

CONTROL-FREAK PARENTS LETTING GO OF YOUR KIDS

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GOLD RUSH

Todd Russell and Brant Webb's media challenge. Plus, the inside story of their complex rescue.

BY TONY WRIGHT

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SEX AND THE CITY
From left, role hopefuls
Dallas Desira, Rupert Owen,
Hrisanthi Tomaszewski,
director Anna Brownfield
and producer Aer Agrey

PHOTOGRAPHY
ROBIN SELICK



**A porn film being
made by feminists?
Presenting the
women's view of
sex on the screen.**

BY PAUL TOOHEY

HAVE THE TWO GIRLS climbing the stairs to audition for parts in Australia's first full-production porn film in a decade got the wrong address? There are no huge stacks of blonde hair, colossal chests or clacking high-heels. No competitive nervous gossip, overheating mobile phones or suitcase-sized make-up bags. As for the three young men also chasing roles in the same film, there's not a pony-tailed muscle boy among them. They look like art students.

The location's not right, either. No dodgy warehouse on the outskirts of town but a sunny St Kilda communal workshop space, with earnest, creative types poking about the gardens. Given the setting, it is not surprising that the film's director, Anna Brownfield, proclaims herself a feminist.

In case you missed the boat, porn and feminism are no longer mutually exclusive – it's similar to the way African-Americans have reclaimed the word "nigger".



**Lights, camera,
satisfaction**

**▼ PORN IS A
FORMULA. IF YOU
STRAY FROM THE
FORMULA, YOU END
UP MAKING A KEN
RUSSELL FILM //**

RUPERT OWEN



XXX FACTOR
Rupert Owen's
previous credits
include *The Einstein
Factor*; Hrisanthi
Tomaszewski, far left,
draws the line at X-
rated stuff

NAKED FUN

Erin Walsh, below, doesn't
see the film as porn; Dallas
Desira, right, identifies
with the main character



lesbian – as depicted in the final sex scene. I try to think of one bloke who would be confronted by the morality of that. I'm still trying.

"My other films have always been about female sexuality," Brownfield says. "It's also to do with the fact I have watched porn in the past and it did nothing for me."

Perhaps she's one of the many people who just don't like porn. Why fight it? "I felt there must be something more that can be made," she says. "And there has been some porn I have liked. So much of it is to formula, it is so contrived and there's not a lot of naturalism. When you're watching people having sex for money, there isn't any natural chemistry."

We will not be seeing any of that chemistry today – rehearsals for *The Band* do not involve sex. The reading sessions are to build "a relationship and a trust" between the actors, so when it comes to actual filming there might be genuine intimacy. "If you look at a lot of porn," says Brownfield, "a man is in a room, a woman comes in and suddenly they've got their clothes off. I want to provide a reason."

The problem with providing a reason – a storyline – is that people watch porn to see sex. There is a chance that the thing getting the most furious work-out by people watching her film may be the fast-forward button.

Eros, an industry association which lobbies for the popular acceptance of non-violent adult pornography, says women buy half of all adult films sold in Australia. Brownfield is a small part in a bigger international shift for women to reclaim porn. It was led by ex-US porn star and now filmmaker Candida Royale, credited

Brownfield, a 34-year-old Swinburne University multimedia lecturer who has made short "serious" films, is auditioning actors for her first X-rated production, *The Band*. Brownfield's Poison Apple website (poison-appleproductions.com.au) explains her vision: "celebrating the diversity of women's sexuality in a manner that is humorous, humanistic, sensual and passionate – and celebrating the fact that sometimes we like a quick, hard shag as much as guys do!"

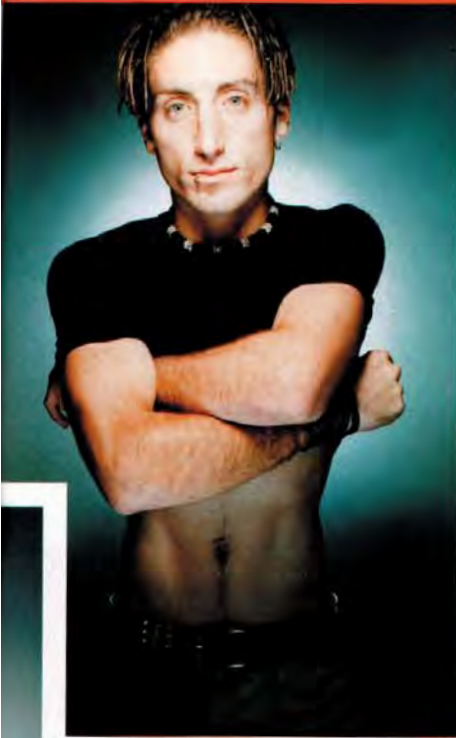
It is not for censors, HIV, drugs, priests or politicians that Australia's once active porn film industry has come to this. Rather, no one can be bothered making films here. Girls are hard to find, and there are no tax breaks for porn financiers and even less glory. The man who has agreed to back Brownfield's film prefers not to be named.

The Band is about a rock star named Jimmy who betrays his girlfriend with a groupie. Brownfield says she is making a film for women but, apart from the fact that she and her producer are women, the only feminist pay-off seems to be that Jimmy's girlfriend wins her revenge on him by becoming a

with opening up the women's market with female-friendly porn (foreplay, using women's facial expressions, no bullying, no seedy hotel rooms and, sometimes, condoms).

