



CU BOOK REVIEWS

Body of OZ Film and TV References Grows

Albert Moran's Guide to Australian TV Series, Australian Film, Television and Radio School Sydney 1993, paperback with B&W photos, 672pp, indexed, \$24.95.

Albert Moran's compendious guide - nearly 700 pages - comes with a glowing introduction from Bruce Gyngell and jacket raps from Debbie Byrne ('essential') and Bill Collins ('significant'). But don't be put off by the hype: it is both these things, and then some.

Moran - an academic whose writing is refreshingly free of jargon - sets the scene with a 30-page overview which divides Australian television history into six stages, including Radio With Pictures (1956-64), Cops and A Kangaroo (1964-75) - presumably a reference to Skippy though the program is not mentioned in the accompanying text, and The Golden Years (1976-86). His view of the future for broadcast television is gloomy - it is likely to 'survive but in a marginal position'. Perhaps this reflects the outlook of FACTS, whose members seem obsessed about the impact of pay TV, and which was one of the sponsors of his research!

Each entry in the detailed alphabetical listings of drama series begins with a checklist which covers genre (eg historical, family, children's, comedy, political/social); number and length of episodes; producer; format (eg 'series, shot on videotape, in colour'); date of first screening; and key personnel - production and direction, cast and crew. Moran's synopses are lively and informative, fair and not unduly opinionated. Where relevant he mentions critical and audience reaction, prizes and awards. He includes useful background: for example, the political problems encountered during the filming in the Philippines of the series *A Dangerous Life*, necessitating a relocation to Sri Lanka; and the diplomatic fracas in Malaysia set off by the ABC

series *Embassy*; or the impact of a series - *Number 96* is a good example - in its contemporary social context.

For anyone whose life has coincided with the development of Australian television, reading this guide is an enjoyable exercise in nostalgia, and occasionally bemusement: how many would now remember *The Private World of Miss Prim* (1966), *Frank and Francesca* (1973), or *No Thanks I'm On a Diet* (1976), for example?

The checklist at the head of each entry does not indicate which network first screened the programs, though this information is usually in the text. *CU* felt that listing at the top would have meant that important links between say, Crawfords or Kennedy Miller and the commercial networks, or Roadshow, Coote and Carroll and the ABC in recent years, were easily identifiable. This minor shortcoming is more than compensated, however, by a section which describes the major drama packagers, including the networks themselves, and relationships between broadcasters and packagers. This section would be a particularly useful reference for overseas producers looking for partners for co-productions and other co-operative arrangements.

The book's last section sets out prime-time schedules on all networks (1957-93) for the first week of March (chosen for consistency and because it is always a ratings week). While this can be only broadly indicative of programming policies, its value lies in its presentation of consolidated information over this long period and the insight it offers into changing tastes and programming policies. The book concludes with a comprehensive index.

Moran's continuing work of documenting Australian television is an invaluable contribution in a field where resources and reliable references have traditionally been sparse. His previous works include *Australian Televi-*

sion Drama Series 1956-1981 (1989, also published by the AFTRS), a survey of government film since 1945 (Currency Press 1991) and his film and broadcasting readers (Currency 1985 and Allen and Unwin 1992), essential resources for every serious student of the Australian production industry.

The funding of the research for this book was shared between the AFTRS, FACTS and Moran's home base, Griffith University's Faculty of Humanities.



Simon Molloy and Barry Burgan, *The Economics of Film and Television in Australia*, South Australian Centre for Economic Studies for the Australian Film Commission, 1993, 133pp (other details, *Policy File*)

There is no doubt that the availability of information resources for the Australian production industry has improved in recent years, and for that the Australian Film Commission must take considerable credit.

The AFC's regular surveys of film, video and TV production in conjunction with *Entertainment Business Review* (the latest, 1992-93, has recently been released) provide an invaluable overview of the current scene as well as allowing analysis of trends and developments over the longer term. Its publication *Get the Picture* (of which there have now been two editions) gathers together a large amount of data about production, distribution, financing, marketing, box office and critical reactions, and is virtually an encyclopaedia of the Australian industry.

The latest publication with AFC involvement (along with the Australian Cultural Development Office and SPAA) is the work of Simon Molloy

Continued on page 17 ...



