

George Miller

Paul Byrnes interviewed George Miller for australianscreen online in 2006

INTERVIEWER So between '83 and '89 Kennedy Miller made a series of extraordinarily powerful historical mini-series about Australia. Could those mini-series be made nowadays?

02:08

GEORGE The mini-series that we made then could be made if they weren't made before. I mean the thing about those mini-series is that they were basically catching up with our history. And my view of Australian cinema since the '70s has essentially been one of catching up with all of our ... the repertoire of our stories. Basically if you look at the early '70s and late '70s, early '80s you saw films that were essentially period films. Almost all based on historical concepts or themes. In which basically we were telling our stories back to ourselves in the form of cinema in this kind of hybrid European-American cinema that we were able to do.

And the mini-series we made in the '80s were basically a continuation of that. We basically ticked them off. We went through all the major cultural events, those sort of, that stand out as it were in our culture.

INTERVIEWER Those series that you made in the '80s were specifically commissioned weren't they, by Rupert Murdoch. Can you tell me about the circumstances in which he commissioned them and the freedom that he offered you at the time.

05:15

GEORGE So Rupert Murdoch takes over Channel 10 and his strategy was to make bold television. So he came to us and said 'Look, you can do whatever you like providing it's bold.' And Byron

Kennedy and Terry Hayes and myself were talking and basically said 'Pretty soon we can tell the story of the dismissal of the Whitlam government.' And we suddenly thought – 'Oh my god, there is a great drama there'. And the more we looked back at it, the more we read into it and so on, we thought it was a perfectly formed drama. So we said we'd like to do this and he said 'Go ahead.'

All his executives were nay-sayers. They all said 'This is not going to rate. Who wants to see it on Channel 10? It should be on the ABC. It's boring anyway.' Murdoch said 'Fine, you do it.' No interference whatsoever. We said to them at one point 'We want to put Murdoch himself in it.' There's a character who plays Rupert Murdoch talking to Malcolm Fraser. His executives actually started to get really nervous. He didn't care. All he wanted was, I guess, landmark television. We were completely left alone. The biggest interference we got were from the politicians themselves. Some of whom contributed but others said 'We're watching you.' Including John Kerr and Gough Whitlam. And so we had, sort of QCs all over the place vetting the whole thing.

And it came out and as it turned out it rated extraordinarily highly and so they said 'We want the next one.' We said 'Providing it's under the same conditions we'll do it.' And that was *Bodyline*.

So it was an extraordinary time when we had absolutely no ... they didn't vet the cut. All we had to do was make it within a certain, you know, time. And so we had a wonderful time. It was a great opportunity to work with directors and writers with whom one would not normally work. Actors. Mainly feature film directors. People like Phil Noyce and John Power, Carl Schultz,

George Ogilvie. They were all people who hadn't really done television before but mainly worked in theatre or cinema.

INTERVIEWER Do you think of it as a golden age for Australian television? In other words is it as good now or is it as possible now to make television of that quality?

08:23

GEORGE I think - I think it's possible to do it in cable. The big hope to me is cable and I'm noticing that what's tending to happen in cable, particularly Showtime, is that they have to basically follow the HBO model. And I don't think anyone would argue that the best television done in the world comes out of HBO.

And because they basically are not afraid to do anything, they do everything that cinema can no longer do, mainstream cinema can no longer do. They do everything that mainstream, you know, free-to-air television can't do. And so basically we end up with things like, you know, *The Sopranos* and *Deadwood* and *Angels in America* and *Six Feet Under* and all those other extraordinary shows. And I think that model is basically going to be followed in Australia. That's the only way to sort of get attention as it were.

INTERVIEWER But underneath that you see a kind of impoverishment of our culture or at least a drying well, it sounds to me.

09:26

GEORGE My ... yeah, my big problem ... I mean, I think our big problem is that we're running out of stories. Cinema is barely over a hundred years old. Storytelling tradition basically goes back several thousand years. In the hundred years of cinema we've basically used up the entire repertoire of storytelling. We've told all the biblical stories, all the great religious stories, all the great

novels. Those that could be filmed have been filmed. We remake television shows from the '70s and '80s. We remake movies that were made in the '80s and earlier. We've told every comic book. We've basically run out of stories.

