



WHAT'S THE NEWS? 9 — May 2004

FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE INC.

Founding Patrons: Gil Brealy, Bryan Brown, Anthony Buckley, Scott Hicks,
Patricia Lovell, Chris Noonan, Michael Pate, Fred Schepisi, Albie Thoms

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.' Margaret Mead

Welcome Friends

Welcome to the ninth issue of the Friends NFSA newsletter. We hope you enjoy reading about your Friends and what they have been up to since the last issue.

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1. Forthcoming Workshop/Conference

The Friends is planning a two-day workshop/conference in July. We will bring together people and groups who are interested in and affected by the incorporation of the Archive into the Australian Film Commission.

The aim of the workshop is to engage a large body of respected archivists, historians, film makers, film producers, radio presenters, music collectors and community members, to discuss and develop a joint statement on the future of the National Film and Sound Archive. This communiqué will be widely distributed to the media and politicians.

The Workshop will be held in Canberra on Saturday the 3rd and Sunday 4th of July 2004. This is only a short time away and we would encourage anyone interested in a participating to let us know as soon as possible. We will finalise the agenda and workshop topics by early June. Suggestions, submissions and ideas for papers, sessions, panels, presenters need to be sent to us by 20th May.

In the spirit of community groups this will be a 'no-frills' event with the emphasis on the final communiqué and practical outcomes. Presentations and meetings will be held at the Canberra Museum and Gallery (located in Civic), with groups dispersing to nearby cafes and parks to work on ideas between plenary sessions. We cannot afford to reimburse anyone for travel, meals, or accommodation costs, but we are more than happy to provide information on what is available in Canberra. Everyone attending will be offered a complimentary pass to Electric Shadows Cinemas for the evening of the 3rd, and if there is enough interest we can organise a group dinner for Saturday night as well. At this stage we envisage an attendance fee of \$40.00 per person (or \$20 per day) to cover venue hire, photocopying and other office costs, tea and coffee.

When:

9am – 5pm Sat 3rd July

9am – 4pm Sun 4th July (first weekend of NSW school holidays)

Where:

Canberra Museum and Gallery, Civic, ACT

Proposed Cost:

\$40.00 per person (or \$20 per day) payable in advance or on 3rd of July.

RSVP:

as soon as possible, deadline for submissions is 20th of May.

email: friendsofarchive@hotmail.com

post: PO Box 1005 Civic Square 2608

phone: 0416 376 056 (Lucy)

2. The Archive Talks

Over the past few months, the Friends in association with the Archive have presented a series of talks in the Archive's beautiful Art Deco theatre. After a successful first season, the Archive talks returned in the new year to further educate and enlighten Canberra residents about the archive and its operations.

In March we heard from Fiona Hooton who presented a wonderful talk entitled 'Drawing with Light in the Dark: UBU Sydney Underground Filmmaking 1965-70'. The talk centred on the art movement UBU and how UBU explored the limits of theatre, music, literature, static arts and film in the tradition of the 1920s avant-garde. This was followed by a delightful screening of *Trouble in Molopolis (1970)* Directed by Phillippe Mora with a stella cast including Germaine Greer, Jenny Kee, Richard Neville and Martin Sharp.

In April we were privy to an informative and thoroughly engaging talk from two current scholars Malcolm Gillies and Dr David Pear. These two men were behind a recent publication on Percy Grainger and provided a wonderful overview of the eccentric Grainger. The talk was followed by a screening of *Passion: The Story of Percy Grainger (1999)* Directed by Peter Duncan.

We would like to thank all the presenters and encourage Friends to attend future Archive Talks for a thoroughly entertaining evening.

3 Australian Film Commission And Archive Integration—The Latest

With the workshop/conference being announced we thought the following analysis of submissions to the AFC in response to its stage 2 Direction Paper compiled by Friends Committee member Ray Edmondson would provide some necessary and important background into the debate. We thank Ray for his contribution.

Analysis Of Submissions Sent To AFC – as of 1 march 2004

The following is an analysis I have made of the submissions received by the Australian Film Commission in response to its Stage 2 “Directions” paper. I have only skimmed some of the papers, so I don’t claim this as a thorough assessment, and it is necessarily rather simplistic.

As of 1 March, there are 105 submissions accessible on the AFC site, plus 2 more which they are known to have received but have not yet posted. (These are a 4-page submission from Judy Adamson, and Archive Forum’s statement and signatories).

The longest submission is from Archive Forum (59 pp) and the shortest from Campbell (1 page, one line). 5 submissions refer to Archive Forum’s statement in their support.

1. **Sources:** The sources of submissions break down as follows:

- 38 organisations, large and small
- 80 individuals (some submissions have multiple signatures)
- 6 NFSA staff submissions
- 2 petitions signed by about 1700 people (Archive Forum’s statement [265+] and Senator Kate Lundy’s petition to the Senate [1432])

Not included are the numerous protest emails and letters sent to the AFC, Minister etc., nor the scores of messages on the CPSU website, nor any other documents, nor views drawn from the transcripts of the AFC’s “stakeholder forums”.

2. Response to “Directions”

4 submissions I judged to express unqualified support for “Directions”. These are from ATOM, Campbell (just one sentence), and the National and Victorian Jazz Archive organisations.

16 submissions did not express a discernible view about “Directions” or its recommendations.

87 submissions were critical of “Directions” in some measure. Criticisms varied from taking issue with particular recommendations, to outright dismissal of the paper. Some of “Directions” recommendations received positive comment from some people, but the overwhelming tenor of comment in this group suggested that “Directions” was an inadequate document. These need more detailed analysis.

