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Michaela Boland and Michael Bodey

AUSSIEWOOD

AUSTRALIA’S LEADING ACTORS AND DIRECTORS TELL HOW THEY CONQUERED HOLLYWOOD

A SUE HINES BOOK
ALLEN & UNWIN
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‘Hollywood’, of course, means many things to many people. In this instance, it is a catch-all phrase for American film and television, which consumes 70–90 per cent of the Australian box office, half the prime-time TV schedules and an inordinate amount of world media attention. In reality, the Los Angeles suburb of Hollywood is a tawdry stretch of cheap tourist shops, run-down apartments and derelict cinemas, frequented by tourists assembling for ‘tours of the stars’ homes’ or posing with a Crocodile Dundee lookalike. Among the only true remnants of ‘Hollywood’ in Hollywood are Paramount Studios, Mann’s Chinese Theatre and the Roosevelt Hotel, former home of the Oscars.

Some of the actors included in this book were born offshore, in Hawaii or the UK for example. Their involvement in Aussiewood is tacit acknowledgement that their story is, in some way, ‘Aussie’.

The ‘Pivotal Projects’ listed at the start of each chapter have been selected by the authors as a means of illustrating the actor or director’s journey to Hollywood, and to flesh out the accompanying chapter.
The achievements of Australia’s leading actors and directors in Hollywood reached a critical mass in the lead up to the Golden Globe Awards in 2002. Ten Australians were nominated across 24 film and television categories, some twice. Even the international press began asking, ‘Is there something in the water Down Under?’

Nicole Kidman was quoted saying she hoped the Australians could sit together but any plan for a ‘Team Australia’-type table at the event was quashed by the mandate to assemble personnel from each nominated show or film. Kidman’s excitement was infectious. It was a year after her split from Hollywood titan Tom Cruise, and the Australian media had been particularly supportive of her personal struggle. She rose to prominence for compelling lead performances in *The Others* and a US-financed Australian musical, *Moulin Rouge!*, and 15 years after decamping to Hollywood she was rediscovering her tribe.

Kidman has several high profile Australian friends in LA: Naomi Watts, Heath Ledger, Russell Crowe and Phillip Noyce, to name some, but her situation is not necessarily the norm. For Geoffrey Rush, meeting Cate Blanchett and Rachel Griffiths at various pre-awards functions before the 1998
Oscars was ‘As close as anything I’ve had that resembles an Australian moment in LA. The rest of the time I have no connection with an Australian network.’

Whether or not a network exists, the impact of Australians in Hollywood – right through to Rupert Murdoch, Chairman and CEO of News Corporation, owner of Twentieth Century Fox – is undeniable. Hence Aussiewood.

The Golden Globe Awards is one of many precursors to Hollywood’s premier gala, the Academy Awards, and the organising body, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, has beyond dubious credibility. Nevertheless, the event spotlights the crafts of acting and directing in television and film. The same parameters have been applied to Aussiewood.

The Golden Globes ignore the groundswell of Australian cinematographers, digital artists, costume designers and other creative talent inflating the ranks of Australians in Hollywood, people whose contributions richly underpin the careers of their more famous peers. When Bruce Beresford made his first American movie, Tender Mercies, he recruited a cinematographer, editor and composer from Australia. Gillian Armstrong fought Canadian labour laws to import her first assistant director when making her first Hollywood movie, Mrs. Soffel. Peter Weir always collaborates closely with Australians, no matter where he works. A dozen of the leading cinematographers in Hollywood are now Australian. Their stories could fill another book.

There is a kindred spirit among Australians in Hollywood born out of their ‘shared colonial experience’, Weir wrote in 2002, and evident in the characteristics that helped them succeed. Determined, hard-working and easy-going are all adjectives often applied to Australians. ‘There’s something about the stamina, work ethic and the ability to have a healthy sense of the absurd which seems to distinguish Australians in film,’