

The Sydney Morning Herald

THE GUIDE

JANUARY 7-13, 2013

TELEVISION



Tinseltown toil

The inner workings of Hollywood, through the eyes of six hopeful Australian actors

AND THE WINNER IS ...

GILES HARDIE'S PREDICTIONS FOR NEXT WEEK'S GOLDEN GLOBES, PAGE 5

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

STAN GRANT PACKS IN GLOBE TROTTING FOR INDIGENOUS TV, PAGE 4

THE  AGE

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2012

green guide



California Dreaming

Six young Australian actors try their luck in LA's pilot season.

By Paul Kalina

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NATASHA POOT

Chasing a dream in La La Land

Granted a taste of showbiz, it's *Next Stop Hollywood*, writes **Paul Kalina**.

RIGHT now, the names of Craig Anderson, Michael Clarke-Tokely, Alycia Debnam-Carey, HaiHa Le, Penelope Mitchell and Luke Pegler don't appear on billboards for the latest film or hot TV show.

But one day, they could. They are but six of the scores of actors from Down Under who recently made the annual pilgrimage to Los Angeles for "pilot season", when the studios cast their new programs in the hope of getting full-season commissions from the TV networks.

The six-part observational documentary *Next Stop Hollywood* tracks their fates as they try to get a foothold in the world's entertainment capital.

But there's a still-larger question hovering over this universal portrait of self-transformation, of people reconciling their dreams and hopes, struggles and disappointments. What is the measure of success in this most glamorous, feted, yet brutal of vocations, and why would someone of sound mind willingly submit to this kind of rite of passage in the first place?

Those questions certainly loomed large in the minds of Anderson and Le, who at 35 and 30 and with runs on the board – Anderson is creator and star of the offbeat ABC comedy *Double the Fist*, while Vietnam-born Le has had roles in *Bed of Roses*, *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* and *Neighbours* – are ready to move to the next stages of their careers.

Anderson agreed to the project when its director, Gary Doust, suggested it would be an opportunity to see how Hollywood works. "I assumed I would be fine, but when I got there I realised how hard it was," Anderson says.

His arrival in LA without having shored up an agent or manager isn't an experience Anderson is comfortable revisiting. Ditto his encounter with an A-list actor on the red carpet who abjectly reminded him of his place in the



Craig Anderson, Penelope Mitchell, Michael Clarke-Tokely, Luke Pegler, Alycia Debnam-Carey and HaiHa Le are looking to land their big-screen break in the ABC's *Next Stop Hollywood*.

pecking order. "I feel sick now talking about it," he says. "It was a horrible experience trying to get [an agent], they were like gatekeepers treating me like an idiot. It was humiliating."

Le, by her own admission a shy person, admits it took some convincing on the part of executive producer Tony Ayres (*The Slap*) to have cameras following her on this important journey.

While she hoped it would open doors and opportunities in Los Angeles, she says she "mostly did it for personal reasons. I was at a stage of my career where I wanted

a challenge. As actors, you're always drawing on your life experience, and I knew this process would force me to be brutally honest with myself and the type of

All too often people assume you go over there and become an overnight success ... Naomi Watts spent 10 years in LA before she had a break.

GARY DOUST

work I want to do. On a personal level, it allowed me to grow and be brutally honest with myself."

For Le, who has travelled to pilot season before, the campaign

to break into the industry in America is a "slow-burner".

Both actors, however, are in no doubt about where their futures lie. "When I got back [from filming

thing I watch is from America, apart from what Trent O'Donnell (*A Moody Christmas*) does. My humour has a fan base there. I developed two projects for ABC2 that got to the final hurdle, but they're too weird for here, the audience too small. Overseas is the answer. American TV can sell this stuff to their own audience and a global audience."

Actors from multicultural backgrounds are also more likely to find rewarding roles in the US, Le believes.