And this is particularly acute in Australia where we have a very, very young culture with not a lot of history. And a culture which is very hard to differentiate from most of the other cultures.

Particularly now the American culture. So we don't really have a lot to offer that's unique and I think there's a real problem there and it's something that we haven't really paid any attention to.

And I think that's at the heart of it. I mean people talk about Australian scripts not being any good or the stories any good. I think Australian culture's a little bit too skin-deep basically. And it's ... if we try to look at it aggressively I think we'll have to ... most people will have to admit that that's true.

INTERVIEWER Do you see the culture as eroding?

11:27

GEORGE I think the culture has almost gone. It's an awful thing for me to say because I'm a storyteller. An Australian storyteller. And - and ... but I notice that for instance my children, as they grow up, it's very, very ... they know so little Australian culture. It's very, very hard to direct them towards it. And I'm a storyteller. I'm a practitioner. Which really worries me, I mean they know Halloween, they know Valentine's Day, they know *The Simpsons*, they know every game that comes out of the United States. Every television show and every video. Every Disney Pixar movie, Dreamworks movie. They know all of those backwards. They know very, very little of Australian culture. And this is with parents like myself who are consciously trying to push it their way. And it's very, very hard.

And if you look at what's happening for instance in China and so on, they recognise the problem. They're now really pushing incredibly hard to tell Chinese stories so that they can export them to the rest of the world. And I find that's happening right across Asia, where they're actually consciously trying to export their cultures in the same way that what has made America so powerful is this ability to - ability to kind of appropriate most of the world's cultures, regurgitate them - regurgitate them and shove them out into the rest of the world. It does make them a very powerful culture. And I think it's at the heart of it. And I don't think anyone's even sort of bothered to notice.

So, there's my pessimism. I shouldn't get too into it.

INTERVIEWER No, that was good. Let's go on now back to a more chronological discussion and go back to the start where you made *Mad Max*.

GEORGE Sure.

INTERVIEWER So let's talk about *Mad Max*. Watching it again recently, I knew the story that it was influenced by your work as a doctor and especially in casualty wards but I was struck this time by the flat landscapes of it and I was wondering whether that side of it was influenced by where you grew up for the first years of your life in Australia. In Chinchilla.

13:56

GEORGE I guess any work is a sum total of what your experience is at the time. And there's no question that *Mad Max* was influenced by my childhood in rural Queensland which ... Chinchilla itself is west of the Darling Downs. Completely flat roads. Loamy soil. Heat haze. Burnt land. And with a very intense car culture. I mean the main street of town and Saturday night were just the kids in the cars. By the time we were out of our teens several of

our peers had already been killed or badly injured in car accidents. And there was just those long flat roads where there was no speed limit and people would just go. And that obviously had a big ... impinged on me.

And it wasn't until I really ended up being a doctor in emergency and seeing the kind of carnage as a result of car accidents or bike accidents that it kind of got into me. It kind of disturbed me quite a bit. And I think all those things were part of the mix of the *Mad Max* films. Particularly the first one.

INTERVIEWER Talk about the creative impulses that were at work in terms of what the film was going to be about. Was it a reaction to the way Australian films were being made at the time? Was it an attempt to make a more cross-Pacific kind of Australian cinema? What was going through your mind?

15:39

GEORGE The main thing ... I guess the main thing going through my mind when we made *Mad Max* was I wanted to make a film which I saw as pure cinema. I started off being interested in mainly painting and drawing. And it wasn't until I started to edit film, I had the opportunity to do that, where I suddenly saw - oh my god, there is a fourth dimension if you like. Time. You could bring into two dimensional space. So it became basically kinetic pictures that I was mainly interested in.

And it was only later that I got interested in narrative. So with the first *Mad Max* I basically wanted to make a silent movie. With sound. The kind of movie that Hitchcock would say 'They didn't have to read the subtitles in Japan.' A film that basically played like a silent movie and ... because for me, once I got interested in cinema as moving pictures I went back to the silent era. And I was particularly struck by the films of Buster Keaton, Harold

Lloyd and those - and those kind of very kinetic action montage movies that they made. And they were the ... I think they were the true masters in that era.

