

BUCKLEY, ANTHONY - BEHIND A VELVET LIGHT TRAP

Anthony Buckley has the measured charm of a man who has done it all – cinematically speaking, anyway. And now he's telling it all, too, in a peppery, amusing and informative memoir, *Behind A Velvet Light Trap*, which is filled with detail and anecdotes. Like the time he slept in Rudolf Nureyev's four poster in London's East Sheen. That'll probably be the most-thumbed chapter (No 16), Buckley tells Andrew L. Urban.

The chapter is called Ballet in the Bedroom and relates Anthony Buckley's time editing Rudolf Nureyev's *Don Quixote*, shot in Melbourne. But Buckley would be needed in London, where the editing suite he was to use was set up in the ante-chamber of Nureyev's bedroom. The colourful details serve as an example of one of the book's strengths: Buckley keeps a well judged balance between informative detail and entertaining anecdote.

And as he readily admits (and his publisher agrees), this chapter will be the one to get much attention – even though it is a small part of the amply illustrated and beautifully produced 400 page book. The detail in both personal and work related areas is impressive. "Yes," Buckley says, "I've been told I have accurate recall ..." as he cuts into an appetising, freshly made beef cheek pie at an East Sydney café, where we are lunching to talk about his book, the day after Jack Thompson officially launched it at the Mitchell Library.

"cinematic treasures"

The function took place in the library's famous Reading Room, where the young Buckley first foraged for cinematic treasures and tid-bits in the early 50s, with the help of the librarians at the time – who are the first to be thanked in the book's acknowledgement pages.

But while Chapter 16 will draw some gossip-driven interest, Buckley's primary objective in setting his memoirs to paper is for historical purposes. "I've been a member of the Archives (National Film and Sound Archives) since 1983 and am very keen on archiving history ... although," he hastens to add, "this book is not a history of Australian cinema."

It's not, but with its 6 pages of small type index, it's a fantastic reference for the period from the 1950s to 2009 and is subtitled, "A filmmaker's journey from Cinesound to Cannes." In 1995, the first seeds were sown, when Buckley gave the Centenary of Cinema lecture at Sydney University, titled Saturdays at the Sesqui. That forms the basis of the book's first chapter. In 2000, he was invited to deliver the inaugural Longford Lyall Lecture, named after two of Australia's screen pioneers: it was called *The Man Who Met Longford*, since Buckley had indeed met Raymond Longford, in 1955. The story of how that came about makes great reading (p.18).

"One of the secrets to the exceptional detail"

One of the secrets to the exceptional detail Buckley can set down here is his habit of "keeping everything ... I never throw anything out." He can quote (and does) the exact words of the letter from Longford, inviting him to afternoon tea, following Buckley's letters to Longford, in the wake of his discoveries about the man in the Mitchell Library Reading Room. Longford was languishing as a nightwatchman on Sydney's wharves at the time, but living quite close to the Buckley family home in Crows Nest.

Another Buckley habit, since 1975, also served him well; sending all the investors in films he worked on a weekly report in the form of a newsletter; he was the first producer to do so. "After 45 years that's an amazing collection of facts and anecdotes," he says smiling over the Margaret River red that's washing down the beef pie.

"I wanted to leave something for the Archives ..." he adds, but it's not just the manuscript of his book. He has already shipped 48 boxes of scripts, notes, letters and photos to Canberra, and he is packing another 20 to follow.

"Cinema is the artform of the 20th century"

"Cinema is the artform of the 20th century," he says, "it took people out of their homes and entertained them – even in the middle of depressions. I don't think television replaced that experience. It's very different ... in a cinema people come together to experience the film. That's unlike watching a film on the TV screen at home." The smile is gone now, as he laments the way modern cinema is going.

"Multiplexes are awful – they have curtains on the walls but no curtain in front of the screen," he says with disdain, as a sign of the absence of love for the artform. "I think cinema has reached its peak and is now at a crossroads. I'll be watching over the next 10 years to see where it goes. At the Movie Convention recently on the Gold Coast, Geoffrey Katzenberg was saying the next major step in movies is 3D ..." Buckley couldn't contain himself and interjected quietly: "What about the stories?" Where Hollywood was once the creative heart of cinema, making movies of lasting value, Buckley sees it largely as a novelty factory now.

Cinemas may well go the way of the bowling alleys, he says; "when they are no longer in use as cinemas, they'll make excellent funeral parlours, with a ready made bar for the wake," he jokes.

Buckley is also despondent about the new generations of potential filmmakers. He argues that while we do still need film schools, he would "scrap AFTRS altogether in favour of placing their core strands – producing, direction, cinematography, editing, sound and writing – at NIDA where there would be a synergy between stage and screen." He goes on to say, "I believe we have lost our way. It's the thirty somethings that worry me and my peers. They seem to have no sense of the audience they are hoping to reach." He quotes a writer friend assessing some first feature scripts. "The males wrote drugs/slash movies, the females destructive sex/abusive parents, and that as it! They only have two stories to tell until they're forty five and , oh, they have invented an entirely new genre called 'I don't read or watch television'."

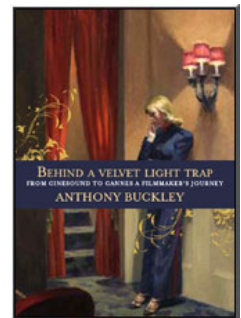
"History is vital to understanding culture"

He goes on to claim that the standard of writing for television has been far superior to "to anything we have produced for the screen for the past decade. Network television is to be loudly applauded for the money they invest in the development of the script."

One of the key motivations for writing his book, is perhaps his view that "History is vital to understanding culture ..." And it is silent film, he maintains, that is the most universal of cinematic languages. His love of films is well demonstrated by his frequent Saturday night home screenings for a dozen or so friends on his large screen, where he shows films – including silents, like *The Third Man*, in their proper ratio



Anthony Buckley



Behind the Velvet Light Trap

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screenings for a dozen or so menus on his large screen, where we show films – including silents, like *The Third Man*, in their proper ratio and with the lights off... it's like being in a small cinema."

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