The Band's producer, Aer Agrey, 26, studied gender studies and history at university but says it was selling movies behind the counter of Melbourne sex shops which gave her an insight into the fact that women and couples were not able to buy the pornography they wanted. "The mission," says Agrey, "is to make really good quality erotica with characters and sex and to do it ethically. Most porn is really disposable – there are no classics made any more. It's all Hollywood chicks with unbelievably huge breasts with scars all over them."

Only one of the five hopefuls trying out for *The Band* refuses to discuss his motive for auditioning. "Rod" shuffles about, confused.



Hrisanthi Tomaszewski – who refuses to disclose her age – is looking for more than her weekend work fronting a wedding-circuit band. She's turned up thinking maybe the film's erotic content is to be simulated; it's not. She's nervous. "There are certain limitations to what I'll do," she says. "I'm OK with nudity but not sure how I'd feel about the X-rated stuff." She is yet to tell Brownfield this.

"I believe in freedom of expression and I like the idea of a film that combines music and sex from a women's perspective," says Tomaszewski. She watches some porn but says she's never seen a film successfully combine sex, dialogue and story. If convinced this project can manage all three, she'd be happier about participating in explicit scenes.

The problem with storylines in porn is they go wrong. There's no better example of how badly than in Australia's own 1990

bit over being shocked. We've turned full circle. We want to be disturbed.

Producer Aer Agrey talks of the classics. Recently I watched *Gone With the Wind* for the first time. I was disturbed. It was the scene in which the sexually frustrated Rhett carries Scarlett up the staircase and forces himself on her. You don't see him doing it, of course. But the morning after, Scarlett is, for the first time, happy as a lark. Almost 70 years on, it suggests a troubling and perilous message.

Rhett raped Scarlett. And it makes you wonder: as people reclaim all forms of abuse, owning and controlling them because they are unable to eradicate them, what comes next?

Who knows? The first test for Brownfield and Agrey is whether they can make a feminist fantasy of what ethical, passionate, women-friendly sex should look like on a budget of just \$80,000.

THE MISSION IS TO MAKE REALLY GOOD QUALITY EROTICA AND TO DO IT ETHICALLY //

AER AGREY PRODUCER

He had expected the outer-suburbs warehouse; he wanted the manicured, pneumatic women. Rod is, in real life, what is called a sexual "submissive"; he wants to be abused by powerful women in latex and he wants to do it now. He suspects Brownfield may be taking the piss and abandons ship.

Erin Walsh, 35, dances at bondage clubs in wigs and high heels. She's only interested in a lesbian role. "I don't see it as porn," she says. "I kind of get the gist that it's largely for a female audience. There's hardly a male in sight – and if he is, he's used as the women's plaything."

Dallas Desira, 24, wants the lead role of Jimmy. He relates because he's been playing in "shitty garage bands" for years. Desira claims he wouldn't be here if Brownfield was making "just a porn film". But, I tell him, this *is* a porn movie. "I suppose it is, you can't hide it," Desira concedes, not unhappily.

For Rupert Owen, 29, the money – and there won't be much for him – is unimportant. Owen is a registered sex worker. He and a female partner had a longstanding double act that operated between brothels and hotel rooms whereby they would perform intercourse for clients. He's a master's student in media studies and recently pre-recorded an appearance on TV's *The Einstein Factor* (special subject the life and times of Errol Flynn – he came second). Owen's up for anything.

"I do see it as both porn and erotica, although people would probably argue with me about the definitions," he says. "And this is porn because there is a formula. If you start straying from the formula, you end up making a Ken Russell film."

X-rated "classic", *Arigato Baby*. It tells of a man who falls for a Japanese girl but feels guilty because his dad hates Japanese after fighting them in World War II; meanwhile, he's having an affair with an Aboriginal girl, who in turn sleeps with the Japanese girl. The Japanese girl, unable to face the shame of her lesbian act, tops herself.

All bases were covered in this multicultural sexual whirlwind. The Aboriginal actress, Brenda Knowles, aka Nikki Lane, most famous for streaking at the 1988 VFL grand final, has sex to the drone of a didgeridoo.

Real life was not kind to Knowles. Her breast implants eventually went badly awry, literally exploding with infection and closing her career as a stripper. She hasn't been sighted for some time.

Arigato is not cited as a cautionary tale for those making *The Band*; things have changed since it was made. A quick check of the titles of current top-50 porn-sellers shows the demand for anal sex is overwhelming: it has become essential to the formula. *The Band* will toe the line.

"I'm into showing diversity and, if it's in an environment that's relaxed, it's OK," says Brownfield. "Anal sex holds an attraction for women. It is a part of women's sexuality they like to explore but there's an element of taboo about it. In most European Catholic countries, girls have anal sex in order to keep their vaginas pure for the men they eventually marry."

You get the sense Brownfield wants to shock; and maybe, along the way, shock-rocket herself forth as one of Australia's "dangerous" new filmmakers. But we, the public, are a



It makes sense that women take position behind the porn camera. But why someone like Brownfield, who tells me intercourse is an "inherently aggressive act by men"? Why doesn't she just make a lesbian film? Or not make one at all?

"I think women do want to watch heterosexual sex," Brownfield says. "The issue I have with so-called lesbian product is that it is aimed towards the heterosexual market; it's a male fantasy of what lesbianism is."

Brownfield says women are objectified in porn. So are men. If *Band* hopeful Dallas Desira finds himself used as a "woman's plaything" to help Brownfield make a statement on behalf of women, I doubt it'll cost him any sleep. ●