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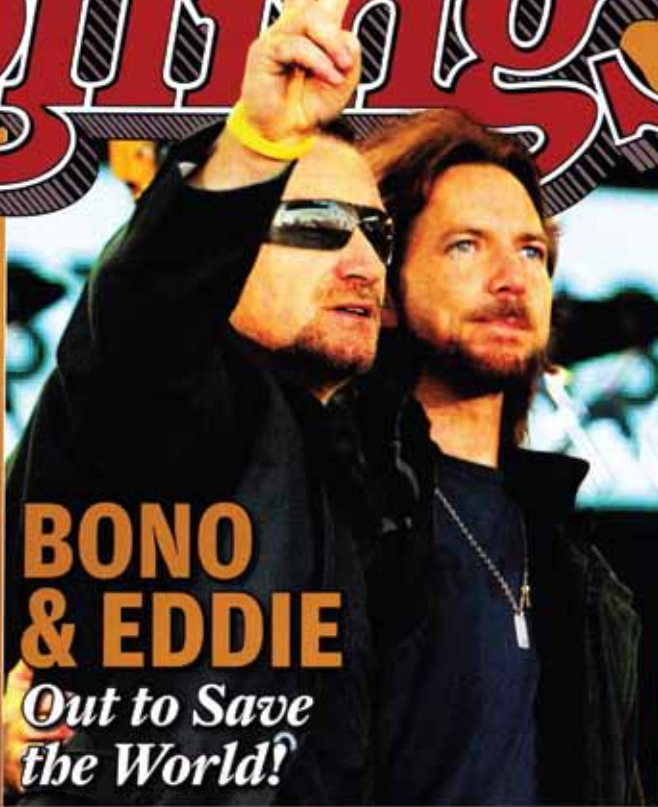
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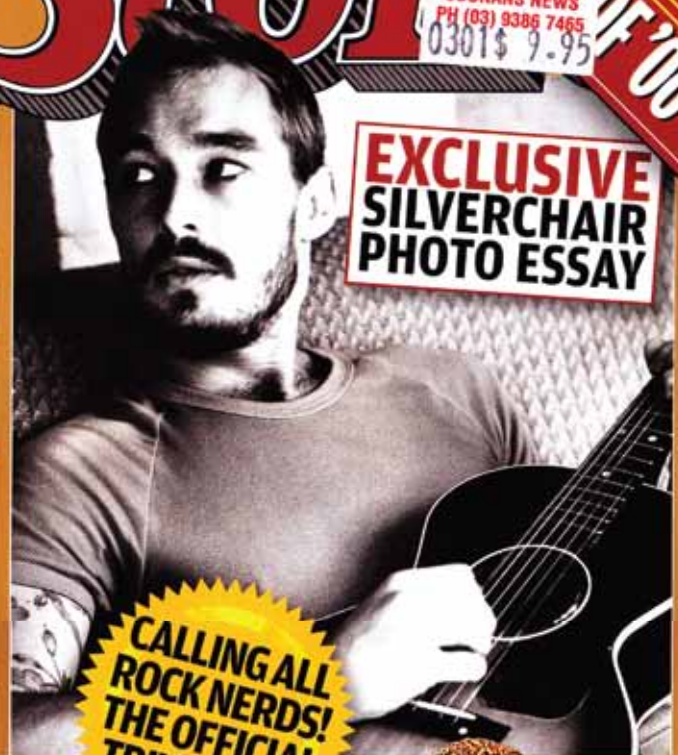


