

Drought, dirt and dust in Rachel's real-life drama

SOPHIE ELSWORTH
TELEVISION WRITER

ACTOR Rachel Ward is bringing the real-life struggles of our parched pastoral land to the television screen in a new drama being shot on location in South Australia.

ABC-TV series *Rain Shadow*, which is being filmed around Mt Barker and Callington, east of Adelaide, aims to put a human face on the challenges to the nation's rural communities presented by the drought.

Ward, who first came to prominence more than 20 years ago in the mini-series *The Thorn Birds* and has a long list of theatre and movie credits, leads the cast.

As vet Kate McDonald, Ward's character has to deal with farmers unable to pay bills, families in crisis and a community struggling as it waits for rain.

Victoria Thaine, who starred alongside Susie Porter in *Catapult* and *Wish* and Nathaniel Dean, who worked in 2006 movie *Gundy*, are among the

**“I'm over
urban dramas**

team of more than 65 cast and crew. Ward said she was “excited” to be filming the new production, worth more than \$4 million.

“The biggest attraction was that I was shooting it in South Australia and in the country,” Ward said, describing the state as “exotic”.

“It's just great not to be doing it in the city. I'm over urban dramas. It's great to be doing something involving a section of the community that you don't very often get to hear about.”

Filming on the series began last month, and will last for seven weeks at dozens of locations.

The production is financed by ABC-TV, the Film Finance Corporation, the SA Film Corporation and Southern Star Entertainment, and will comprise six one-hour episodes.

Producer Gus Howard, who worked on hit series *Blue Heelers*, said the series was very “real-life”. “It's a perfect example of what is happening at the moment and how people are affected by the drought,” he said.



RURAL VET: Actor Rachel Ward on the set at Callington of the new ABC-TV series *Rain Shadow* yesterday.
Picture: DEAN MARTIN

QUENTIN TARANTINO
PRESENTS

"BRUCE LEE WOULD BE PROUD!"

TONY JAA IS THE NEW KING
OF MARTIAL ARTS.

LONDON DAILY EXPRESS, Alex Haver

★★★★★!

YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS.
TONY JAA IS INCREDIBLE.

LONDON DAILY MIRROR

"BREATHTAKING!"

TONY JAA IS AMAZING.

THE TIMES, Wendy Ma

The PROTECTOR

ONG BAK'S TONY JAA IN

MUSIC BY RZA

THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY PRESENTS A SAHAWONGKOLFILM INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTION BAA-RAI-EYE PRESENTS "THE PROTECTOR" TONY JAA PHETTHAI WONGKHAMLAO BONGKRO KONGMALAI JIN XING JOHNNY THAI NGUEN
NATHAN B. JONES LATIFEE CROWDER JONATHAN PATRICK FOO MUSIC BY ANADECH KAEWOT EDITOR EKASUWEE NGANCHAWANG COSTUME DESIGNER THE RZA EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MARUT SEELACHARDEN PRODUCED BY NUTTAHUT KITTIKUN
WRITTEN BY TONY JAA PANNA RITTIRAI DIRECTED BY PRACHYA PINKAEW CASTING BY NAPALEE PRODUCED BY THONGDEE JOE WANNAPIN PRODUCED BY JATUPAN RASMEE PRODUCED BY SITA VOSSEN
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Action packed . . . new film *Tom Yum Goong* is currently being filmed in Sydney

New film's Thai time on Sydney streets

IF you see a lost elephant or an action-packed brawl in Sydney in coming weeks, don't be too worried.

The new **Bruce Lee** will rectify the situation and send the elephant home.

The \$13 million Thai film *Tom Yum Goong* is currently filming in Sydney.

And while its story's centrepiece is a poached elephant now residing in Sydney, the film's real star is

Tony Jaa, reports showbiz editor **Michael Bodey**.

Jaa's phenomenal martial arts skills and boyish good looks already have producers salivating that they've found the next **Bruce Lee**.

Given the standard of the Thai film industry, Jaa admits starring in a film shot in Australia is unthinkable.

"It's way beyond my dreams," he said.

Also part of the cast of

the film is hulky Australian actor **Nathan Jones**, who played the gigantic **Boagrius** in *Troy* alongside **Brad Pitt**.

The film's substantial budget dwarfs that for most Australian films and it was raised almost entirely on the strength of Jaa's outrageous skills and bright future, as first displayed in his previous hit film *Ong-Bak: Muay Thai*

Warrior, which opens in Australia in March.

