



COMING SOON
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THE BARRY MCKENZIE MOVIES

BY TONY MOORE

BARRY MCKENZIE became a cult figure in late 1960s Britain as the hero of a long-running comic strip in *Private Eye* magazine, written by struggling expatriate Australian performer, **Barry Humphries**. '**BAZZA**' **MCKENZIE** was a young Australian innocent set loose in Swinging London, vulgar and irrepressible, perpetually sucking on 'ice-cold tubes of Fosters', trying unsuccessfully to get 'a sheila into a game of sink the sausage', and chundering at will on unfortunate poms who crossed his inebriated path.

Then in 1972 **BAZZA** became a film star in the movie comedy, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*. Directed by **Bruce Beresford** and starring **Barry Crocker** (as **BAZZA**), **Humphries** (as Edna Everage), **Spike Milligan** and **Peter Cook**, the film blended the sensibilities of English satire with Australian working-class larrikinism, and was a smash hit in both countries.

BAZZA introduced Brits to the wonders of the Australian vernacular. When **MCKENZIE** was randy he might 'cream his jeans', urination became 'siphoning the python' or 'draining the dragon', while spewing could be a 'technicolour yawn' or 'parking the tiger'. The British loved (and still love) **Humphries'** send-up of their uncouth colonial cousins, but also enjoyed the piss-take of grasping English landlords, surly officials,

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county dowagers and trendy artists and hippies.

The movie triggered a sequel, *Barry McKenzie Holds His Own* (with a young hairy-headed **Clive James**), and a wave of Aussie ocker

comedies that both celebrate and critique the Australian masculine national character.

The **BARRY MCKENZIE** films reflect a time when Australians were in adolescent rebellion against a

mother country they couldn't keep away from, massing in rowdy numbers as expats in the pubs of Earl's Court.



BAZZA is a democratic leveller, who destabilises comfortable English assumptions of imperial superiority over colonials. As a charming, if chaotic, wild colonial boy in England, *MCKENZIE* occupies the same nationalist space as bushranger folk heroes like **Ned Kelly** and unruly ANZAC soldiers in World War One. He is a carnivalesque foil against snobbery and elitism, whether practised overtly by the English ruling class, or more subtly by the trendies of the day: the counter-culture, TV producers, the clergy, psychiatrists, left-wingers, artists and feminists—besting the powerful through a heady brew of colourful slang, ribaldry, riot and song and dance. *BARRY MCKENZIE* shakes a well-aimed Fosters at the sacred cows of both the right and the left of Britain and Australia in the early 1970s.

Modern audiences can glean in the *MCKENZIE* films a foretaste of the postmodern aesthetic with which they are familiar from 1990s pop culture like *The Simpsons* and *South Park*. The films sample vaudeville, music hall, burlesque

and musicals, the Goons and the *Carry On* films. To this mix **Humphries** injected his own transgressive aesthetic passions for dada, surrealism and Wildean irony. Obsessed with bodily functions and the grotesque, the *BARRY MCKENZIE* movies can still shock and the over-the-top dialogue remains a riot. Director **Beresford** parodies the media landscapes of the time, jumping genres from Hammer Horror and Kung Fu movies, to Cold War spy thrillers and puffed-up government tourism documentaries. Sex, power, class, race and hypocrisy are targets that don't go out of fashion. Far beyond 1970s nostalgia for a lost London of flares, sideburns and hippy happenings, the *BARRY MCKENZIE* movies should be applauded as subversive and enjoyable comedies with a great deal to say about Australia and Britain even today.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Moore is a cultural historian, commentator and documentary film-maker with a special interest in Australian pop culture, artistic bohemia and Labor politics.

He is Commissioning Editor of Pluto Press Australia, prior to which he was a program maker at ABC TV where his last documentary was *Bohemian Rhapsody: Rebels of Australian Culture*, now the subject of a PhD he is completing at the University of Sydney.



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The series is edited by Jane Mills, an Associate Senior Research Fellow at the AFTRS. A freelance writer and broadcaster, Jane is currently writing a book on global and local cinemas; her previous book was *The Money Shot: Cinema, Sin and Censorship*. She is a board member of the Sydney Film Festival and a founder-member of Watch on Censorship.

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