

I like to refer to the decades of the 1970s, 80s *and early 90s* as the Golden Era of the ABC because it was a period when the National Broadcaster presented quality programmes that viewers really wanted to see and, by and large, very much enjoy. It was also a period where it was an exciting and invigorating arena in which to work. It therefore attracted a large number of people whose talent could be developed in a creative and/or managerial way to provide a large variety of programming appealing a wide audience.

I joined the ABC in 1972 as a temporary employee in the film editing postproduction area, filling in for someone on annual leave. The first programme I worked on was The Aunty Jack show, somewhat confronting for a recently arrived £ 10 Pom and which was the first programme to be screened in colour on the network the following year. Fortunately, I seemed to satisfy the department head who hired me and was offered a permanent position after a few weeks. It was an interesting period in another way too. Just before I joined the ABC they had started training and employing female film editors, somewhat of a first for the industry in Australia. This certainly was not the case in Canada where I was introduced into the industry and had spent the previous 6 years working.

In those days the ABC had enough money to produce all programmes internally and broke these down into approximately 5 different genres:

- TV Features
- TV Drama
- Comedy
- Education
- News & Current Affairs

Those in management, especially department heads, were well appointed and in many instances had worked and been trained within the ABC.

Sadly, today, with a huge cut in funds, the ABC can no longer afford to produce all its programming internally and must either buy products to broadcast or commission shows to be produced externally. This, I believe has resulted in a decline in programme and technical quality and the ABC is no longer seen as a place to receive much in the way of creative training. As a consequence, it probably doesn't attract the kind of personnel it did back in the Golden Era. However, as a result of attending **The Starburst Film Festival and Filmmaking Symposium** recently I believe there may well be additional factors involved in the general decline in broadcast quality. I will touch on these a little later.

As I said the organisation was regarded as a very good training ground in several areas and produced many very talented performers both in production areas as well as in management. In fact, quite a few members of the production staff were snapped up by Hollywood and some cinematographers and editors went on to win Academy Awards. One of those was John Seale, winner of 5 Academy Awards for best cinematography. He joined the ABC in 1963 "when the ABC had a lot of money and the cine camera department wanted to spend it. They had 26 cameramen, and each one had his own little ArriFlex camera, plus a 70DR wind-up Bell and Howell. A lot of these guys were ex-World War II combat cameraman. Many of them saw the Vietnam War and the Korean War with a camera. They were amazing because they were the old guys who'd come up through the very early stages of film work in Australia. Some through features, but most through news. They learnt so much about life in this context; not only in how to operate a camera, but also about how to interact appropriately with people. When they went out to shoot a news story, they were taught about the attitudes of people and how to film them – how they could be nervous, how to put them at ease, what angles to use, how to talk to them, things like that."

In 1973 I was assigned to the education department as a film editor and there encountered one of the most special and significant people of the ABC in its Golden Era, **Sandra Levy**. She was a producer then, who had recently graduated from a Specialist Trainee programme then being run by the ABC. She won my deepest respect right away when I discovered that prior to joining the National Broadcaster she had been a schoolteacher and that some of her students were teenage boys. At the time we were making a 20-minute series called SCAN which during term time was broadcast once a week. Before long she moved into drama as a producer and in 1987 was promoted to being head of that department. She then left the ABC for a while and from 1989 to 1998 she was head of drama at Southern Star Endomol. She returned to the ABC as director of television from 2001 to 2005. During her stewardship the audience increased 24 per cent, due to the production of programs including [Kath and Kim](#), [Spicks and Specks](#), [Enough Rope](#) and [The Chaser](#). Sadly, in 2006 Kerry Packer persuaded her to leave the ABC once more and join [Channel 9](#) as head of drama where she stayed for only a year. She was then appointed as CEO of the [Australian Film, Television and Radio School](#)^[3] where she remained for two four-year terms, stepping down in June 2015.