Director **Prachya Pinkaew** said there was one major reason to film in Sydney beyond the obvious success of international films shot here such as *The Matrix* and *Mission Impossible 2*.

"Australia is a place that is a symbol of wildlife and animal preservation from my point of view," he said.



Lethal weapon: Muay Thai expert Tony Jaa delivers a knockout performance in *Ong Bak: The Thai Warrior*

A little Muay Thai magic

Meet the new martial artist in town. **Joe Neumaier** in New York reports.

Is Tony Jaa the next Bruce Lee? The 29-year-old actor, like the character he portrays in *Ong Bak: The Thai Warrior*, is able to turn his body into a war weapon; a stealth bomber of punches and kicks that blitzes an opponent and then—bang, lights out!

He, of course, credits Jackie Chan and Jet Li as inspirations. But like the late, great Lee, Jaa may introduce audiences to something new and thrilling.

In this case, it's Muay Thai, the ancient fighting style of Thailand that's notable for

combatants' extensive use of elbows and knees.

Growing up in the Burin Province of Thailand, Jaa (Thai name: Phannom Yeeum) began training at age 10 with his elephant trainer father, a skilled Muay Thai fighter.

"I believe it can be in one's blood to be able to kick and punch," Jaa says.

"I wanted Muay Thai to now be seen by many people. And the ancient forms of this style of fighting are different from anything ever seen before."

Formerly a stunt man (*Mortal Combat: Annihilation*), Jaa's high-kicking, high-jinks in *Ong Bak* (as a novice warrior out to retrieve a precious artefact from drug fiends) include some of his trademark 360-degree flips and an exciting chase through a Bangkok market

when he leaps through moving barrels. His other specialties include leaps that end in splits, and a running jump-kick across the shoulders of his opponent.

With age and shifting interests ushering Jackie Chan, Steven Seagal, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Mel Gibson out of the rock-'em-sock-'em sweepstakes, Jaa could now find himself in major demand.

Certainly, it was designed that way. Director Prachya Pinksew was on the hunt for a fresh face to mold into a star and turned to enter Thai action actor, Phanna Rithikrai. Jaa's mentor for the last 18 years.

The director was so knocked out by what he saw of Jaa that he crafted *Ong Bak*—the story of a man who goes up against thugs to take back what belongs to the

people of his village—especially for him.

For Jaa, it was a living dream. "I watched Phanna's films since I was young. He was one of the first Thai action heroes, and I'd come home and replicate them," he explains.

Jaa, who works without wires or special effects, helped with the amazing fight choreography.

Having done stunt work since he was 15, he relished the chance to be the central figure.

"Friends saw [Mortal Combat] and I'd say, 'That's me,' but they couldn't tell because it was a double," he recalls.

The actor is excited about what *Ong Bak* might do for both the Thai film business and the Muay Thai style of martial arts that he practices.

"This is the first film that shows the Thai way of life and

how Muay Thai plays an important part," he says.

"It's something novel for people. They haven't seen something like this before." Jaa says that along with the lessons taught by his father and his Muay Thai masters, he has learned from his heroes.

"From Bruce Lee, I adapted a hard and fast style of fighting," he says. "From Jackie Chan, the ability to use objects around me in action scenes. And from Jet Li, a sense of grace and style."

As he prepares to star in his second Thai feature, Jaa says he'd be interested in a Hollywood action film, or maybe a Quentin Tarantino flick. Is that for off?

"Quentin's seen *Ong Bak*," Jaa says. "He's interested."

Ong Bak: The Thai Warrior opens on March 18.

Flying fists and feet for fans of fundamental kung fu

Cary Darling in Los Angeles

Five years ago, before the lyrical sweep of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *House Of Flying Daggers* and *Hero*, the Western world's idea of martial-arts movies was more floghouse than art house.

Now things are coming full circle. *Ong Bak: The Thai Warrior*, is classic, fundamental: all flying fists and feet, and few discernible acting skills.

Enough with the sumptuous cinematography, tangid love stories and primping for Oscar recognition—what we want is a man on a mission and bad guys dropping like rain.

Later this year, Kang Fu Hsieh, a comedy from director Stephen Chow (Shao Lin Soccer), will follow in the acrobatic footsteps of Jackie Chan. So now that old-school is new-school again, and because *Ong Bak* will merely whet your appetite for more, here are some of the must-see Asian



Still the one: Bruce Lee

action films from the past few decades.

