



Story Joanne Hawkins

The man who turned his ancestry into an industry has finally finished a sequel to the hit comedy the Wog Boy, reuniting with old mates and colleagues just in the nick of time

Nick Giannopoulos can still remember the first time he met Vince Colosimo. It was 1985 and the pair were standing in the car park of the Victorian College of the Arts, where both were studying acting. Colosimo was just 18, fresh out of high school but already a star - thanks to his AFI Award-nominated performance in 1983's coming of age drama *Moving Out*. But it wasn't a shared love of the dramatic arts that drew the pair to each other. No, it was the fact they were the only students with cars.

"And that we were the only wogs in VCA!" guffaws Giannopoulos, 46.

"Yeah, we were the only two that had our clothes pressed by our mums and dads", quips Colosimo, grabbing the joke baton and sprinting away with it. "And we could smell each other out because we wore cologne".

The pair collapse into giggles and it's some time before they're able to pull themselves together, especially when Giannopoulos reminds Colosimo that he used to drive his dad's daggy station wagon to college so he didn't mess up his treasured V8: "How many times did it actually com up out of the garage, Vince?"

When he's at last able to speak, Colosimo, 43 says, "We became mates pretty much straightaway. We knew we were alike in a lot of ways and we also both felt like fish out of water in the institution. The people around us weren't our everyday peers, so hooking up with a fellow wog was quite comforting".

Twenty five years on, and the boys from inner-city Melbourne - one with Greek heritage, the other with Italian, are still close. Their friendship has survived career highs and lows, relationship breakdowns and other dramas, but they're as tight as ever. "If you can make two or three friends like Vince in your life, you've done well", says Giannopoulos.

He (the Greek one) of course, has built a thriving career out of his background. While Colosimo (the Italian one), has gone on to star in varied fare such as *Under-*

belly, *Lantana* and *The Secret Life of Us*. Giannopoulos has become synonymous with what's best described as the 'wog genre', a result, initially of no one willing to give him any other acting work.

Giannopoulos even changed his name for six months early on - to Giannos - before he realised it was important to him "to get there without having to sacrifice my surname. That was when I made a stand for myself. It was just before [the stage show] *Wogs Out of Work* started, in 1987, and I thought, I'm going to stop making apologies and stop trying to live my life how other people are trying to make me live it. *Wogs Out of Work* was a way os saying, "We're here, we're part of this country and we're bloody funny. Come and spend your \$20 and have a great night out, whether you're a wog or not".

After that came more highly successful stage shows - *Wog-A-Rama* and *Wog Boys* all of which Giannopoulos co wrote, produced and starred in. The latter was made into the film *The Wog Boy*, which co-starred Colosimo. Released in February 2000, it broke the opening weekend box office record for an Australian film and went on to gross \$13.4 million in ticket, video and DVD sales.

With those kind of figures, you'd think a follow-up

would have been whipped up quickly. But it's only now - 10 years later - that a sequel is about to hit cinemas "I work at my own pace", explains Giannopoulos. "I'm kind of weird that way. I'm a bit of a dreamer and don't like to be pressured to do anything".

The Kings of Mykonos: Wog Boy 2 reunites the characters of Steve (Giannopoulos) and Frank (Colosimo) who head off to the Greek island when Steve inherits a beach from an uncle. Throw in more old favourites from the original film (such as Costas Kiliass as "Tony the Yugoslav" and Steve's beloved 1969 Valiant pacer car) and a dastardly villain (played hilariously by Alex Dimitriadis) and you have an amusing - if somewhat cheesy - romp that should do wonders for Greek tourism.

Giannopoulos has been working on the film since 2005 (he co-wrote it with long-time collaborator Chris Anastassiades, as well as being the producer) and admits to being nervous ahead of its release. "I'm anxious" he says. It's a tough period before a film opens, because the nature of films today is that you have one or two weekends and that's it. Five years' work is compounded into a couple of weekends.

"You're also up against massive American movies such as *Iron Man 2* and *Robin Hood*. You're this little Aussie fish swimming in a massive pond and you start to sh*t yourself.

His apprehension is understandable. After success on stage, screen and TV (he starred in Seven Network's *Acropolis Now* sitcom from 1989 to 1992), his charmed run came to a grinding halt with the release of *The Wannabes* in 2003. The film was his first project outside of the ethnic genre - he played a failed actor involved with a crooked Wiggles - like children's group - and anticipation was high. Subsequently, it tanked (although Giannopoulos - a born salesman who can talk the talk, not to mention talk and talk - is at pains to point out it did well on DVD).

"I wanted to do something different", he says of his