In 1974 I changed departments and started editing the series Chequerboard. Richard Oxenburgh fronted this show which was based on a series of interviews with people who had fascinating subjects to relate. I learned quickly that Richard's hands were a significant feature of this show as they appeared on screen quite frequently to avoid 'jump cuts' when the interviews had to be arranged on screen out of the order in which they were filmed.

The executive producer of the series was **Geoff Daniels** who also garnered my respect. He held regular meetings of all production staff to discuss the topic of the upcoming show and thereby helping to

determine the form each episode should take. He went from there to run the drama department producing shows including **Boy in The Bush** and **Spring and Fall**. He started out in the ABC as a sound recordist.

In the **Late 70's** I worked in TV Features the head of which was the very perceptive and talented **Alan Bateman**. The shows he introduced to the ABC in that period included:

**In the Wild with Harry Butler,
Torque with Peter Wherrett,
Peach's Australia with Bill Peach
Journey into India with Keith Adams**

all of which I edited episodes of.

An assistant cameraman who worked on a number of shows I edited was the very tall Richard Walker, some 6 foot 10 inches in height. He was very good at what he did having been trained in the ABC cinecamera department and was part of the team that went to India to shoot **Journey into India with Keith Adams**. It was a little tricky at times, especially in the remote areas of that country, where lots of children would assemble to noisily observe what was going on. Controlling these children was somewhat problematic. Here assistant cameraman Richard saw solving the problem as one of his duties. He stood in front of them all and raised his right arm and waving a piece of coloured cloth before walking away from the camera and often way out of the village. Intrigued by this very tall man they all followed him out allowing the rest of the camera crew to get on with the day's shoot. Sometime later though Richard lost the desire of becoming a cinematographer and instead became a successful producer in the TV features department.

I only worked in the **News and Current Affairs** department once and that was in 1982 editing an episode of Four Corners. It was about the topic of aviation featuring **Jeff McMullen** who at that time was the International Reporter for the series. Prior to that he was a foreign correspondent for the ABC for almost two decades. The Producer was **Jonathon Holmes**.

In the **1980s and 1990s** I worked mainly in the Drama Department. Looking back on my career there I was fortunate enough to have been nominated for 4 AFI awards for best editing on movies produced by the ABC, much of which I attribute to the very talented directors and producers I was privileged to have worked with. The directors include the extraordinary **Michael Jenkins** who also directed a series called **The Leaving of Liverpool**. The screenplay for this was written by writing partners [John Alsop](#) and [Sue Smith](#) who were then working together on the miniseries [Brides of Christ](#). Alsop read a review of a book about the child migration scheme, Lost Children of the Empire. Although the scheme had continued until 1967 and had affected thousands of children, little was known about it. Alsop approached Penny Chapman, then head of drama at the ABC, with the idea for the story, and she approved the funding. [Michael Wearing](#), head of drama at the BBC, also agreed to co-fund and co-produce the drama. It was based on the experience revealed by the thousands of children who were sent to Fairbridge Society Institutions in Australia after the second world war many of whom documented the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse they suffered. The final script was sent to the BBC where it was approved prior to the shoot. When Michael and I completed the fine cut we sent a copy to the BBC before putting it to bed. Their reaction was astounding claiming it could not be aired in that form. Michael and the Head of Drama, Penny Chapman, refused to budge so the BBC sent a senior executive out to Sydney to resolve their issue.

In the meantime, we screened it for ABC's managing director David Hill, who gave it the go ahead. I hadn't realised then that he had been born in England and spent three years at Fairbridge Farm School in Molong with two of his brothers after his impoverished single mother was promised better opportunities for her children in the 1960s. He later claimed "We were luckier than most because my mum managed to follow us out, and we got back together as a family. Most of these kids never saw their families again". In spite of the BBC's initial reaction, it was screened in both countries without any changes being made and was extraordinarily well received. It also won the 1992 NEW YORK FESTIVAL award for International TV Programming.

