

# BETELNUT *BISNIS*

- a story from Papua New Guinea



*In the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, a grass roots family makes a precarious living by trading in betelnut, one of the world's most widely used narcotics.*

A FILM BY  
**CHRIS OWEN**

PRODUCED BY  
**ANDREW PIKE**



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# BETELNUT BISNIS

## SYNOPSIS

Betelnut is one of the most widely used narcotics in the world. In the coastal areas of Papua New Guinea, where it is grown, it has been a socially acceptable stimulant since ancestral times, but in the central Highlands where the majority of the population live it is a relatively recent arrival.

Many Highlanders have come to depend on betelnut, not only because of their addiction to the drug, but also for their livelihood, trading small quantities of the nut up from the coast to sell in their local markets. For many families, the betelnut trade is the only source of cash income to pay for such basic necessities as food, school fees and medicine.

This is the story of one such family in the Highlands – Lukas Kaima and his wife Kopu, as told by their friend and close neighbour, Chris Owen, an Australian expatriate.

The Kaimas are settlers in the Eastern Highlands, without land of their own, living on a small plot on the outskirts of Goroka town by arrangement with traditional landowners. The soil is too poor to grow their own food and they have to rely on cash earnings to survive.

Lukas sometimes finds part-time work as a nightwatchman and labourer, but decides to try his hand at the betelnut trade to see if he can earn some extra money to make ends meet.

The film follows Lukas and his wife as they try to make a success of their business travelling to and from the coast on the betelnut trail.

**BETELNUT BISNIS** is an often humorous story of resilient people who have few material possessions but who face each new day with dignity and a quiet determination.

As they go about their travels, the film presents us with a vivid portrait of present-day life in Papua New Guinea - not the "doom and gloom" stories that dominate the daily news in the Australian media, but the day-to-day realities of life for "grass roots" citizens.

Chris Owen has contributed directly or indirectly to almost every significant documentary made in Papua New Guinea over the last three decades – whether as director, cinematographer, editor or as adviser and trouble-shooter. He has also made a series of internationally acclaimed documentaries of his own – including *THE RED BOWMAN*, *MAN WITHOUT PIGS* and the recent award winning *BRIDEWEALTH FOR A GODDESS*. He also directed *TUKANA* a Melanesian feature film set in Bougainville.

In the last few years Chris Owen has also served as Director of the National Film Institute of Papua New Guinea and has trained and worked with a team of Melanesian filmmakers, some of who contributed to the production of **BETELNUT BISNIS**.

**BETELNUT BISNIS** was commissioned by SBS Independent in Australia. It was directed, photographed, and edited by Chris Owen, and produced by Andrew Pike.

# BETELNUT *BISNIS*

## CREDITS

Written and Directed by  
**CHRIS OWEN**

Photography and Sound Recording  
**CHRIS OWEN**

Editing  
**CHRIS OWEN**

Contributing Editor  
**LINDI HARRISON**

Additional Photography  
**HILLARY KAFABI**  
**IGNATIUS TALANIA**  
**BAIKE JOHNSTONE**

Production Assistant & Researcher  
**JANE TAMAS**

Production Manager  
**IGNATIUS TALANIA**

Sound Mixer - **MIKE GISSING**  
**Digital City Studios**

Online Editor  
**ROEN DAVIS - Visualeyeyes Ltd**

### ***Special thanks to:***

Lucas & Kauku Kaima  
Joripaine Henkelman & Christa Banak  
Dodoal Daugi and their extended families  
Chief Pilot Emmanuel Kadiko  
& staff of AirLink Ltd  
John Doa & RaunRaun Tieta  
Dr. Jacob Simet  
National Cultural Commission of PNG  
National Broadcasting Commission  
Tony Waine                      Terry Nandali  
Merrilyn Pike                      Susan MacKinnon  
Bob Connolly                      Dylan Owen  
Jonno & Topias                      Dennis O'Rourke  
Peter Moli                      Robert Buleka  
Pepak Kararo                      Anita Toro  
Joey Bulda                      Mal 'Kela' Smith  
Jeremy Bird                      Peter Irving  
Chris Bamford                      Gary Kildea  
The staff of Ronin Films

Music  
'Sekim Pocket' – LBX2 Band (BilBil)  
'Ruai Ruai' – Georgianna Toro (Ayura)

Producer  
**ANDREW PIKE**

Location Producer  
**CHRIS OWEN**

Produced in association with



Financed with the assistance of



Produced in association with  
THE NATIONAL FILM INSTITUTE OF PNG  
and  
RONIN FILMS

The producers wish to thank the citizens of the Eastern Highlands and  
Madang Provinces who helped in the making of this film.