■ **Enter the Dragon** (1973): Certainly the first martial arts film to matter to a global audience. The reason? Two words: Bruce Lee. His sheer ferocity has yet to be equalled.

■ **Iron Monkey** (1993): With a rockin' title,

action choreography from Yuen Wo Ping and a finale fight on flaming poles, what's not to like?

■ **Five Deadly Venoms** (1978): Director Cheng Cheh's tale of the "poison clan" is a kung fu hoot.

■ **Once Upon a Time in China** (1991): The *Swordsmen* II (1991): For anyone who's seen only Jet Li's American films, both these should be required viewing.

■ **Dagum Forever** (1990): **Septent: Police Story II** (1992): Though many Chan fans might pick Drunken Master II or Project A as their favourites, these are my personal choices.

■ **Hard-Boiled** (1991): Director John Woo's Hong Kong fare will be no tear-stained love letter. Instead, it's a riot of gunplay and gangsters. There are many other notable Woo titles, such as *A Better Tomorrow* (1986), *A Better Tomorrow II* (1987) and *The Killer* (1989).

■ **Battle Royale** (2000): This explosive Japanese near-future come-book

fantasy, starring Takeshi Kitano (*Zatoichi*) and based on Kenji Takami's epic, *Lord Of The Flies*—like novel, is not for the squeamish or for the kids.

■ **The Heroic Trio** (1993): **Peking Opera Blues** (1996): The former—starring Michelle Yeoh, Maggie Cheung and Anita Mui, is comic-book camp; the latter is *Crouching Tiger* graceful. Both let the ladies take the action spotlight.

■ **The Blind Swordsman: Zatoichi** (2004): My swordsmen can beat up your swordsmen—and mine is blind.

■ **A Chinese Ghost Story** (1987): **The Bride With The White Hair** (1993): **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon** (2001): **Hero** (2002): **House Of Flying Daggers** (2004) (still in theatre): Beautiful films that are as much about their lush look, pagentry, spiritual aura and sense of romance as their fight sequences. They appeal to an artsy sensibility, but make no mistake: they still put the martial in martial arts.



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get a better insurance deal.



Mixing traditional
dance with art
theatre. Page 31



Dancing up a
storm. Page 38



Canine web cam.
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Photo: Erin Byrne

In the name of the father

Few of us have to endure a Darth Vader/Luke Skywalker-style relationship with our fathers.

However our relationship to them can have a massive impact on our lives.

That relationship is explored in the Sidetrack Theatre's latest production called *It's A Father*, a series of short comic plays

looking at fathers' relationships with their children and wives.

Director Don Mamouny said one of his favourite pieces in the production was called *The Donor*.

"It's about a childless couple in their 50s, and his wife is in the backyard hanging out clothes and he is planting cucumbers in his

garden," he said. "This young Indian man turns up and it turns out to be his son because he was a sperm donor about 20 years earlier. This scene is repeated about 30 times, with half Chinese and half Lebanese people turning up as his children.

"He rejects them because they're not Greek but his wife accepts them and their

marriage, which is not very happy, is suddenly happy with around 30 kids."

The short plays were written by Greek Australian playwrights and the production is part of the Greek Festival of Sydney.

It's A Father will run from March 9 to April 8 at Sidetrack Studio Theatre, 142 Addison Road, Marrickville. Details: 9294 4655.

NEWTOWN PRECINCT GUIDE

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FREE

A GREEK COMEDY FOR DAD

BY KATHERINE SCOTT

It's a Father, a riotous new comedy about fathers, their motives, their quirks, what we love about them and what drives us nuts is Sidetrack's contribution to the Cracker Comedy Festival.

The work premieres in March at Marrickville's Sidetrack Studio Theatre, courtesy of the Sidetrack Performance Group and the Greek Festival of Sydney. And it certainly has big shoes to fill as it follows last year's major hit, *It's a Mother*, which had its debut at last year's Greek Festival.

Don Mamouny, co-founder of Sidetrack and writer and director of *It's a Father*, was awed by the enthusiastic reception of *It's a Mother*. "[The show was] fantastically successful, it was a sell-out season. We could've gone on quite a lot longer," Mamouny said.