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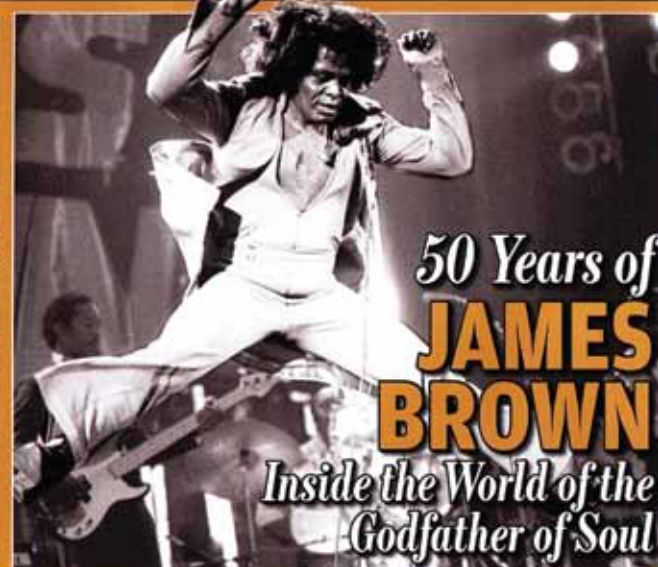
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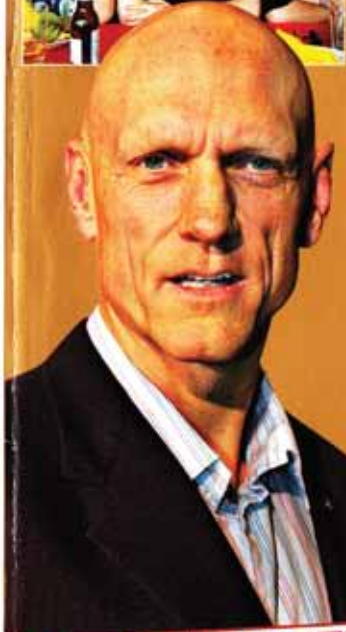
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How do two inexperienced brothers turn an inside joke into Australian cinema's runaway hit? It's only scatological.

when the wit hits the fans

IF YOU'RE FACED WITH THE TRUTH AND A GOOD yarn, I always take the yarn. Every day," says director Clayton Jacobson early in our breakfast interview, munching away on a cheese and ham toastie. "Absolutely. Life always needs a little bit of colour," adds his brother Shane, now AFI-winning actor for his title role in the runaway local hit *Kenny*, also with a toastie in hand. Despite that caveat and tall tales of their father living in a carnie tent in the outer suburbs of Melbourne and mysterious family consortiums willing to give the brothers \$1 million to make films, not only do I believe them, I want to run away with them and do whatever the cinematic equivalent of cleaning up the lion shit or selling fairy floss is. I meet the pair at a deserted Melbourne Docklands on a grey morning. They greet me as though I'm doing them a huge favour, taking time to talk with them. Before the interview, they get a report on *Kenny's* box office receipts. They're told they just surpassed *Chopper*. I offer my congratulations. "Thanks mate," says Clayton. "We don't get too excited though. It took one week for *The Devil Wears Prada* to get to the same place we did in nine."

By Ben
McKervey



Above: Brothers Shane (left) and Clayton Jacobson close the deal - and the year - with their surprise cinema hit, *Kenny*.

Clayton is a loveable salesman. Part Steven Spielberg, part Harry Knowles; Clayton has a director's comprehensiveness of vision but also a boundless fan-boy's enthusiasm. Despite the fact that he's been talking *Kenny* solidly for the last year, his eyes light up when he talks about the film and fondly refers to the titular character as though he was sitting with us. Which he kind of is. Shane is instantly recognisable as *Kenny's* older brother. The year's other reality-blurring comedy hit, *Boyz* had a quiet, reclusive Jewish intellectual playing a brash, moustachioed anti-semitic simpleton, but Shane is very much *Kenny's* just-older older twin. They don't share the lisp, and Shane has a bit more product in his hair, but the quiet effusiveness and homegrown wisdom is a brother's shared trait.

Kenny was born when, looking for laughs from his big brother Clayton, Shane would come into the Clayton's production offices (Clayton was then making huge budget advertisements for Japanese motor cars) and free-associate as character who was a plumber with a heart of gold. For material he used little titbits of quotes he'd heard at event jobs and his background as a stand-up comedian and television warm-up man.

"He had something there for sure, and I wanted to use it. I didn't really know what he had, or how I'd use it but there was something," says Clayton. "I'd take him outside, with a camera and I'd just shoot him talking as *Kenny* about his day and what's happening at work and the more he'd talk, the more I was convinced that there was something there." After a few more months, Clayton and Shane had a script for a 50-minute short.