# CHRIS OWEN - CV

Date of Birth: 15-5-44

Sex: Male

Citizenship: Australian

Language: English, Melanesian Tok Pisin.

## BACKGROUND

Preparatory and primary schooling in Britain and Australia.

Secondary Education at Purbrook Grammar School, Hants, U.K., completed at Churchers College, Petersfield, Hants, U.K.

- 1961** Returned to Australia with Permanent Resident status.
- 1961-68** Worked variously as a Bank Clerk, Stationhand, Wheat Farmer, Psychiatric Nurse, and Ironworker.
- 1968** Returned to Britain.
- 1969 -71** Studied at the Birmingham College of Art & Design, U.K. ( University of Aston in Birmingham campus), graduating with a Diploma in Visual Communication.
- 1972** South-East Asia as a freelance photographer.
- 1973 -75** Joined Papua New Guinea Tourist Board, as cinematographer, photographer, and sound recordist.
- 1976 - 88** Joined the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies as resident film-maker initiated an ongoing cultural film-making programme with a training component for Papua New Guinean film-makers.
- 1988-1995** Research Fellow / Filmmaker within the Cultural Studies Division of the Papua New Guinea National Research Institute.
- 1996-99** Head of the Film Department within reconstructed Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies.
- 2000 -2001** Head of the National Film Institute of Papua New Guinea, an amalgamation of the Skul Bilong Wokim Piksa & Film Unit of Institute of PNG Studies.
- 2001-2003** Director of National Film Institute.

## FILMOGRAPHY

*Producer / Director / Cinematographer / Film Editor*

TIGHTEN THE DRUMS - Self Decoration Among the Enga

THE RED BOWMEN (long & short versions)

GOGODALA - A Cultural Revival?

BARNABAS - Portrait of a Niuginian Artist

MALANGAN LABADAMA - A Tribute to Buk Buk (long & short versions)

PAINTING IS MAGIC - Ilawelia Hului (a portrait of a sculptor)

TUKANA - Husat I Asua (Two-hour feature film in Tok Pisin filmed on location in Bougainville, featuring an entire cast of non-professional Melanesian actors)

MAN WITHOUT PIGS

RAMU PAWA- a diary from Yonki Dam (a five year cinematic diary)