Courtesy of quotas and a vast domestic and global audience,

Next Stop Hollywood] I had been to every network in this country pitching ideas," Anderson says. "They like what I do, but they say it's too narrow for our audience. Every-



Craig Anderson, 35

THE winner of an AFI Award for the cult comedy *Double the Fist*, Anderson has his sights on something better than playing "a diabetes patient on *All Saints*". The funny man suspects the audience for his unique brand of comedy isn't in Australia, but the US.



Michael Clarke-Tokely, 21

TORN between his new-found passion for acting and university studies, the Melbourne actor is at a crossroads. His blond, boy-next-door looks suggest he could be in strong demand in the US, but a substantial role in the ABC's coming *Dr Blake Mysteries* suggest success could be closer to home.



HaiHa Le, 29

VIETNAM-born Le has enjoyed various roles on Australian TV shows, but sees open doors for multicultural actors in the US. As well as her career options, she is weighing up a fraught childhood.



Alycia Debnam-Carey, 18

THE young Sydney performer has been acting since she was eight and is perched on the brink of stardom when she arrives in LA with her mother, who is an industry insider.



Penelope Mitchell, 22

AS A cousin of Radha Mitchell, the Melbourne already has some connections to the world she hopes to break into. She certainly has a better bed to rest on at night than her Comfort Hotel colleagues. But her confidence is no substitute for runs-on-the-board experience.



Luke Pegler, 30

PEGLER'S credits include *Neighbours*, *Rescue Special Ops* and US series *Spartacus*. The pilot-season "veteran" is a self-confessed party boy and in many ways his own worst enemy.

culturally diverse characters tend to be more seamlessly woven into American shows than is the case in Australia, Le says.

"A character might be Asian in appearance but the storyline won't be Asian, it won't draw attention to ethnicity. A Latino character won't speak in accent, he or she will just

look different." The role that Le auditioned for in *Neighbours* was as neighbour-from-hell Michelle McKenzie. When Le was cast in the 12-episode role, the character name was changed to Michelle Tran "to suit my appearance".

Doust, whose earlier documentary *Making Venus* also delved into

the pratfalls of filmmaking, had heard the hard-luck stories of actors trying to crack it over there."

"All too often people assume you go over there and become an overnight success," Doust says. "People don't realise that Naomi Watts spent 10 years in LA before she had a break. We were inter-

ested in getting into that, the challenges of being an actor and trying to crack it over there."

When an earlier attempt to make *Next Stop Hollywood* with an overseas broadcaster fell over, Doust approached Ayres and his Matchbox Pictures partner Michael McMahon about a reincarnated

version that would be more observational in style.

Casting agent Kirsty McGregor found five of the six actors who appear in *Next Stop Hollywood*. "We were looking at a certain level of actors," says Doust, who maintains that none of the cast regarded the documentary as a calling-card or, worse, a talent-themed reality show. "I don't think any of these actors wanted to be seen as a Kardashian. They are quite serious about their craft and it was probably more a case, when we knew which actors we wanted, of us reassuring them that it's not a reality show. I still think the risk for them in terms of putting themselves out there was [higher] than becoming famous."

While it's smartly constructed as a what-happens-next guessing game, underpinning *Next Stop Hollywood* is a cautious and salutary story about "making it".

"I don't want to call it luck or timing," Doust says, "but I wanted to show how certain things need to line up for you as an actor. Some of our big actors may not have made it had they not been in the right place at the right time."

"It's a bit scary to think that you may or may not make it just by meeting the right person or being in LA at the right time. Of course acting ability is important, but it's not everything."

Doust was surprised at the various outcomes. "Before we started this, I wouldn't have picked the ones that scored roles."

It may seem ironic given the apparent out-there-ness of the Hollywood machine that the secrecy of the big-talent agencies posed the biggest challenges Doust faced making the documentary.

As we see, cameras were not allowed anywhere near their premises and the actors fortunate enough to land a meeting were not allowed to reveal what was discussed. "I was banging my head in the beginning because of access," Doust says. "It's just easier for people to not appear on camera and talk. They assume the worst; that you're Michael Moore or it's a *Borat* sketch."

"They just say no. It really is the safest thing to do."

At one stage, Doust thought it should be called "*The Doors*, because that's all we were seeing".

