

An Aussie Greek baring gifts

NICK Giannopoulos created one of the most popular comedies in Australian box-office history. Since his film *The Wog Boy* earned \$11.5 million in 2000, only *The Dish* and *Happy Feet*, among comedies, plus two Baz Luhrmann films and *Mao's Last Dancer* have earned more. One may have expected demand for a *Wog Boy* sequel to be strong.

"No, there's never a great demand for any Aussie film," Giannopoulos says. "I'm serious. You always have to convince people in this country. They're running a business."

He asks, rhetorically, what percentage of the box office Australian films have been taking since 2001.

"It hasn't been that great," he says. "At one stage we were down to 4 per cent, weren't we?"

In fact, it plummeted to 1.3 per cent in 2004 after reaching 7.9 per cent in 2000, the year of *The Dish*, *The Wog Boy*, *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Chopper*.

"That's what Australian distributors and exhibitors look at, at the end of the day. They're the cold hard numbers you have to deal with. And we made *The Wog Boy* 10 years ago, that's a long time ago," he adds. "You don't know how someone's pulled up, what they're still capable of or where their head's at."

To be frank, Giannopoulos's head was all over the place.

He justifiably revelled in the success of *The Wog Boy* despite not being given his due by the Australian film industry.

His less than fully formed screenplay, its base humour and celebration of stereotypes clashed with the naturalistic, serious tone of the broader film-making community.

But Giannopoulos was just as



Co-writer Nick Giannopoulos and actor Vince Colosimo at the Melbourne premiere of *The Kings of Mykonos* last week. Picture: Ian Currie
Source: The Australian

weary of the "wog" phenomenon as most of us.

After all, he and *Wogs Out of Work* co-creator Simon Palomares had milked every ounce of goat's milk out of the "wog" brand for a decade through his live shows *Wogarama*, *The Wogboys*, *Wog Story* and television series *Acropolis Now*, before taking it to the film screen.

And Giannopoulos worked it harder than most, taking his stage shows across the country, pitching his *Tarago* and hustling for audiences in many country towns.

He moved on to direct a film largely bereft of wog humour, *The Wannabes*. But the comedy about a band of thieves masquerading as a children's musical group stiffed.

Hence Giannopoulos's comment that film financiers might not know "how someone's pulled up, what they're still capable of, or where their head's at". His new film, *The Kings of Mykonos*, is a vibrant, expensive sequel to *The Wog Boy*. It was a struggle to get made because Giannopoulos tried to raise funding during the global financial crisis. Then there was the cen-

tral point of the screenplay: it was set on the Greek island of Mykonos. A backlot studio at Melbourne's Docklands would not cut it.

"Once people read the script they got that, though," Giannopoulos says of his ambitious screenplay. "They got that *Mykonos* was the story."

Unfortunately, Australia doesn't have an official film co-production treaty with Greece, despite *The Kings of Mykonos* being the second local film to shoot in Greece, following the John Tatoulis film *Beware of Greeks Bearing Guns*.

"And with Melbourne being the third largest Greek city in the world!" Giannopoulos says of the lack of a co-production treaty.

"We've got one with Germany and the UK." (And Canada, Italy, Ireland, Israel, Singapore and China, as it happens.)

"I keep asking the politicians why we don't have a treaty but they've got no answer for me. It would have made my life easier and it could have been beneficial to both countries."

Nevertheless, *The Kings of Mykonos* received some support from a Greek

film agency and it has been pre-sold to release there, with subtitles, in two weeks.

It should do well in Greece for several reasons, not the least of which are the co-stars, Vince Colosimo and Alex Dimitriades, and Greek screen goddess Zeta Makrypoulia. Greeks also have a fascination with the descendants of generations of migrants.

Giannopoulos recalls meeting kids of Greek families all congregating on the Greek Islands during summer.

"And we all have the one thing in common," he says.

"In the 50s and 60s our parents got on boats, or planes in the 70s, and all migrated to these countries: Australia, Canada, the US, South Africa."

The Kings of Mykonos is about wog boy Steve's journey to the island with his Italian mate Frank (Colosimo) to claim an inherited beachfront property.

The screenplay, far more structured and interesting than the original, recalls some of the experiences of Giannopoulos and co-screenwriter Chris Anastassiades. Giannopoulos first went to Greece in his teens. He still has a photo of himself proudly wearing his Essendon football jumper while sitting on his grandfather's donkey.

But he also recalls visiting his parents' villages and meeting his cousins who didn't understand his English or his Greek.

"I was too young to realise it at the time, but as the years went on I started to appreciate the differences and the comedic potential of the clash, and the uniqueness of that in terms of an Australian film," he says.

It is a unique Australian film for many reasons.

Ninety per cent of it was shot in Greece by a predominately Australian crew. And the film's vistas, tone and salaciousness are, well, un-Australian.

"It was shot in Mykonos, mate," Giannopoulos says, laughing.

But it has a glamorous, seductive look and feel.

"Courtesy of [cinematographer] Mark Wareham and [director] Peter Andrikidis," he says. "They just fell in love with the light over there."

And Giannopoulos is sure the Greeks will enjoy the light he shines on them. One Greek distributor was wary of the film after being burned by Nia Vardalos's recent comedy *My Life in Ruins*, which was seen to muddle in the clichés of the old Greece of the 70s.

"I said, 'Guys, I come here every year, I love the Greek Islands and I come here because I love the cosmopolitan vibe of the place.'

"And part of the humour of the film is [because] when I come here I do expect to find people out of Zorba the Greek, but what I find instead is everybody speaks English, everybody's incredibly fashionable, it's got the most beautiful clubs and restaurants in the world, beautiful beaches and locales and that's the Greece I want to show: Greece in 2010."

The Kings of Mykonos opens today.

Focus on Language

The Mayor of the City of Canterbury, Cr Robert Furolo MP, is encouraging residents of non-English speaking backgrounds to join our Community Language Reference Group at Campsie Library. "Our libraries are a valuable source of information to people in our community and cater to all ages, backgrounds, interests, skills and abilities," Mayor Robert Furolo said.

"And language is no barrier, because we work hard to cater for our City's diverse population. "We have a vast selection of multi lingual resources at all our branch libraries which specifically target the needs of Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Korean and Vietnamese speaking members of our community.

"We were recently also successful in obtaining a grant to purchase more than 1,200 books, DVDs, music CDs, newspapers and magazines, as well as offer a range of activities such as children's story times to engage Bengali families, one of our fastest growing communities.

"Our libraries have a fantastic track record of providing high quality services to our City's culturally diverse community. "Our multicultural service has been overwhelmingly successful and there has been an overall increase in community language loans over recent years. "With our City's diverse population, it is vital that we supply these resources and we're always looking for ways to build on our multi lingual resources.

"But we need your help and are looking for people from the Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Greek, Korean and Vietnamese speaking communities to join our Community Language Reference Group to help us select community language materials.

"The group will meet twice a year and members will be invited to participate in book selection meetings for their particular language and asked to provide feedback about current selections. "Being a member of our Community Language Reference Group is a great way residents can help us promote our multicultural community," Mayor Furolo said.

For further information or to apply to be part of the Community Language Reference Group contact our Multicultural Services Librarian on 9789 9399.