And basically I saw the action movie, particularly the car action movie, as an extension of that. Just the way you could put little bits of film together and make up a kind of a whole sentence. The syntax of filmmaking was first discovered by those kinds of filmmakers.

And that was the thing that really drove me to something like *Mad Max*. And of course that meant that we had to work in genre. It wasn't a kind of reaction to the period films being made at the time. It was mainly ... it was my interest and Byron Kennedy's interest at that time to make a film like that. And it's still a film ... I still love those films. I call them - I call them 'pure cinema.'

INTERVIEWER So in a sense it was an experimental film for you?

17:39

GEORGE Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I think, yeah, I think every film I make, I really believe every film I make is experimental. I mean the film we're making right now is experimental. No-one's ever made anything like this before. And I guess at the time we were making *Mad Max* the same thing applied.

INTERVIEWER Is there a connection between *Violence in the Cinema Part 1* and *Mad Max* and if so, what is it?

18:11

GEORGE *Violence in the Cinema Part 1* was simply trying to make the point that whatever we think in terms of intellectually, the way we basically celebrate something is quite different than the way

we experience it viscerally. And quite often the struggle of humans, of we as humans, is to find some way to balance the two. That very, very early reptilian part of ourselves and the more, if you like, you know, higher brain function of ourselves. Those two things are basically the struggle I think we always play out. It's played out ... will always be played out. And *Violence in the Cinema* was a look at that.

At the time there were these films, I remember *Godfather I* came out. *Clockwork Orange* and then the term 'ultra-violence' in cinema came out in the early '80s. There were big censorship issues and so on. And that was in the air. And *Violence in the Cinema* came out of that and I guess to some extent the first *Mad Max*, which a lot of people regard as very violent, probably had some of that influencing it as well.

INTERVIEWER So *Mad Max* was made very much as a hit and run kind of production. You had very little budget. You worked kind of in a guerrilla style in Melbourne. Can you talk us through the production of the film and what kind of corners you had to cut.

19:50

GEORGE Well the entire budget was \$350,000 and so that means you're doing everything incredibly cheaply. It meant that Byron Kennedy and I would gestetner the script and then we'd get on the back of my motorbike and we'd ride and deliver it to the cast and crew. It meant that Hugh Keays-Byrne and all the guys who played the bikers ... we couldn't afford to fly them down. We could afford to take the bikes from Melbourne up to Sydney. They got on their bikes and rode them down and kind of rehearsed being a bikie gang on the way down.

It meant that we had to sweep up the roads after there was a car crash. Byron and I would stay back at night and sweep up the

roads. It was that kind of guerrilla filmmaking. It meant that the film was cut in a flat that we borrowed from a friend and he would cut sound in the lounge room and I'd cut picture in the kitchen. It mean that the mix that was done for \$6000 was done by Roger Savage after he was mixing Little River Band in a big fancy sound studio and using a very revolutionary time-coded way of putting picture and sound together, which hadn't been done before. And that led to Roger being one of the, you know, leading sound technicians in film in the world.

So everything was done in a every innovative, resourceful way and it meant that the lenses that we had were lenses that ... Sam Peckinpah had shot a movie, *The Getaway*, one of the last movies that Steve McQueen had made. And he used these Todayo <sp?> lenses which were so damaged by the car action that they had, they were dumped down in Australia. But we were determined to do a wide action, you know, wide-screen action movie and so we could only get these Todayo lenses. Only one of which worked properly.

So the whole film was shot on this very wide 35mm lens. The other ones were too tricky to use. So that's why people said I was very clever to use the wide-angle lenses but we had no choice really if we wanted to do the anamorphic format. So ...

INTERVIEWER You also closed roads didn't you without permission?

22:09

GEORGE Well, well we did close roads without permission. We ... in those days there was no ... there was a legal twilight zone, I mean there's nothing in the law to give permission to go and drive a car and smash it in the street. I mean no-one had made these kind of movies at the time. So there was no-one to go to really get a permit for. If we did ... we weren't even allowed to use radios.