A few of the other dramas I edited include:

Scales of Justice directed by: Michael Jenkins, Produced by:
Michael Carson

Barbcueria directed by: Don Featherstone, Produced by:
Julian Pringle

Bordertown directed by: Ken Cameron, Produced by:
Steve Knapman

Police Rescue directed by: Don Michael Pattinson Produced
by: Sandra Levy

A Dangerous Life directed by: Bob Markowitz, Produced by: Hal
McElroy/Sandra Levy

Stringer directed by: Kathy Mueller, Produced by:
John Edwards

Seven Deadly Sins directed by: Several, Produced by: Bob Weiss
/ Ross Matthews

Some of the Movies were:

Rebel directed by: Michael Jenkins

Wendy Cracked a Walnut directed by: Michael Pattinson

Waiting directed by: Jackie McKimmie

The Custodian directed by: John Dingwall

Dallas Doll directed by: Anne Turner

When editing the early Movies for the ABC they had to be done on 35mm film rather than the less clunky 16mm which was the usual format for television. So, when editing my first movie for the ABC I used an outside postproduction facility called Spectrum Films run by the amazing **Hans Pomeranz**. He and I got on very well together and quickly developed a strong working relationship. Hans was also an ex-ABC employee.

As founder and Managing Director of legendary Spectrum Films, Hans nurtured many of today's filmmaking 'names' in their early years.

Raised in Holland during the war he had a very difficult childhood partly due to his Jewish heritage and partly due to that country's near starvation throughout the war years. His family migrated to Australia early in the 1950s where he secured his first job working in a film laboratory, there discovering he had a desire to be where the films were being shot and made rather than only being processed. He began dropping into the ABN-2 newsroom at Gore Hill, running messages there for his company. When a vacancy for a trainee film editor arose, he applied for and got the position and ended up cutting newsreels for *Weekend Magazine*. In 1964 Hans broke from the ABC to establish the Spectrum Films facility to service the

independent editing community. His commitment stood for 45 years, for which an OAM was awarded in recognition of his efforts to the Australian film and television industry. Not only through editing facilities, but financing and indeed Producing, Directing and Editing his own projects, one of which was *Stockade*. Hans was politically astute and believed in social justice. He was most generous in causes such as raising funds for St Vincent's Hospital and his beloved Mosman Soccer Club, where he was once President.

However, his early childhood deprivation in Holland finally caught up with him and sadly, he died in 2007 just short of his 69th birthday, having spent many very active years with a new heart transplanted by Victor Chang.

The craft of film editing is essentially the same today although the methodology has changed quite dramatically over the last 30 years or so. I commenced my career as a film editor working on Moviolas. Then in the 1980s tape based non-linear systems such as Touchvision and Ediflex were introduced somewhat simplifying the editing mechanics and speeding up the fine-cutting procedure. However, it was not until the 1990s that Digital nonlinear postproduction was widely adopted. In the early 1990s Lightworks, an English company, gave a demonstration of their brand-new software in Australia and I was so impressed I persuaded the ABC to let me edit the series, **Seven Deadly Sins**, using a very early version of this system. Because this was a co-production the outside producer was also very interested in the technology and had a very good relationship with the English developers. I would generally work from about 9am to 7 or 8pm each day and he would then come in and ask me what I considered to be the strong and weak points of the software. He would then spend much of the evening on the telephone to the developers passing that information onto them. They would then refine the software and send it back to me. This went on for the entire series and the end result was quite impressive. It quickly

became obvious that this was the technology of the future and shortly afterwards gained worldwide acceptance.