LUKAUTIM BUS- I gat rot bilong stretim bek Bus Bilong Yumi

RE-FORESTATION NATURALLY - The Technique

BRIDEWEALTH FOR A GODDESS

**BETELNUT BISNIS** – commissioned by SBS Independent (completed 2004), produced by Andrew Pike.

## ADDITIONAL FILM CREDITS

### *Cinematography, Sound Recordist, Producer, Editing & Script Consultancies*

- NUPELA PAWA ( ABC - science features)  
*-Principal cinematography.*
- THE COMMANDERS - Admiral Yamamoto (BBC)  
*-Location cinematography P.N.G.*
- YUMI YET (by Dennis O'Rourke)  
*- Additional cinematography.*
- ANGELS OF WAR (With Hank Nelson, Gavan Daws and Andrew Pike)  
*-2nd Unit cinematography.*
- THE SHARKCALLERS OF KONTU (by Dennis O'Rourke)  
*-Additional cinematography / Film sound recordist / Associate producer.*
- FIRST CONTACT (by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson)  
*- Additional cinematography.*
- A QUESTION OF INDEPENDENCE (by Dennis O'Rourke)  
*-Additional cinematography / Film sound recordist.*
- THE NEW NATIONAL PARLIAMENT (P.N.G. Prime Minister's Department.)  
*-Cinematography.*
- A LONG NIGHT WITH LETHAL GUESTS (by Oliver Howes Film Australia)  
*-Director of Photography.*
- ANTHROPOLOGY ON TRIAL (WGBH, Boston)  
*-2nd unit Cinematography.*
- COWBOY & MARIA LONG TAUN (by Les McLaren and Annie Stiven)  
*- Cinematography / Associate producer.*  
*Winner Best Documentary Dendy Awards Sydney Film Festival.*
- HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (BBC - David South)  
*-Location Film sound recordist P.N.G.*
- SENSO DAUGHTERS (by Noriko Sekiguchi, Japan )  
*-Director of Photography.*  
*Winner Best Documentary at Melbourne Film Festival.*
- CANNIBAL TOURS (by Dennis O'Rourke)  
*-Film soundrecordist / Associate Producer*
- JOE LEAHY'S NEIGHBOURS (by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson)  
*-Associate Producer*
- MAGICIANS OF THE EARTH (by Philip Hass, MethodAct New York)  
*- Principal Cinematography.*
- MALANGAN - the Art and Craft of New Ireland. (Minneapolis Institute of Arts.)  
*-Principal cinematography / Co-producer.*
- MRS.HEGARTY GOES TO JAPAN (by Noriko Sekiguchi, Japan)  
*-Director of Photography.*
- BLACK HARVEST (by Robin Anderson & Bob Connolly)  
*-Associate Producer.*
- GROWING UP - PNG. (Central Television, U.K.).  
*Consultant Producer / Filmsound recordist*
- COLONISTS FOR A DAY (by Alec Morgan, Film Australia)  
*- Director of cinematography.*
- JAKUPA - an Artist's Dreaming ( by Tetsujiro Yamagami, Siglo Ltd, Japan)  
*- Director of photography / Co-Producer.*
- OLD ENEMIES - Crocodiles and People ( by Mike Hacking TVNZ )  
*- Principal cinematography, PNG location research/liaison*
- NAPALUNGA (by Ignatius Talaria & Baika Johnston)  
*- Editing Consultant & Post Production Consultant.*
- SPIRIT OF MELANESIA (by Ignatius Talaria & Baika Johnston )  
*- Editing & Post Production Consultant*
- KANAKE HOSTS - South Pacific Festival of Arts 2000 (by Ignatius Talaria)  
*- Producer, Editing Consultant.*
- STRONG CONNECTIONS (by Martin Maden)  
*- Script Development & Editing Consultant*

## RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

### BRUKIM WARRA BILONG WANTOAT

A feature documentary set in the Morobe Province of PNG in co-production with the Australian National University & University of Papua New Guinea.

### SUTIM NOS

A feature documentary set in the Wondakia district of the Eastern Highlands Province of PNG.

### IT'S ALL OVER NOW

Script development 1st draft (a historical/contemporary drama set somewhere in the Pacific).

## SUMMATION & AWARDS

The documentaries and the feature drama TUKANA have been presented at international film festivals (Edinburgh, New York, London, Tokyo, Paris, Hawaii, Bombay, Madrid, Cyprus, Sydney, Melbourne, Tashkent and Rome among others), and screened on broadcast television in Australia, West Germany, and Japan.

TUKANA co-directed with Papua New Guinean actor Albert Toro, was invited for presentation at the 'New Directors / New Films' Festival in New York following a screening at the Hawaii International Film Festival.

TUKANA was awarded a Special Merit at the Tashkent International Film Festival by the Journalist & Writers Union of the former USSR.

MAN WITHOUT PIGS was awarded 'Best Documentary' at the Hawaii International Film Festival 1990, and the 'Peoples Choice Award'- Kauai.

MAN WITHOUT PIGS won the 'International Jurors' STA prize at the 1991 Sydney Film Festival.

MAN WITHOUT PIGS was invited for screening at the Royal Anthropological Institutes bi-annual International Festival of Ethnographic Film, U.K. 1992, at The Bilan du Film Ethnographique, the St Petersburg International Filmfest Russia, and the FilmForum Ethnologie, Friburg FRG.

Owen was awarded San Francisco Film Festival GOLDEN GATE AWARD for Cinematography on the IPNGS co-production SENSO DAUGHTERS, which also won 'Best Documentary Award' at the Melbourne Film Festival.

Another IPNGS associated production COWBOY & MARIA IN TOWN won 'Best Documentary', Sydney Film Festival 1991.

BRIDEWEALTH FOR A GODDESS was awarded 'The Grand Prix NANOOK' at the 17th Bilan du Film Ethnographique in Paris. 2000. The film also won the award for 'Best Documentary' at the 4th Belo Festival of Ethnographic Film, in Brazil.

BRIDEWEALTH FOR A GODDESS was also invited for screening at the Royal Anthropological Institutes bi-annual Festival of Ethnographic Film. Dec.2000, at the National Museum of Ethnology 'Miupaku', special event, Osaka, Japan, and at the Mostra Internacional do Filme Ethnografica, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

BRIDEWEALTH FOR A GODDESS has been awarded the 'Prize for Excellence' by the American Anthropological Association to be presented Washington DC Dec2001. The film has been awarded 'The Museum Prize' at the Parnu Festival Estonia.