The walkie-talkies were on police frequencies so it was illegal to use police radios. To use the radios because the police would come and say 'Hey you're interfering with our frequencies.'

But what happened as the film went on, in Melbourne, the police got so interested in the film unofficially they'd come off hours and help us with the ... make the film. I mean they'd block off the roads for us and whatever because no-one was making movies about these sort of things. Particularly because there was futuristic kind of cop cars in it we would often be driving these cars back to and from location and have an escort of several police on their motorbikes or police cars. Just taking us down as part of a convoy. So it was kind of pretty guerrilla in that way.

INTERVIEWER Couple of things to finish off with on *Mad Max 1*. Talk about the casting of Mel Gibson and also why you set it into the future. What was the reason behind it being slightly futuristic?

23:37

GEORGE We set - we set the film in the future mainly because once I'd basically contrived the story, which was very, very intense in its incidents, it felt like it was just too hyperbolic. It was just totally exaggerated so we thought if we set it in the future we might sort of ... it might take on a sort of a more fable-type quality. But we didn't have enough money to really set it into a far future and degrade it down too much so it was set in the near future.

By the time we made the second film, *Mad Max 2*, we were able to do a little bit more.

INTERVIEWER And the casting?

24:20

GEORGE

The casting ... I ... the casting was a real problem. I ... if we thought ... remember that the people who ... the only way we could raise the money was basically from friends and family. There was no ... by putting ... who put in \$10,000 lots. And it was very, very difficult to sort of put that money ... it took us more time to gather the money, the \$350,000, than to actually make the film.

But so we had an obligation to really try to get the film seen as widely as possible. So my thought was - okay let's try to get an American name. And I actually went to Los Angeles and couldn't even ... realised that the whole budget would be taken up by a so-called American name.

So I can remember coming back to Australia and thinking - how are we going to cast this? And we saw lots and lots of young men. And we tested some and it just wasn't working and I thought - we're not going to find these people. And I remember Mitch Matthews, the casting agent, said 'Oh there's a couple of NIDA graduates you should meet.' And I remember late one afternoon after screen testing lots and lots of people, Mel Gibson came in. and I was very, very exhausted. I remember watching through the video camera lens as he's running this scene and I suddenly started to believe it. And I thought - oh my god, there's something going on here. And halfway through that test he was [snaps fingers] ... I was just so grateful he was around.

At the same time there was Steve Bisley. And at the time I also met Judy Davis. They were all in the same year at NIDA, in their final year. And so we cast Mel and, you know, that was it.

INTERVIEWER

The rest is history. Couldn't find a part for Judy though?

GEORGE No. I tried very hard. I remember meeting her. She didn't test but I remember Mitch said 'You should meet Judy, I mean there's something extraordinary about her.' And I remember her coming in and just saying hello. I think she was waiting for Mel and Steve and just said hello. She had that rather shy smile of hers. And I didn't know ... she was obviously very interesting to talk to. I had no idea she was such a great actor.

INTERVIEWER Was budget the main difference when you came to make *Road Warrior - Mad Max 2*. Talk about the conceptual changes.

27:03

GEORGE *Mad Max 2* was different. The budget wasn't the issue. The biggest shift in *Mad Max 2* was my head. I felt utterly defeated by the first *Mad Max*. I felt that - that the film was unreleasable. I - I ... it's a mystery to me why the film still worked. All I see is its defects. And - and I thought that if you prepared a film well enough that the film that's in your head, it's just a matter of executing it. And I was quite naïve then. What I didn't realise is that filmmaking is tough. And it wasn't until I spoke to Phil Noyce and Peter Weir - Phil had just done *Newsfront*, his first feature, and Peter had done his second, probably, feature - and they said 'Oh it's always tough. It's crazy.'

And that, as simple as that sounds, that really changed my attitude. So we ... on *Mad Max 2*, I made a point of getting the best possible crew we could find. We were going to be out in the desert at Broken Hill. It was going to be tough. We were going to try to push things a little bit and, you know, I ... but the attitude that I had and I think that the crew had was vastly different.

