



1



2

# Heritage Adelaide, the perfect backdrop for a contemporary silent film



3

An Australian comedy that takes the audience back to Australia as it may have been at the turn of the 20th century

DENNIS COLEMAN

- 1 Government House, Adelaide South Australia
- 2 Central Markets, Adelaide South Australia
- 3 Film editing suite c. mid 20th century

Renowned South Australian film maker Rolf de Heer (*Bad Boy Bubby, Ten Canoes*) made an unusual discovery. He found 20,000 feet of old unexposed film stock in a fridge. The film proved to be the genesis of an idea – the making of a silent movie, using the stock with traditional hand-cranked camera techniques set against the Victorian-Edwardian backdrop of Adelaide's cultural precinct and nearby revamped retail strip.

Before undertaking the project De Heer spent time researching library film archives, focusing on street scenes, some of which, he remarked, were quite bizarre. Co-produced with Julie Ryan, *Dr Plonk*, starring Reg Lunghi, Paul Blackwell, Magda Szubanski and Reg the dog, it turns on a time-travel theme.

Lovers of silent movies will be impressed with the apparent authentic re-creation of films of that era. The 1907 segments deliberately have a flatter, grainier and more degraded look while various techniques and different

panchromatic stock (more globally light sensitive and thus producing a more realistic image) were used for the 2008 scenes.

A 90-year-old hand-cranked camera was purchased. The design of lenses from that era allowed the film maker to view scenes through the film but modern film stock was unsuitable. A more modern camera with contemporary film was used.

Likewise, the original plan was to use one of the world's best Wurlitzer organs, one that rises and descends into the pit of the Capri Cinema in Adelaide. This was not possible and instead a score for piano and vocals was written by Graham Tardif and performed by Melbourne's Stiletto Sisters.

History buffs will love the steam engines, turn-of-the-century laboratory and custom-made 'plonk mobile.' The street scenes certainly bring those old black and white photographs of my grandparents' Adelaide back to life.

*Dr Plonk* has been well received at film festivals in Toronto, Rome and others.