"Almost every actor we spoke to said, 'I'd like to watch that', but far fewer were willing to be involved and open themselves up," he says. "I think it's a brave thing that our six actors did."

Next Stop Hollywood premieres on Tuesday, January 8, at 9.30pm on ABC1.



From left, Craig Anderson, Penelope Mitchell, Michael Clarke-Tokely, Alycia Debnam-Carey, Luke Pegler, Haiha Le

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

THE DAY OF THE CICADAS

NEXT Stop Hollywood is a six episode local take on the stage door to stardom perennial. It follows six Australians as they shop themselves about Los Angeles during pilot season, the death by a thousand cuts January-to-March madness when dozens of TV pilots are cast.

It could be a reprise of *The Day of the Locust*, Nathanael West's 1939 novel about the horror show of Hollywood celebrity, filmed in the 1970s. But thanks to (mainly) appealing characters and Gary Doust's direction, the first episode starts the series strongly with the six stars announcing their wares in the TV bazaar, where careers are created, but mostly are ended before they begin. It's all very real, but not reality TV as we know it.

Certainly, it is superior to those shows where people fight to win a prize for losing the most weight, belting out the biggest ballad or, in one shocker, winning the affections of a lady who unbeknown to the male contestants is gay.

Next Stop Hollywood has much more in common with the reality craft competitions, where people with skills compete on the quality of their work without audiences enduring their journeys of self-discovery. The *Great Food Truck Race* on Foxtel is a great



first watch

Stephen Matchett

Six young Australians head to LA with Hollywood stardom in their sights

example in which teams of chefs compete to sell good quality takeaway tucker.

What makes this show superior is there is nothing contrived about the contest — these actors aren't sniping and scheming against each other in a closed shop to impress a judge.

According to Doust, the original idea had the actors living together, "but I wanted to change it to a documentary series". In a comparison that may not endear him to some

of the more body image obsessed participants, he says the show his series reminds him of most is *Whale Wars*, the Animal Planet program in which a film crew follows Paul Watson and the Sea Shepherd organisation.

"This isn't *Big Brother* . . . the actors go to Hollywood and we tag along — they are real actors on real journeys; they weren't working for us," he says.

Doust says he liked all the participants: "They got the camera stuck in their faces at times they least wanted it." This rather sounds like what acting is about, though judging by the way the actors present in the first episode, some are more real than others. Doust says casting director Kirsty McGregor (*Animal Kingdom*) started out with 50 possible actors and these were narrowed down to six.

"We were interested in actors who had a fair chance and were going to be engaging for the audience. The six selected are all different, with a spread of experiences."

They certainly are. Penelope Mitchell (did she mention she is Radha's cousin?) is poised, beautiful and not burdened by self-doubt. In the first episode she worries most about who will represent her. With some Australian TV credits to her name, she picked up work in three episodes of a new US series, *Hemlock Grove*, in which "a werewolf struggles both as a monster and a human".

If self-belief is any indication, Mitchell is already rich in Hollywood terms, where confidence is currency. She is certainly distinguished from others in the cast who have Australian-sized egos.

Michael Clarke-Tokely presents as a decent bloke with the standard concerns among the young for self-fulfilment, social justice, truth and beauty — all relieved by a determination not to take himself too seriously. Haiha Le comes across as a complex woman utterly lacking in artifice. On the basis of what she reveals in episode one, it seems certain she will struggle, not because of any absence of talent but because she finds the world a hard place.

The other three are the stars of the first episode. Luke Pegler plays "bloke" beautifully. At 30, he is mature enough to be familiar with failure and wise enough to understand that you make your luck in life — and that he

could have handled previous pilot seasons better. His addiction to exercise signals a strategy to deal with demons. That what we see of Pegler is not perfectly packaged indicates this is the real man, and while he does nothing especially impressive in the first half of the series he is one to watch, if only to see how he deals with defeat or responds to success.

The same applies to Craig Anderson, not least for his guts. At 35, grey-bearded and overweight, he bills himself as a character actor and comic and he hits Los Angeles friendless and unprepared. But he does whatever he can think of to make contacts, enduring embarrassment with grace and resilience. There are scenes that are hard to watch without feeling mortified for him.