On the first one most of the crew had come out of Crawford's Television. They couldn't work out why - why we were trying to shoot the film in an atypical way. They thought we were just

going to make a Crawford's cop show. But we ... by the time we got to *Mad Max 2*, I think this was Dean Semler's second feature and his attitude was give anything a go - it's crazy but give it a go, we'll back you all the way.

And we went out there and it was much, much physically ... a much tougher film physically but - but with that sort of attitude that it's always tough and let's just go out there and make the very best film we can. That sort of ... we ended up, you know, by and large having a very good experience on that film. It - it was ... I felt as though I was able to achieve something much closer to the film in my head than I did with *Mad Max*.

INTERVIEWER Even though it was vastly more ambitious and more difficult to operate in that kind of western desert atmosphere? I imagine it must have been physically really arduous.

29:36

GEORGE It was physically arduous but if the spirit is strong ... it's when you're demoralised as I was on the first film that it becomes very difficult. On the second film ... I mean it's wonderful also, shooting in the desert. And we were one of the first films into Broken Hill which as you know is a mining town so it had a lot of infrastructure. I mean there was a French restaurant for god's sakes. And you had all that technology that they use in mines for welding and all the artisans. And it's a decent sized town. And it's since then become quite a - quite a, you know, quite a location for - for people because you've got the access to the desert with a fairly decent urban centre. And so ...

INTERVIEWER Had your conception of the mythical side of *Mad Max* developed between the first and the second films?

30:30

GEORGE Yeah. Yeah. There was a big ... you're very smart. There was a big shift on the second film in this way: when I ... when *Mad Max* did come out and to my honest surprise and relief it did ... it was successful. I - I watched the film go round the world and become a hit virtually in every culture other than the United States. This is the first film.

In Japan they called it a samurai movie and said 'You must know Kurosawa.' I'd never heard of Kurosawa. In - in France they said 'Oh it's a Western on wheels.' In Scandinavia they said 'He's a Viking.' And basically I began to realise that somehow there was something else going on there and that was the realisation that there is a collective unconsciousness going on. That there's a mythology out there and basically *Mad Max* was a kind of a weird Australian version of that. A kind of road warrior.

And so that led us to Joseph Campbell and once you ... once - once Campbell opened those doors of perception into storytelling I suddenly became ... forgot about cinema all together and basically became a storyteller. I've been trying to figure out those mysteries ever since.

So *Mad Max 2* was very influenced by that. Suddenly you saw that he was much more than just a character. That he was indeed a mythological figure, you know, a mini-version of one. He's not - he's not a great hero but he has that ... something like that is nascent in him.

And it was ... so it was a little bit more self-conscious in *Mad Max 2*. Not following it, you know, religiously. The hero myth. But it was an understanding that that was what was at foot.

INTERVIEWER Between *Mad Max 1* and *Mad Max 2* you'd only done a tiny bit of television, as far as I know. How did you approach directing

from teaching yourself more about directing between the first and the second films?

00:52

GEORGE Between *Mad Max 1* and *Mad Max 2*?

INTERVIEWER Yeah. Because there's a big difference between the two films. I mean it's not just covered by budget.

01:06

GEORGE Yeah. What differences do you detect?

INTERVIEWER Well I think the kinetic side of your directing which I think is obvious in the first film is kind of blossoming in the second one. I think you're much more confident about what you were doing. You knew exactly what you wanted to get and your exploration, to me as a viewer, of the possibilities of excitement that you could get from a big wide screen and a lot of noise and a lot of action doubled. Tripled. In terms of imagination. Is that wrong?

01:45

GEORGE No, no. It's absolutely right. I ... the - the ... because I suppose the biggest ... one of the other big differences between *Mad Max 1* and *Mad Max 2* and in the time, in the interim, I spent almost every day thinking about what I'd done wrong on *Mad Max 1*. Why it wasn't sort of bending itself to my will.

Remember that I spent almost a year cutting it. That ah.. so I saw every mistake. Everything ... and once it's locked on film it's there forever and you say 'Oh my god, if the camera was only a little bit lower' or had I done that a little faster or that's ... if I'd changed that line. I was having to confront that. We all do when we're cutting a film. But I was able to do that.