"That show's now going to the Melbourne comedy festival in April, so I hope *It's a Father* will follow in the same footsteps."

"It has a similar format with a series of short comic works around the theme of fathers: fathers and sons, fathers and

daughters, fathers and wives - fathers in general."

The cast includes Alex Bias, Adam Hatzimanolis, Victoria Karozis and Panda Likoudis - each boasting television and theatre credits, including *All Saints* and *Acropolis Now*.

Mamouny speaks of the cast with the affection of a father. "I've got nothing but praise for Alex and Panda and Adam and Victoria, they've been amazing," he said.

"They're amazingly inventive people. It's sort of like working with my family in a way - a very funny kind of family!" "Anyone who appreciates the funny side of life will enjoy *It's a Father*. Everyone's got a father, and most fathers, if you look at them from a certain angle are very funny, even when they're being serious."

Fathers who don't mind laughing at themselves but don't want to have a laugh at their own expense, come see the show on Tuesday nights when all dads get in for free.

It's a Father will run from March 9 to April 8 at Sidetrack Studio Theatre, Marrickville. For information and bookings call 9294 4655 or email theatre@sidetrack.com.au.

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Alex Bias, Adam Hatzimanolis, Victoria Karozis and Panda Likoudis in *It's a Father*

Time to get sidetracked

AN INNOVATIVE Marrickville theatre company is planning a big year in 2006, aided by a \$60,000 cultural grant from the NSW Government.

Sidetrack was created 22 years ago, and continues to work with artists from diverse cultural and performance backgrounds to develop new ways of presenting theatre.

"Our main objective is to challenge the notion of what theatre is," said Sidetrack's Artistic Director and cofounder, Don Mamouney.

"Most theatre companies in Australia tend to position their works to a mainstream, older audience. Sidetrack recognises that Australian audiences are more diverse. We're always surprised by our audiences."

It's all the more surprising that Sidetrack manage to reach so many people on their shoestring budget.

Most of the year the company operates on only a skeleton staff of two, expanding their numbers only during busy times, when a show is running.

They're also helped greatly by the dedication of their regular actors.

"We have a fantastic core group of performers that we work with, and at the level they're performing, they could be commanding top work anywhere in the world," Mr Mamouney said.

Sidetrack's productions tend to be highly physical and energetic, but there is also a strong focus on story-telling.



Sidetrack will produce 'It's A Father' as part of this month's Cracker Comedy Festival.

"We're working at the moment on a big creative production called The Seven Pirates," said Mr Mamouney.

Sidetrack is also set to follow up the success of last year's production, It's A Mother, with their new show, It's A Father, which will play during the upcoming Cracker Comedy Festival in March.

The show explores what it means to be a father - particularly a Greek father.

It's A Father opens at the Sidetrack Studio Theatre, 142 Addison Road, Marrickville, on March 9.

For more information, visit crackercomedy.com.au.



Father and son: Adam Hatzimanolis and Panda Likoudis spending quality time together


DAD TAKES THE STAGE

BY PAM WALKER

It's a Father is a joyful, sometimes loud, often brash but always amusing, romp. A collection of vignettes, it explores the role, importance and peculiarities of dads, with a special Greek focus. It helps if you have a smattering of Greek – it will give you access to another comic layer – but the occasional Greek curse or lament is not a barrier to enjoying this sequel to *It's a Mother*, last year's hit for Don Mamouny and Sidetrack Theatre. The four-hander displays some fine acting from all the cast but a standout is Panda Likoudis who creates characters as diverse as the very daggy

but sufferingly dutiful son, the still bitter spurned husband but loving father, and the mighty but overly horny Zeus. Also versatile is Victoria Karozis who opens the show as an adoring little boy before taking the stage as the obligatory Greek mamma, including the sexy mamma of Alexander the Great. Alex Blas and Adam Hatzimanolis put in good performances in this irreverent, vibrant and energetic comedy in which nothing is sacred – certainly not dad, or his views on soccer, surfs, sperm donations and long-lost sons. *It's a Father* plays at Sidetrack until April 8.

On for young
and old . . .
clockwise from
left, Panda
Likoudis as the
Undertaker in
Alkestis;
children at
Connells Point
Public learn
about Hellenic
culture after
school; seniors
go through their
paces at the
Thursday Outing
at the Greek
Community
Club, Lakemba.
Photos:
Tamara Dean



Greece is the word . . . and they're all passing it on