Soon Clayton was burning through tens of thousands of dollars for seconds of footage of cars by day and then tens of dollars for minutes of footage of his brother by night. Clayton's friends and colleagues in the commercial production industry were helping out with the film and, just as importantly, the pair were getting help from Shane's friend Glenn

said, "Oh, I can do that."

Soon, Shane and Clayton were at Glenn's house with the expressed aim of talking Glenn out of investing his hard earned money in the volatile Australian movie industry.

"I'd been in the movie game for a while and the idea that a private investor can put up money for an independent film and get a decent return is a little naive," says Clayton. "He wouldn't listen though. He'd say, 'Boys, this is a winner. Trust me.'"

"I wasn't convinced. I knew it was a good idea at 50 minutes, but at twice the length, the film was never going to work if we were just doing poo jokes," said Clayton. "We weren't interested in doing a film that had one joke that was repeated until everyone was sick of it and

The results were outstanding. More than 200 cinemas screened the fake documentary in 2006 and it's been a critical and audience favourite. Glenn has made his money back and far more. Shane has also achieved minor celebrity status and is constantly surprised by the amount of people who stop him on the street – people who believe *Kenny* is a real person.

"About 90 per cent of people who come up to me think I'm *Kenny*," says Shane. People always come up to me say, 'Hey *Kenny*, how's Jacqui doing?' (*Kenny's* object of affection, played by ex-Chantoozie Eve Von Bibra). 'How's your dad?' We certainly never really discourage the idea, but we always give them a little touch of the nose and say something like 'Do you believe in Santa Claus?'

"We see it as a success, not so much because we've managed to trick people, although we're very happy that we've managed to make a movie that comes across as

“About 90 per cent of people who come up to me think I'm *Kenny*.” Shane Jacobson



Smash hit (clockwise from left): Shane gives the big thumbs up after accepting his 2006 AFI award for Best Actor for his role as *Kenny*. Of his beating Heath Ledger his father Ronald said "it's like comparing Mister Ed to Phar Lap"; endlessly patient, *Kenny* handles yet another shitfight; Shane and Clayton in production for *Kenny*. The role was created as a joke between the brothers.



Preusker, who ran a portable plumbing business named *Splash Down*.

"We ate a lot during the daytime because the catering wasn't quite as good at night," remembers Clayton.

Finally the short film was finished and ready to be shown for cast and crew. After a successful screening, the brothers were in the unique position of having investors hound them.

"After the film was screened, Glenn came up to me and said that a man representing a prominent family had approached him offering to give them some money to turn the 50-minute short into a feature," said Clayton. "He asked if we could turn it into a feature for \$1 million. I laughed and told Glenn that I could make it for a lot less than that. He asked how much and I told him the figure. He

BEN MCKELVEY profiled singer and songwriter Sarah Blasko in RS 659.

frankly I wasn't convinced that we had a feature film in *Kenny*."

The penny finally dropped for the pair though when Glenn's wife told them about the upcoming plumbing convention in Tennessee. The mile-high love story, the opportunity in Sydney, the family illness, all of a sudden, *Kenny* had a third act.

"The very next day Clay went out and bought a camera and then we started shooting," says Shane. As the film progressed, it became more a family affair. As well as the entire extended family contributing to the film's colloquial wisdom (including Nana Jacobson's "You can smell the shit through my ribs"), Ronald Jacobson, the pair's father plays *Kenny's* irascible dad, and Clayton's son plays *Kenny's* son, partly because Clayton wanted the movie to be a totally family affair, but also just because they were available, and cheap.

real, but more so we're happy that we've managed to create a character that people care about," says Clayton.

Kenny isn't done making Clay and Shane proud either, with distribution in the UK and the US on the horizon and a television show starring *Kenny* to be made next year. "It's going to be *Kenny* going round the world, checking out the plumbing in different continents. After all, toilets are one of the things that all the people in the world have in common with each other," says Shane.

Just after ROLLING STONE interviewed Clayton and Shane, Shane won the AFI for best actor. After hearing that he was up against Heath Ledger for the award, Ronald, Shane's celluloid and real father said comparing Heath and Shane was like "comparing Mr Ed and Phar Lap". In this family, it sounds like high praise indeed. Mr Ed knew how to deliver a punch line; all Phar Lap ever did was run fast.