So when the idea for *Mad Max 2* came it was like - oh my god, here's an opportunity to put all the theory into practice. So in one way *Mad Max 1* was a rehearsal for *Mad Max 2*. And I think every film that you do is a kind of rehearsal for the next one. So you're developing your technique. You're trying to fathom film language. You're trying to fathom the mysteries of storytelling and we'll never do it but each film helps you do that.

INTERVIEWER So a few years later you get to make a third one. Was it automatic that you would make a third *Mad Max*? What sort of decision-making process did you go through as to whether you would do it?

03:16

GEORGE None of the - none of the films ... once I finished one film there was never an intention to make another one but then a story comes to you and you think - okay we'll do, you know, that story kind of gets to you. I intend to ... I have a fourth story which I resisted even thinking about for about 20 years but it just forced itself on me really.

So that sort of happened with the third story. By the time we got to the third story we wanted to push it in a different direction. We had ... we were in the middle of ... we'd just finished *The Dismissal*. We were in the middle of *Bodyline* and *Cowra Breakout* and we were in the thick of that production, those productions. And we ... the studio wanted another film. I had the story. Terry Hayes and I figured out how to do it. And then Byron Kennedy was killed and that kind of blew it all out of the water and I was reluctant to go ahead.

And then there was a sort of need to sort of - let's do something just to get over the shock and grief of all of that. And so George Ogilvie who was like a mentor to me, particularly through the

mini-series, particularly with actors. I said ‘Come on George.’ He - he ... I ... in a sense I taught him how to make film. He’d had theatre, ballet, opera experience. And particularly was a great teacher of drama. I said ‘Come along,’ you know, ‘we’ll make this thing together.’

And it, in a way of all the films, it’s the one I have most affection for of the three films. Even though most people wouldn’t agree. I realise looking back on it that we almost took on too much story. We told about three ... two or three different worlds, trying to struggle ... juggle all those things together. So that’s what led to the third story. It’s just ... the third film. It’s just the story came along.

INTERVIEWER It has a more quasi-religious kind of feel to it. Certainly a stronger, more open emotionalism than probably the first two films. The element of the children was a kind of an unexpected thing. Were you conscious that *Mad Max* had now become a commodity and needed to be looked after as a franchise? Or were you able to put all those sort of thoughts out of your mind?

05:55

GEORGE I’d had none of those thoughts of franchises and so on. It wasn’t ... it happens on every single film. I don’t make many films and there’s only one thing that I can get my juice up about and that is if the story gets to me. It’s very, very simple. If it does and it’s ... and the form is interesting, if there’s something intriguing about the form, then I can get up the energy and the obsession to make a film. But if it’s not there I can’t do it. I mean, you know, you just sort of can’t do it. You end up phoning it in and you become a hack or you think of yourself as a hack. That’s not to say good films can’t be made that way. I’m just saying that’s how ... that’s what happens to me.

So I never think of it in terms of a franchise. Ever. And that's why each film is quite different. There's almost three different films in many ways.

INTERVIEWER So would you say the emotionalism of it does have something to do with Byron's death?

06:55

GEORGE Oh I'd say definitely. Yeah. Definitely.

INTERVIEWER Can you talk about that?

07:00

GEORGE Well, you know, we were like film making brothers and he was also one of these people who is pretty indestructible, you know, you have a sense when someone's young, you have this feeling. And he was almost one of the last people that you'd think, you know, would - would basically die in a helicopter accident. Of course looking back on it, I mean, helicopters are dangerous. As are cars. As is life.

So that had a big effect and I remember sort of feeling this sort of ... this very zombie-like state going through the film. But that also happened during *Bodyline* and *Cowra Breakout* which were being shot at the same time. So it was a very, very hectic time. And a deep immersion into work.

And it kind of just comes out of your gut I suppose, you know, when you're working so hard you don't really have time to think about it. It just comes out of your gut. And I guess if you're going through a lot of great turmoil of emotion that has to come out in the work.

INTERVIEWER How did you feel about working with major studio backing, this is before you actually went to Hollywood to work, but were the studios - Warner Brothers in this case - very supportive of you on the second and third *Mad Max* films?