"When I saw the series I felt nauseated and humiliated; it was bad enough doing it but it was horrifying watching it," Anderson tells Review. And yet, he kept at it, cold calling, ringing old Australian contacts and bailing people up at premieres — if you ever thought Geoffrey Rush seemed like a good bloke, you're right. There is no faulting Anderson for realism in recognising how hard his challenge is and there is a great deal to admire in his good-natured courage in sticking to it. This is a bloke who demonstrates that self-belief does not inevitably incorporate large-scale delusions of grandeur.

"It was a horrible time when I didn't know what I was doing, I felt out of my depth," he says. And yet he kept at it. Where Mitchell has a jumbo-sized, American-style ego, Anderson has that all-Australian characteristic, he is game to have a go.

The series standout, Alycia Debnam-Carey, is also relatively retiring. The brief clips of her talking about experience and ambition and the hunt for work in the early episodes present her as self-aware and astute, wise beyond her years. She exudes professionalism and — while nobody connected with the series will give anything away — the fact she scored an audition for the forthcoming *Sex and the City* prequel, *Carrie Diaries*, demonstrates Hollywood takes her seriously. Not that she seems all that worried; she understands that winning and losing roles often has nothing to do with ability. "Having no expectations is a really

good thing," she says. And yet the young woman resigned to doing and hoping for the best looks like doing well.

"The great thing about the series is what unfolded for Alycia," Doust says. "Alycia is ready to go," Anderson agrees.

But go where? Wherever luck and talent take her. While the screen-culture establishment complains about the absence of publicly funded Australian voices telling government-supported Australian stories, our actors are welcome across the Pacific.

Perhaps there are statistics showing Australians do no better than Brits or Canadians, but from Rose Byrne to Mia Wasikowska, Hugh Jackman to Sam Worthington there does seem to be an army of Aussies on American TV and in Hollywood films. Perhaps it is because they do not assume a beautiful body and the ability to read a script qualifies them for fame.

In the first episode, manager Gabe Cohen says the difference between Australians and the local competition is that the former are more interested in acting than being celebrities. "Actors are commodities and you have to be able to do that stuff."

Doust agrees: "Masses of American actors turn up and think it is their right to be a star and famous. Australians are more committed to their craft and quite picky about some roles."

"Their accent is not easy to pull off and it's the first thing they look for. I was amazed at how our actors were able to transform. American actors can't do Australian accents," he adds.

According to Doust, the result is that "the industry actively searches for Australians, particularly for pilots, [because] they are aware of the talent".

So no worries. Just say "g'day" and she'll be apples. Um, not quite. Whatever the accent, every unknown actor is selling in a buyer's market. And if the first episode is any guide, it takes an enormous performance to be noticed. Which isn't easy for anybody brought up with the Australian antipathy to big-noting.

Anybody appalled by the self-promotion among hacks and flacks, actors and bankers that infests the media and who guesses there is nothing now to distinguish us from the Americans should guess again. There remains a chasm between what looks like blatant boasting here but what on the other side of the Pacific is almost seen as paying people the courtesy of explaining what you have to offer.

Anderson explains: "In the series I have an awkward moment; people say, 'Don't be shy, don't be humble, don't be Australian.' But this is terrible; Australians don't brag. I said, 'Hell, I am an Australian.' But then they say, 'Go on, explain what your talents are.'"

Which is what they all do, with varying degrees of success, ranging from not much to something that is short of stardom but is certainly stellar.

The extraordinary thing is that opportunities do appear. By the middle of the series, Debnam-Carey and Mitchell have parts lined up, and Anderson, having sussed out how the town works, is starting to make his own idiosyncratic way. It's mainly a matter of their energy and ability, but it's also thanks to capitalism and free trade.

As Anderson explains, the entertainment economy needs enormous amounts of content, which means that his background in comedy and digital work for him.

"There is such a demand for content. The comedy writing schools exist to feed the networks — you can be writing for them in a couple of years. It's the same for actors. You just have to try everything to get anywhere."