3. Leave the Archive alone

72 submissions said, in one way or another, that the institutional integrity and identity of the Archive should not be disturbed by the AFC. The Lundy and Forum petitions also said this.

Some documents (for instance, the Australian Society of Archivists) were very definitive on this point, making it clear that the legislation *did not require any “integration” of AFC and NFSA at all*. Both could report independently to the AFC Board.

Detailed analysis is needed to set out the variations and specifics.

4. Statutory authority status

41 submissions called for a separate legal status for the Archive, dissolving the link with AFC. Many submissions (I did not count these) queried the logic of the marriage in the first place.

The Forum statement/petition also definitively calls for this. The Lundy petition does not specifically do so, but the ALP's subsequent policy stance does.

5. Consultation process

27 submissions were critical of the consultation process to date, several expressing concern that they had not been invited to comment when they should have been given the opportunity.

6. Advisory Committee

21 submissions commented on the need for an Archive Advisory Committee in one form or another. Some called for changes on the AFC board as well.

7. Director

6 submissions commented on the process of appointing a Director.

8. Name

38 submissions expressed a view on the name of the Archive. Some of these were hard to interpret, since some people assumed that "Australian Film and Sound Archive" or "National Screen and Sound Archive" or some other variation **was** the original name. Many others didn't specifically address the topic, but their use of a particular name in their text clearly expressed a preference. So these are my impressions:

- With a couple of exceptions (one arguing to keep the name "ScreenSound" on the basis that dropping it would only add to the confusion at present) there is a general aversion to keeping the "ScreenSound" brand, and a call to reinstate a self-explanatory title for the institution.
- Most staff favour "National Screen and Sound Archive". This formula is the subtitle of "ScreenSound" which staff have been required to identify with since 1999.
- Most constituents favour "National Film and Sound Archive". My rough count suggests 75% for NFSA, 25% for the alternatives.
- A few submissions debated the relative merits of "Australian" vs "National", "Film" vs "Screen". A couple (and this struck me as very sensible) called for care in the choice, saying it should be based on hard research and not subjectivity.

Comments

1 Industry organisations – such as SPAA, ASDA, FACTS – are conspicuous by their absence in the submission list. I am not sure what this indicates. Lack of interest? Discretion as the better part of valour? Certainly, some individuals within such organisations have made their personal views clear by signing either of the petitions and/or lodging their own submissions.

2 The staff submissions have been prepared with care and obviously within a context in which the freedom to criticise has been weighed by the writers.

3 The opening page of "Directions" invites "management, staff, external stakeholders and interested parties" to "provide comments on the proposals herein". *It does not invite comment outside those limits.* Moreover, "Directions" has been used as a discussion constraint, setting the agenda for the "stakeholder forums". Constituents had no say in the Government's surprise decision to join the Archive with the AFC, nor in the AFC's chosen approach to "integration". What I find significant about the responses, then, is the degree to which constituents have ignored the limits of the invitation and have gone to the fundamental issues, to say what they perhaps might have said had they been consulted before the event.

4 I read the above analysis, and the content of many submissions, as a stinging indictment of both the secret Government decision to amalgamate, and of the competence and integrity of the AFC as the host body for the Archive. (It is also, incidentally, an indictment of the equally secret Government decision to "rebrand" the Archive 5 years ago.) One might expect *some* positives to emerge in such a process, to see some evidence that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. But the overwhelming view is that the marriage has nothing to commend it: indeed, that the Archive has to be quarantined or protected from the AFC.

5 By now the AFC has received hundreds of pages of feedback, much of it closely and carefully argued and representing an immense amount of work, containing many proposals and raising numerous questions which require answers. If it exemplifies the values of intellectual engagement and rigour with which, in "Directions", it so clearly identifies, the AFC will respond fully to this input. So far, though, it has not announced any process for doing so. Only when it does respond can any real discussion start.

Ray Edmondson

2 March 2004

4. Contacts

About The Friends

The Friends is a group of advocates, working to further the aims of the Archive and to encourage links between the Archive, the film and sound communities and the general community. In essence, the Friends want to promote excellence in film and sound culture, including: best practice in preservation, public programs and access; promoting high level appreciation of film and sound heritage and contemporary culture; creativity in the use of our Archive; a broad, outward looking focus that locates Australia in the South East Asia-Pacific region and globally; and restoration of the correct name for the Archive.

To achieve our ends, we rely on Friends to contribute energy and enthusiasm, and to participate in events that will provide the resources. You can never have too many friends. Please encourage your friends and colleagues to join us. And if you feel you would like to contribute by joining our committee, don't hesitate to contact Lucy our administration assistant.

We hope you have enjoyed this newsletter and would love to hear from you on any Friends topic. You can contact us at friendsofarchive@hotmail.com or ring Lucy on 6248 0851.

Friends Website

Our website includes How to Join, Newsletter Back Issues, Discussion Papers, our Mission Statement, Events and Contact information. The address is www.archivefriends.org.au. Check it out!

Ina Bertrand, Shelley Clarke, Travis Cragg, Mary Domitrovic, Ray Edmondson, Chris Harrison, Charles Higgins, Oliver Jones, Andrew Kaminski, Tina Kaufman, Richard Keys, Jordie Kilby, Andrew Pike, Cheryl Stevenson and Roger Westcombe.

CONTACT DETAILS

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