... Continued from page 16

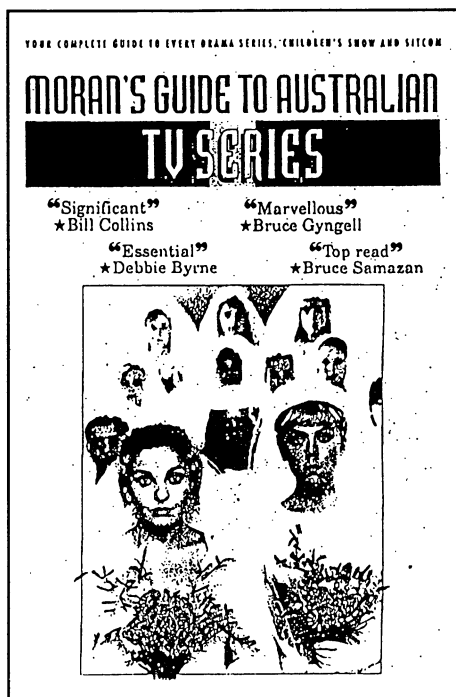
and Barry Burgan of the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies. This research paper makes an economic analysis of the audiovisual industry with particular emphasis on government intervention. The writers express a hope that the report is 'interesting and accessible to a wide range of readers' and in this, they have succeeded. There is plenty of information presented here, some of it quite complex, but the presentation is free of jargon and understandable by non-economists.

The report relies fairly heavily for its material on other sources (eg *Screen Digest* surveys, AFC/EBR surveys, *Get the Picture*) but what is useful is that it pulls this diverse material together to form a comprehensive local industry overview. (In its reliance on secondary sources some of its information may be slightly dated. For example, Chapter 2 contains a survey, based on a 1991 Coopers and Lybrand report, of government involvement in film and television in the US and European countries, though the EC has seen major developments in this area over the last couple of years).

It provides a good primer in the workings of distribution and exhibition, and in Chapter 5 sets out - simply and without taking sides - the main arguments for and against government intervention, drawing on earlier material by Kirsten Schou, Throsby and Withers, and Ross Jones.

The chapter on film and television financing notes that the Government has spent 'a little over \$100m a year on film and television support in various forms'. The writers do not attempt to estimate total support by including, for example, that proportion of ABC and SBS funding which could be regarded as support for production. They reach no firm conclusion on the desirability of government intervention in the Australian industry at this stage of its development, but their neutral tone is a refreshing change from the fundamentalist arguments put in recent years by Jones and others.

This report has plenty to interest the lay reader, but for those concerned with its economic credentials, *CU* plans to carry an economist's review of this publication in its next issue.



ABA's *Trends and Issues*

Australian Broadcasting Authority, *Trends and Issues* No.2, Oct 1993; *Australian Content on Television 1990-92*, 32pp; No.3, Oct 1993, *Viewing Australia: audience views about Australian television programs and films in 1992*, 15pp, ABA Sydney 1993.

The ABA released the second and third issues of its publication *Trends and Issues* to coincide with the Centre for Media and Telecommunications Law and Policy's Australian Content seminar in Melbourne (reported in the last issue of *CU*).

While mourning the demise of the ABT's *Broadcasting in Australia* series, it must be conceded that the appearance of these inexpensive (\$5.00) papers suggest that the regulator intends to continue to provide a regular supply of data and research about developments in Australian radio and television which fall within its scope for broadcasters, the production industry, teachers and students and indeed anyone needing reliable information.

CU uses the word 'reliable' advisedly, since on recent occasions (like the seminar mentioned above) repre-

sentatives of commercial television have questioned the accuracy of research on social issues such as television's portrayal (or non-portrayal) of the realities of Australian society. The regulator itself was responsible for some of this research, conducted by reputable consultants using tried and tested methodology. These critical comments have, strangely, drawn no public response from the ABA.

The research reported in the publications under review drew no fire from the networks. This was perhaps not surprising, given that the first, which analyses station performance over the first three years of the TPS 14 requirements for Australian content and children's programs, shows that all stations met the transmission quota, the total drama/diversity score, the C drama minimum score, and the minimum drama score in each year. The only jarring note was a decline in the average drama diversity score in both 1991 and 1992: from 2184 in 1990 to 2056 (1991) and 1846 (1992).