An exhibition of still photographs by Owen took out the P.A.T.A. Golden Award in competition at Tokyo in 1974.

The body of work is used extensively as course material in many Universities, and has been used in support of major museum shows (eg., 'An Assemblage of Spirits' Minneapolis Institute of Art and 'Pieces of Paradise' Australia Museum).

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*"Since the mid 70s Chris Owen has collaborated on many of the major films from and about Papua New Guinea. He has an established reputation as a fine location cinematographer, and in his own right as an award winning ethnographic/documentary film-maker."*

*- Andrew Pike, Film Historian / Exec.Producer Ronin Films.*

Ref: *Expressive Culture in Papua New Guinea*

- *a Guide to Three Films by Chris Owen*

pub. Documentary Educational Resources

'Mortuary Ritual and Prestige Economy - the Malangan for BukBuk.' By Bruce Lincoln ( Cultural Critique 89)

# BETELNUT BISNIS

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

(from an interview with Chris Owen, June 2004)

### GENESIS OF THE PROJECT :

I was staying in Goroka in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, when SBS contacted me about the possibility of making a film. They were familiar with some of my earlier film work and recognised that, having lived up there for many years, maybe I had a different perspective on the place.

The first thing that came to mind was a story which would somehow include betelnut (or buai as it is called locally) in an overall theme of ordinary people getting on with their lives in a difficult socio-economic environment.

I'd always been intrigued by the role of this narcotic nut in Melanesian culture, and the little known fact that it is the fourth most widely used drug in the world.

I was concerned too that post-independence Papua New Guinea more often than not seemed to attract negative flak in the international media, and particularly in Australia, so I thought maybe here was an opportunity for me to show an alternative, more positive side to the country.

### BETELNUT:

Having spent 30 consecutive years living and working as an Australian expatriate filmmaker in PNG, I know from my own experience that the culture of betelnut is an omnipresent and unavoidable factor in the country's life.

When I first lived and worked on the Papuan coast and later in the New Guinea islands, I did experiment with betelnut. I tried chewing when required on several ceremonial occasions, and occasionally I chewed it socially in camaraderie with my Papua New Guinean friends and colleagues.

I never did make a conscious decision not to become a chewer, I just never acquired the taste. Even to this day I've still not come to terms with the chemistry of the whole thing – the chewing of the nut itself, then the application of the lime with the mustard and masticating the quid for several minutes. It's an extremely potent and caustic mixture that ends up in the mouth.

For my Melanesian workmates, however, chewing betelnut was and is an everyday and often all-day habit. I couldn't help noticing how they're always ducking out for a chew (it is banned in Government Offices). It's like here in Australia, taking a regular smoko for a cigarette or a cup of coffee.

Papua New Guineans will say quite emphatically that 'it's good for our teeth', but I reckon when chewed with powdered lime which turns the spittle a dramatic blood red to give the buzz, it can rot the gums. Furthermore, according to medical evidence, Papua New Guinea has one of the highest rates of jaw cancer in the world, possibly because of all the chewing going on.

Being a non-chewer I guess I never thought too much about buai, though in retrospect I was always vaguely conscious of its physical and aesthetic effect on the immediate environment – the blood-coloured stains splattered everywhere up to about a metre high on walls, tree trunks, doors and so on. Apart from that it never really affected me, although I would sometimes keep some in a bowl for visitors.

A few years ago when I relocated from the coast to work up in the Central Highlands, I really felt the power of betelnut: it was everywhere and began to impinge on my life.



On the coast, betelnut has always been there, because that's where it grows, and since time immemorial it has been used traditionally in ceremony and to welcome visitors to one's village or house in the same manner we'd offer refreshments to our guests in Australia.

But in the Highlands where it is too cold for the nut to grow, it has become a marketable commodity with people seemingly obsessed and addicted to the stuff in a very serious way. Hardly a day, a moment or a conversation passes without some reference to it.

This phenomenon began during the colonial period when the Australian administration transported many Highlanders down to the coastal coconut and cocoa plantations as cheap indentured labour. One consequence of this practice was that many Highlanders were introduced to betelnut chewing for the first time by the coastal people and became addicted to it. Then on completion of their contracts many such workers took their habits and betelnut back to the Highland villages where their relatives tried it and became hooked as well.