08:32

GEORGE Yeah, we had final cut. We had really no problem with that. I'd really ... and I'd also made ... I'd also worked on a *Twilight Zone* movie where there was a series of four little films put together to make a *Twilight Zone* anthology film. And that was at Amblin with Steven Spielberg and Frank Marshall and Joe Dante. Very interesting ... there were three ... four directors.

And - and what I recognised very much at Amblin was a very similar thing we had at Kennedy Miller. It was basically a bunch of filmmakers making films together with very little interference from the studio. It reminded me very much of how we were working particularly in our television. I mean it was wonderful to be working with feature directors all together. Writers, composers and everything in those ... during that era at Kennedy Miller. And so, you know, I got sort of to trust the studios okay, during that. It was illusory at the time because I didn't realise Steven Spielberg had a very rarefied circumstance there and he was very protected.

It wasn't until I went into *Witches of Eastwick* with my eyes, you know, completely shut and naïve that I realised it was a bad mistake. And that's when I hit the full force of Hollywood pathology. And it ... I didn't make another film for many years.

10:05

However, having said that my experience since then with studios and particularly as you get now into the 21st century, it's extraordinarily good. I mean the film we're in the middle of now ... it's a completely different time. That was old school and now

it's - it's all about being as efficient and collaborating as well as possible with filmmakers as you possibly can.

INTERVIEWER Let's go back to the period of television and the first of the major Kennedy Miller mini-series which was *The Dismissal*. Did you ever think about another topic as being the first one or was it always going to be the dismissal and why was it going to be that?

10:49

GEORGE Well you've got to remember the day we finished shooting *Mad Max 2* we were already talking about doing a mini-series. We were talking to Network Ten as it was called, about it. So as we were doing the post-production of *Mad Max 2* we were already thinking about doing a mini-series. And once we decided [snaps fingers] yeah, the dismissal.

By then we realised that what you ... what makes great drama is a great conflict. Self-evident. And basically driven by great characters. And you had great characters in Whitlam, Kerr and Fraser. And it was a classic antagonist-protagonist. A classic conflict written by history, by recent history. So it was a sitter for drama. And once we decided to do it we just plunged in.

What was really interesting though was it was quite bizarre in those days you ... it was financed by tax legislation called 10BA as you may know and it had to be finished ... all films and television had to be finished by a certain date. The end of the financial year. The end of - of June.

Anyway the point being - the point being that under the 10BA legislation that they had at the time, you had to finish your film by the end of the financial year. Which meant that everyone would crew-up at the same time and the post-production facilities all would be demanded, you know, they had to be ... people

wanted them at the same time. So the cycle was nuts. They changed it the following year and it made more sense. So you could spread the production over the whole financial year.

12:35

But in the case of *The Dismissal* we had to finish it by a certain date. So everybody signed up and we had no scripts. We had every actor from John Meillon to John Stanton and Max Phipps. People who'd starred in movies were doing parts. Ruth Cracknell. Just doing little walk-on parts. Actors just wanted to be a journalist. We had this great group of people but no scripts but everyone knew the story.

And a great thing happened. It was one of the best things that could've happened because instead of working off the page, we workshopped. Basically guided by George Ogilvie. So we had four directors. One writer who was Terry Hayes who basically manhandled it all together and - and we had probably sixty actors.

We had a location and we all just got together for about two or three weeks workshopping. It was extraordinary. Extraordinary. John Hargreaves, extraordinary John Hargreaves. I mean we had Jim Cairns and Junie Morosi come and we interviewed them. The whole cast. And John Hargreaves sat and - and went with Jim Cairns into a room and sat and absorbed him and he shared ... they shared secrets. Both of them are gone now so we'll never know what they spoke about but it was a fantastic time.

And it kind of gave an authenticity and I as a director was able to learn from other directors and they were able to learn from me and so on. So that kind of established a house style of workshopping stuff. So by the time we got to *Bodyline*, we just got a bunch of actors who were cricket nuts and put them

together with ex-Australian Test players and cricket pundits. And put them together in a great big workshop and resulted in *Bodyline*. It was just a great way to work. This collegial way of putting things together.

END TRANSCRIPT