Another ex-colleague I would like to mention is Richard Francis Bruce. I first got to know him when he was an assistant editor in Four Corners. After leaving school, Richard joined the ABC in Sydney with hopes of emulating his father, Jack Bruce, who worked as a cinematographer in Hollywood for Cecil B. De Mille and the Famous Lansky Players. However, the only opening at the time was in editing. He fell in love with the craft and spent 15 years with the ABC working on various current affairs and other programs before getting into drama. He left the ABC to work on the feature "Goodbye Paradise" before going on to "Careful He Might Hear You" and Kennedy Miller's "The Dismissal" and "Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome". It was through George Miller's studio film "The Witches of Eastwick that Richard was introduced to Hollywood. He again worked for Miller on his 1992 film "Lorenzo's Oil". Richard got the job on "Shawshank Redemption" over 30 of Hollywood's best editors because the producer had a similar background (at the BBC) and took a liking to him. In 1998 he received his third Oscar nomination for his work on "Air Force One", a fact which attracted considerable attention by the Australian TV and press.

He visited Australia that same year wondering whether he should return to live here and have his children educated in this country. During that time we both edited episodes of **The Dangerous Life** series for the ABC at the end of which he returned to the USA to continue his career.

The accomplished film editor has been made a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia, honoured for his significant service to the film industry.

About this time I also worked on the ABC miniseries called **Bodysurfer**. It won the **1989 Television of Australia Award for Excellence in Editing**. Director Ian Barry

The final two ex ABC colleagues I would like to mention are Matt Villa, and Wayne Pashley, both of whom were assistant editors while I was working for the drama department.

Matt Villa:

Very promising assistant editor in the drama department until the mid 90's. He then left the ABC to pursue a career as an editor. Obviously with some success as this year he won the AACTA award for best editing in the 2022 film **Elvis** directed by Baz Luhrmann and was nominated for an OSCAR.

Wayne Pashley:

Wayne Pashley is a Sydney based supervising sound editor, sound designer, and re-recording mixer, whose feature film credits include Australian and International titles. Starting his career in sound at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation during the early 1980's, he worked exclusively in drama and on many of the acclaimed mini-series of that time, including **Captain James Cook**, **The Boy in the Bush** and **Great Expectations**.

In 1989, Wayne moved into a freelance career as a sound designer, and in 1993 opened the doors to his own sound studio, **Big Bang Sound Design**, together with his partner Libby Villa, who was once an assistant of mine. Since then he has worked with some of the finest directors and producers in the film industry, and contributed to the soundtracks of over 65 feature films including Peter Weir's "**Greencard**" and "**Fearless**", George Miller's "**Babe**" and "**Happy Feet**" movies and "**Mad Max: Fury Road** and **ELVIS**

A multi award winning supervising sound editor/Re-recording Mixer, Wayne has garnered four AFI/AACTA awards for his work on Bill Bennett's "**Kiss or Kill**" and "**In a Savage Land**", Baz Luhrmann's "**The Great Gatsby**", and George Miller's "**Mad Max: Fury Road**". This year he won the AACTA award for the sound postproduction on **ELVIS** and was also nominated for an OSCAR.

As I mentioned earlier, I was a part of a panel for **The Starburst Film Festival and Filmmaking Symposium** the other members of which were a very talented mixture of writers, directors and producers, all currently still active in the industry. From what they had to say I gathered that much in the way content is distributed these days, through the many aspects of social media etc., has had a big and negative effect on the cinema and television industries. Not just about where today's audiences gain access to it but also on the nature of its content. Artificial Intelligence has also had a certain impact, and as one member expressed, has even penetrated the craft of writing. Several members also claimed to experience periods of feeling 'high' followed by substantial periods feeling very low, largely I gather, through the lack of having a consistent guarantee of worthy projects to work on. This was accentuated by the fact that these people expressed a strong passion to get into this creative industry from a very early age. None of this I was aware of and to the best of my knowledge it did not have much of an impact on people I worked with in the industry before I retired. And I, and many of the people I worked with all those years ago, never had or expressed having a passion to get into this industry from an early age. In fact, I fell into this line of work quite by accident and under some rather bizarre circumstances.

Nevertheless I am quite prepared to accept that these factors may well have an impact on the quality of today's ABC programming and contribute to its overall decline as well as the current lack of funding.