There was an immediate and exponential growth in the demand for the nut which nowadays has blown out into a multi-million dollar 'grass roots' industry, and it's even included in the governments CPI index!

### **THE STORYLINE:**

Against this backdrop the main storyline of my film centres around a New Guinea Highlands character named Lucas Kaima, who was my neighbour, and remains to this day a good friend. He is also a dedicated chewer and betelnut addict.

Lucas first came into my life in 2002 when I rented a house in an industrial estate on the outskirts of Goroka town, in the Eastern Highlands Province. I became aware of him around the place almost immediately. In retrospect I think he deliberately high-profiled himself, so that I couldn't possibly be unaware of him. (People assume that most white people will be needing domestic help, and competition for these positions can be intense.)

Like most of the settlers from out of town, Lucas and his extended family were squatting on a little block of land just across the valley from me in an arrangement with the traditional landowners, which meant as a family they had no land of their own on which to grow their food.

At the same time Lucas had no regular income apart from occasional casual labouring and night security work with the company who owned the compound and the house where I was living.

Eventually he 'volunteered' to help me - for money that is - in my gardening project. This was an idea I had which was to turn my large unused backyard into a place where some of the local migrant settlers I'd befriended could plant and grow their own basic foodstuffs in a secure and sustainable way.

Both Lucas and his wife stood to benefit from this project, and so we set out to make it work. It was during this period that Lucas proved to be a tireless worker: he had an amazing capacity for physical work, and his range of skills always amazed me. It was a good time, and we became close friends.

It didn't take long, though, before I realised that Lucas was a betelnut addict. He was chewing anything up to twenty nuts a day, which is an expensive habit by anyone's standards. Without it, he just didn't function. He'd say 'skin bilong mi les yia' which in Melanesian Tok Pisin, the lingua franca, is a way of saying "I've no energy." It usually implied too that it was time for Chris to throw in a few bucks to buy buai to kickstart the day!

To support their habits, as his wife chewed too, and to help feed the family, Lucas often used the money I paid him to trade in small quantities of betelnut at his local 'Standup Market.' This activity supplemented his nightwatchman's pay.

Some nights when he was on shift we'd sit around the fire listening to Radio Australia Tok Pisin News on his shortwave radio and swapping stories.

One story in particular he often repeated was the idea that maybe one day he could make a lot of money by doing what so many other people were doing, that is traveling down to the coast where betelnut was rumoured to be cheap, invest in a few bags of the stuff, bring it back and sell it in Goroka for huge profits.

And that's how it all started. I set out to tell his story: the trials and tribulations of Lucas in his endeavours to make a living out of trading in betelnut.

In the film I tell the story as a participant observer, an insider, because as things turned out I became partly involved in it myself.

### **PREVAILING MEDIA COVERAGE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA :**

I've been very conscious of the fact that since Independence back in 1975, Papua New Guinea always seems to get the rough end of the stick in terms of how the country is represented in the Australian media. In particularly television journalism which seems to dwell on the negative aspects of the contemporary situation, i.e., raskolism, the lack of law and order, the general breakdown of goods and services, the pending 'failed state' complete with an analogy to ' Idi Amin's Uganda' as one recent example.

There's also a constant stream of international film teams (many of them well intentioned but usually operating within budgets and timeframes that barely leave them time to get in the door, let alone move beyond the immediate and superficial) making TV programs with themes roaming from an exploration the 'Other' using analytical techniques dating back to the beginnings of anthropology, to the adventure genre depicting exotic images - bare breasted Melanesian women, tropical fish swimming through WWII ship wrecks, and so on. The BBC are even planning a kind of reality show in which they hope to insert an intrepid presenter into an 'isolated and unspoilt village environment' to prove some point or other.

I'd like to think that my film **BETELNUT BISNIS** is somehow different from these mainstream offerings. I hope it's sensitivities will contribute to a better understanding of what life is like for many Papua New Guineans living in the reality of today's peri-urban situation.

By accompanying Lucas, his family, friends and others in his search for the elusive quality mit buai – a mature firm betelnut - I hope that television audiences both in Australia and elsewhere might experience a little of what life is all about for the majority of 'grass roots' Papua New Guineans.