Readers will find some interest in the list of qualifying programs for the three year period. The points awarded for some programs are on the face of it, generous, and others - for example the 'new concept' classification of the tacky Graham Kennedy's *Home Video Show* - are open to question. No doubt the regulator had its reasons.

The other publication, *Viewing Australia*, contains a wealth of information about viewing habits and preferences, including some colourful and resonant quotes from actual viewers.

I think the Australian serials are more down to earth and honest than the American stuff. They're genuine and you can follow it and you can see what's happening.

Light viewer, over 50 years old, not retired, urban dweller.

The overall message is loud and clear: Australians prefer Australian programs. There was a strong demand (58 per cent) for more quality drama in the form of mini-series, and the most liked aspect of Australian films was their identifiable location.

Continued on page 18 ...



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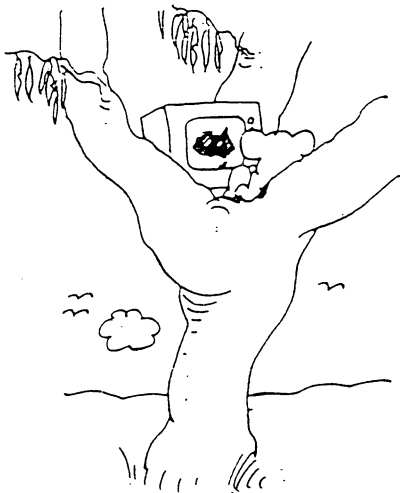
The top four genres of Australian program for predominantly commercial viewers were serials/soaps, current affairs, comedy and infotainment. Predominantly ABC/SBS viewers rated serials and current affairs almost equally and put documentaries ahead of infotainment and comedy.

The highest proportion of those who preferred Australian films and serials to their American counterparts did so because they felt that Australian productions were 'more down to earth/realistic'.

While the results of these two studies are encouraging, they could also provide ammunition for opponents of Australian content regulation. The fact that the networks are easily meeting TPS 14 requirements, along with demonstrable viewer support for Australian programs, could be used to support arguments that regulation - even self-regulation - is no longer required.

Nevertheless, the information they contain makes them an essential addition to any library of broadcasting resources.

A word of praise is also due for the regulator's monthly newsletter *ABA Update*. This is no dry record of facts and statistics, but now contains much useful material in the form of reprinted papers by the Chairman and others, and articles on important developments such as digital technology. Great value at \$36.00 for 12 issues. □



Policy File

..... A Monthly Round-Up of Press Releases, Reports, Publications and Conferences

Media Releases

Australian Broadcasting Authority

ABA to Meet With the People of Griffith and the MIA/Darwin 3/11/93
ABA to Meet With the People of Mildura/ the Riverland Area 9 and 10/11/93
Refers Pay TV Licence B to TPC 18/11/93
ABA To Visit Central and South West Western Australia 23/11/93

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Statement by the Managing Director David Hill [*on his remarks about an Australian republic*] 3/11/93
New Directions for 7.30 Report [*Victoria*] 5/11/93
ABC's Middle East Bureau [*moves from Nicosia to Jerusalem*] 5/11/93
Triennial Funding for the ABC 11/11/93

Australian Film Commission

The Economics of Film and Television in Australia 18/11/93

Minister for Communications (Beddall)

Mainstream Radio Access for Print Handicapped 4/11/93
[*Telecom's Announcement on its FMO*] (Future Mode of Operations) Will Accelerate Industry Growth 11/11/93
Pay Television Update [*Australis Media will acquire 100% of New World Telecommunications, successful tenderer for Licence B*] 18/11/93
Monday Deadline for Pay Television Bid 24/11/93

Optus

Optus Long Distance Celebrates First Birthday 15/11/93
Optus Breaks New Ground with New Mobile Phone Features, Incentives 15/11/93
Tasmania to Get Optus Choice for Long Distance Calls 25/11/93

Telecom

Free Call Service Offered to Families by Telecom 3/11/93
Telecom Break through to Give Customers Echo-free International Calls 8/11/93
Telecom Reduces International Switched Digital Charges 15/11/93
Telecom Launches Interactive Services in Asia via Australia Television 18/11/93
Telecom's New International Network Centre to Enhance Customer Service 30/11/93

Continued on page 19 ...