



# Light my fire



Jonathan Teplitzky and actress Essie Davis.

**TWO THEMES KEEP** coming up in conversation with filmmaker Jonathan Teplitzky about his new film *Burning Man*. Without these two themes underpinning the script, it's likely the film wouldn't sink under your skin and make you question your own life, desires and relationships. Teplitzky peppers his conversation with the words 'visceral' and 'energy'.

Based on the Bondi local's experience of losing his partner to breast cancer, *Burning Man* centres on Tom (Matthew Goode) a British chef in Sydney who is a good man behaving badly surrounded by women who are trying to fix his life.

In wanting to make a film about grief, Teplitzky decided to focus on uncharted territory by exploring the freedom that comes from the loss

of a partner, where indiscretions are more easily forgiven.

"There's sadness and all that sort of stuff but there's this other thing – it's almost like a 'get out of jail free' card for a period of time," he says.

"You now have life experience; you now have done a lot of things; you're not 17 or 20 and done bugger all – you actually have a worldly intelligence but you re-find, in a sense, the freedom to a degree [of when] you were much younger and that really interests me. I think it's a core ingredient, I believe, of when you grieve."

Teplitzky was initially writing another script about a chef, inspired by his family's history in the food industry, when he started thinking about a dramatic tale of loss. The two



Matthew Goode in *Burning Man*.

ideas would meld into *Burning Man*.

"It just made total sense because the behaviour of Tom as just a man was very reflective of what he's gone through, but it's only added to by the fact he's a chef and so often they're psychopaths," he jokes.

"But also there is a real energy of what it is to be a chef, there's a real creative energy and they create good things that are gone 24 hours later – literally – it's consumed and it's gone."

It was Teplitzky's intention to avoid the clichés of most films that deal with grief – lots of wallowing, looking out of windows and rainy days. It's where his concept of making the film a visceral experience with a focus on energy comes into play.

Fast paced opening scenes of a car crash, a garden, a woman crying and flames create a fractured narrative, capturing the sense of chaos and confusion felt by Tom.

"Sitting in the cinema, it's a visceral experience and that's what I wanted it to be... I wanted to tell it through the emotion, at times the harshness, at times the depth or the intensity of the desires."

The casting of British actor Goode (*A Single Man*, *Brideshead Revisited*) in the lead was less about making the film attractive to international

audiences and more about capturing the screenplay's emotion – not being Australian also helped in another way.

"It just adds to his isolation and what he's going through... but I also think it adds to the idea that it's a universal experience and I think that adds to the film."

The cast is rounded out by acclaimed local actresses Rachel Griffiths, Kate Beahan, Essie Davis, Kerry Fox and Bojana Novakovic in the pivotal role of Sarah.

Despite the intense emotions explored in *Burning Man*, Teplitzky has ensured there is a healthy dose of black comedy. So when the energy of Tom's grief becomes the visceral experience he so desires, there's a striking scene involving the aftermath of a car crash and some raw meat to remind you it's time to move on.

"What can I say? The audience needed a surreal laugh at that point. Hopefully it's funny and it comes at a time when it's so kind of raw and emotional and you're wondering what's gonna happen to Tom that you gotta just go with it." — *Rachael Gavin*

**Burning Man** is released by Paramount Pictures Australia on November 17. Check out the *IF* website's *Video Content section* for the trailer.

## NSW film and TV funding slashed in state budget

**NEW SOUTH WALES'** film and television funding has been slashed in the latest state budget, endangering a recent resurgence in local production.

The \$5 million addition to the Screen NSW Production Investment Fund in each of the past two years will no longer continue in 2011-12, according to budget documents.

The \$20 million film and television industry attraction fund (run separately by the NSW department of trade and investment) has also been scrapped, although it is understood the previous Labor government had already committed the entire allocation. Future major film projects being lured to NSW may still tap into a broader-based \$77.2 million state investment attraction scheme.

The film and TV cuts were delivered as part of \$8 billion in total savings the recently-installed NSW Coalition government aims to deliver over the next four years.

Screen NSW's total production investment almost tripled over the past three financial years from \$3.5 million to \$9.6 million (although its actual budgeted allocation was slightly lower), invested across 48 projects.

Without the ongoing \$5 million production funding, Screen NSW's production investment in 2011-12 will fall to just \$3.7 million.

This still represents a small increase on last year's underlying core funding, as does other funding directed towards the agency's other major activities: script

and project development (\$1.3 million), screen organisations and training (\$660,000) and regional initiatives (\$400,000).

Screen Producers Association of Australia executive director Geoff Brown said the budget cut would give other states an advantage over NSW. "It's an unfortunate outcome: one that will hit NSW very hard," he said.

SPAA is lobbying the Coalition to introduce new production incentives, highlighting the economic benefits that the sector can bring to the broader state economy.

Several major screen projects are currently underway in NSW including Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* and Alex Proyas' *Paradise Lost*. Both are filming at Fox Studios Australia, which is full for the first time since *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* was shot in 2008.

A spokesman for the NSW department of trade and investment said the Coalition government was committed to the industry, as shown by its recent efforts to secure *Paradise Lost*, which is expected to generate \$88 million in production expenditure and create 1300 jobs in NSW.

The deputy premier and minister for trade and investment, Andrew Stoner, personally lobbied the production team behind *Paradise Lost* – Legendary Pictures and Warner Bros. Pictures – to bring the production to NSW.

— *Brendan Swift*