Economic times are very difficult, the currency has been devalued, anything they need, that they can't produce themselves, is extremely expensive because most of it is imported. Basic necessities are difficult to come by – water supply, energy to cook with etc. There is little timber for cooking fires, so often they have to use kerosene, and to get kerosene they need money.

Although their daily lives are extremely difficult - as they are for anyone living in poverty - this is not a doom and gloom story: Lucas maintains a sense of humour and a dogged determination to get on with his life albeit in difficult times.

### **SURVIVAL:**

The situation in which Lucas finds himself is not exclusive to Papua New Guinea: it exists throughout the developing world as vast numbers of people continue to migrate away from their traditional homelands to live along major arterial roads and around cities and towns as settlement people where they try to make ends meet with virtually no resources.

What is different is that Papua New Guinea is our nearest neighbour, our former colony, and its citizens need the Australian public's better understanding and sympathy.

What I've described in the film are the circumstances in which they live, without me being judgmental or putting a label on them. Lucas and his family are lucky: they have a flair for small business, and they have the dream that they can make money by trading in betelnut. Stories abound about people who've made their fortune doing just that. This is a film about good people who do their best to survive, but they're not complaining about it. They're getting on with their lives. They're not defeated by poverty. No way.

I suppose because I've lived in PNG for a long time, maybe I'm more in tune with certain aspects of Melanesian culture, particularly the culture of town. I've tried to make an honest film that shows Papua New Guineans as normal people – they're not all raskols or dangerous.

I wanted to make a film that hopefully the average Australian taxpayer will appreciate and learn from – in the context that Australia has been supporting the PNG annual budget to the tune of \$A300million a year since independence – and tell them that it's not all doom and gloom as the Australian media portrays. The media dwells on the disasters, it dwells on raskolism, but really the majority of the country, outside of the towns, gets on with its life. People are still subsistence farmers, but where there have been population explosions and people have to move out to the towns, they have to survive somehow. Some turn to crime, but a lot of people go down the road of trying to live by small business where their whole ambition is to make four or five dollars a day so they can buy a tin of meat and a bag of rice at the end of the day to feed their family.

And that's essentially what Lucas does. He and his family live from day to day. But they're positive about everything. They live in a situation where the body politic is essentially corrupt, has been corrupted over the years and delivers very little in terms of goods and services. They're not waiting for government handouts, they have to survive by themselves.

There's no welfare net as we know it. If you go to hospital, that is if you live near one, it doesn't matter what ailment you have, the most you'll probably get is a malarial tablet and an aspirin after sitting for several hours in a crowded waiting room. The doctors and nurses try wonderfully hard but they're overstretched and underfunded.

And education - if you want your kids to get a basic education – which is seen as the conduit for accessing government, i.e. to bring development into one's community, or some income for the family into the future - you have to get school fees, and where do you get school fees?

You can get them by growing betelnut if you're lucky enough to live on your own traditional land down on the coast, or you can do as Lucas does and try to trade in the stuff.

#### **PARTICIPANT OBSERVER:**

As for my methodology as a filmmaker: I've lived on a day-to-day basis with the staff at the National Film Institute where I was the team leader, and with Lucas and his family and a host of other people. I don't put any analytical model on the aspects of their lives portrayed in the film, or try to interpret what they're doing. I'm sure too that my presence with the camera influenced some events, but I was embedded in the process, and I just show what we all did together on a day-to-day basis - which included the making of this film. So essentially the camera is there, and I'm there. I'm in the film, a participant observer, to use a phrase that I like.

#### **ON THE MUSIC:**

LBX2 – the band in BilBil village, Madang – is a group of disillusioned unemployed youths who have nothing to do all day so they formed a band.

Initially the band went nowhere because they were exploited by the local recording studio who pinched their songs - because there's no copyright in Papua New Guinea – and gave the songs to bands that they were already promoting.

Our researcher, Jane, who is from Madang and New Ireland, has relatives in BilBil and told us about the band. I commissioned them to write a song about betelnut - the song we use at the beginning and end of the film. They actually wrote it as a collaborative effort with myself as producer of the song. Jane and I helped them write the lyrics.

Music is a way out for young people, both men and women in Papua New Guinea. It's a very musical place, particularly on the coast - the ukuleles came with early missionaries, the bamboo pipes are traditional.

To balance the all-male group, I tracked down Georgianna Toro, a young Bougainvillean woman now living in a remote part of the Highlands, to write a song for us, which she also performs in the film - the acoustic guitar piece called 'Buai Buai' towards the end of the film.

