

Celebration of the Greek National Day of Independence in Canberra



The committees of the Greek Orthodox Community and The Hellenic Club



Christina Zois, Filareti Pehlivanis and His Excellency Mr George Zois Ambassador of Greece



Nick Manikis, Peter Chikleas, Theo Dimarhos and Steve Dospot MLA



John Tikis and Ignadios Saragas

Photos by Cole Bennets

A pale limitation

IS AUSTRALIAN television really "hideously white"? Last year Britain's racial equality chief Trevor Phillips initiated an inquiry into racial depictions on television, and summed up Britain's television diet in those two pithy words.

What's slightly embarrassing for us down under is that two of the programs singled out for criticism by English viewers were Neighbours and Home and Away. Even from the other side of the world they couldn't quite swallow a Summer Bay denuded of non-Anglos.

We're almost a decade into the 21st century, in a country where one in five of us has a parent born somewhere else, yet Australian dramas continue to be predominantly — in some cases exclusively — peopled by a bizarrely Aryan cohort that's entirely at odds with what most of us experience in our day-to-day lives. It's a phenomenon that leaves many feeling decidedly un-



comfortable.

"I started in the Cop Shop era when there was one token Greek in the show," says director Peter Andrikidis. "I was the token wog as well, as a director." It was the 1980s, a time when casting agents, producers and directors were wary of anything even slightly out of the ordinary. "There was always this thing that foreign names or faces would put the audience off; that Asian and Middle Eastern people couldn't act; and that indigenous people just wouldn't turn up. I'm not kidding. Producers would say, 'Well, we could cast them but they wouldn't turn up.'"

Andrikidis says things have improved since then — he's directing the second season of East West 101, a deeply multicultural cop show. But that's for SBS. Mainstream, commercial television is still, by



and large, terribly white. "But it isn't inherent racism," he says. "It's just not thinking outside the box. When we cast television, we see the same faces again and again and again, because there's the theory that these people will bring an audience. And those people tend to be non-ethnic because they haven't been given the opportunities early on in their career."

And if the series he's directing will have a marginal audience — realistically SBS only ever garners about 5 per cent of the viewing audience — it's

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still worthwhile. It can, for instance, give those non-Anglo actors a break and the beginnings of a profile. "I cast Don Hany eight years ago in Heroes' Mountain," Andrikidis says. "He did Water Rats for me, then White Collar Blue, East West, False Witness, and now Underbelly. Not bad for a boy from Iraq."

And there are pockets where all races are allowed. In reality shows, where contestants tend to self-select on talent or other criteria (like being grotesquely overweight). And in comedy, where everyone from the Wogs out of Work to the ABC's rising star Lawrence Leung have proved themselves true Aussies by showing themselves prepared to take the piss.