Georgie is the daughter of a famous Papua New Guinean actor named Albert Toro, with whom I co-directed a feature film called TUKANA set in Bougainville before the troubles there. As a close friend of the family, I had watched her grow up through high school, then on to the Faculty of Arts at the University of PNG to study music. That's when I bought her the guitar as a present for getting a place.

Georgie doesn't chew, funnily enough, but the rest of her family do and all the LBX2 boys do – they chew like crazy, and they all have their own betelnut plantations.

### **ON LEAVING PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AND MY EARLIER FILMWORK:**

I always knew that one day I would have to leave Papua New Guinea to return to Australia to live, and that when the time finally came it was going to be emotionally difficult for me.

For several years I had this idea that when the time was right I'd like to make a film that would be quite different from my earlier more specifically ethnographic work, most of which were observational films covering cultural events in the context of urgent anthropology - THE RED BOWMAN or BRIDEWEALTH FOR A GODDESS. I got satisfaction that the films have all been widely seen in Papua New Guinea and are used in universities around the world.

But this time I wanted to portray Papua New Guinea as it is evolving now in the towns and along the highways: a film that was to be different from all the other films I'd seen on PNG, and to make it for an international television audience.

And of course if I could get such a film funded from overseas and shoot it before leaving PNG, I'd come out of the country with the film and edit it in Australia, and that process would help me through my own period of cultural transition back into Australia.

But it had to be a film that would meet the approval of the final and most critical judges – Papua New Guineans themselves.

So getting back to that original phone call from SBS - it couldn't have come at a better time for me professionally.

**BETELNUT BISNIS** is the first film I've made specifically for Western TV, with all the constraints of the 52 minute programme length. I'm convinced it will work in Papua New Guinea: people will identify with the events and places, and it's all in Tok Pisin. I dedicate the film to all those people I've had the good fortune to cross paths with up there over the years.

# BETELNUT BISNIS

## PRODUCER'S BIOGRAPHY

### Andrew Pike & Ronin Films

Andrew Pike was trained as a historian, and completed an M.A. on Australian cinema in the 1930s, at the Australian National University, Canberra. He researched and co-authored a major book documenting Australia's film history, *Australian Film 1900 – 1977*, published by Oxford University Press in 1980 (re-printed 1999).

Andrew also served for three years as Consultant to the National Library's National Film Collection, on the acquisition of films for study purposes in schools and universities. He also worked for three years as a Research Fellow in the Department of Pacific History at the A.N.U. There he co-directed an award-winning documentary, *ANGELS OF WAR*, about the experiences of the people of Papua New Guinea in World War Two.

In 1974, he formed Ronin Films with his wife, Dr Merrilyn Fitzpatrick, a specialist in China studies. The company was involved in many innovative distribution activities for which Andrew won the Australian Film Institute's *Byron Kennedy Award* in 1986.

The company has dedicated much of its work to the marketing and promotion of independent Australian productions. Among the many Australian feature films which the company has supported and distributed are *STRICTLY BALLROOM*, *SHINE* and *ROAD TO NHILL*, all of which achieved outstanding national box-office figures. Ronin's catalogue of independent Australian documentaries numbers about 250 and includes several that Ronin has released theatrically such as *CUNNAMULLA*, *FACING THE MUSIC*, *MY MOTHER INDIA* and *WEDDING IN RAMALLAH*.

As an exhibitor, Ronin has operated the successful Electric Shadows Cinemas in Canberra since 1979. Over the years, Electric Shadows has become a cultural icon in Canberra.

Andrew was a member of the Board of the Australian Film Commission for three years, 1989 - 1992. In 1992, he was given a special award by the Australian Film Critics' Circle for his contributions to the film industry.

In recent years, Andrew has become increasingly involved in production and has produced a documentary, **BETELNUT BISNIS**, for SBS Independent, with director Chris Owen. He has also co-produced *MAN OF STRINGS* (directed by Gary Kildea) for Film Australia and ABC Television. He is developing several new documentary projects and a feature film.

In 1999, Andrew was involved in the formation of the Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive, Inc., an association dedicated to support the Archive's work and to promote the principles of best practice in the film archive profession. In 2000, Andrew was appointed to the Council of the National Screen and Sound Archive for a three-year term.

In 2003, the French government appointed him to the rank of *Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Arts et Lettres* for his work in the distribution and exhibition of French cinema in Australia.