Taking the time to do so is easier, thanks to the much-maligned 2005 Australia-US free trade agreement. Nobody appears to have problems (beyond the time it take to process paperwork) getting work visas, and if there are

local preference rules they don't appear to apply to Australians. And nobody, at least in this series, is complaining about Australian voices telling American stories. So everything's apples, at least until the Yanks work out the accent.

Next Stop Hollywood, Tuesday, 9.30pm, ABC1



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Desperate to get in on the act

January 3, 2013

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Daniel Burt

Show of the week: **Next Stop Hollywood, Tuesday, ABC1, 9.30pm**

Advertisement

WHEN children in developing countries are asked what they want to be when they grow up, most of them say doctors, nurses, dentists and teachers. Enlightened first-world kiddies, on the other hand, want to be athletes, entertainers and professional artists. Of course, the pursuit of glory should be expected in a culture that rewards, if not values, self-absorption and which bestows upon children grand accolades for lukewarm achievement.

Full disclosure: I, too, am a narcissist - although I haven't bothered to ask anyone if they've noticed. That's one reason why I'm drawn to *Next Stop Hollywood*, a six-part observational documentary series that follows Aussie actors as they compete for roles during the frenzied US television pilot season. These guys want fame and, as they've taken the novel route of developing a skill, might even deserve it.

We hear much about the Aussie influx in Hollywood and the likes of Rachel Griffiths, Rose Byrne and Ryan Kwanten are used as the dangling carrot of precedent. We also know that 98 per cent of actors don't fulfil their dreams, so *Next Stop Hollywood* could more realistically be called "Next Stop Centrelink", or "Next Stop the Hare Krishna Place That Gives You Free Food if You Take Your Shoes Off". "Our" (success pending) actors brace themselves for the glitz and grubbiness of a city where locals have more than 60 different words for smog.

We see the machinations familiar to actors: self-interest veiled as curiosity ("So - are they still casting?"); deep superficiality ("I'm air-brushing my headshots"); misplaced proactivity ("The situation is looking a bit dire - I'm going to get my nails done"); professional faux pas ("Please get off the premises"); humble bragging ("I'm alongside Kate Winslet and then there's just me, like, this complete goofball"); attempted networking ("He hung up on me") and melodrama ("My life is doomed!"). No wonder actors spend so much time trying to play other people.

A script would sometimes come in handy; Penelope Mitchell, 22, introduces herself by saying, "My name is Penny Mitchell - Penelope Mitchell is actually - hold on I'm gonna start - 'cause, like, this is another thing I need to negotiate. Because, um, actually, like, Penelope is probably, like, my name; it's probably something I should start using more. Um, so I don't know whether-what-which name we're going for in this - Penelope." That is Oscar-winning equivocation.

Penelope's youthful invincibility contrasts with Craig Anderson, 35, who demonstrates for the camera his parlous existence in Sydney. The comic actor would sleep on a single mattress under his office desk and was bitten every night by a rat, but that was OK because he joined the local pool to use the shower and clean the wounds. On arrival in Los Angeles, his hire car had bullet holes around the petrol tank and his first gig was unpaid alongside a porn star in a terrifying YouTube video. To top it all off, he goes on a seven-day all-juice diet but is only given five juices.

"What's my motivation?" is the quintessential question actors ask on behalf of their characters but perhaps should ask more often of themselves. One 30-year-old subject cites his idea of thespian achievement as "shooting outdoors with heaps of money, sick catering and guns". Another articulates why honing the craft is a nuisance, comparing himself to doctors who "prefer to practice than learn". Everybody knows medical school is for chumps without natural talent.

Actors are often asked to tap their vulnerability, and Vietnamese-born Haiha Le, 29, has a rich vein. She shares the video diaries she shoots at 4am and is careful to give her scrunched tissues a close-up. Haiha is articulate, philosophical and speaks candidly of being ostracised by her church and family after she faced that age-old decision: appear on *Neighbours* or go to heaven. Ramsay Street 1, God 0.

The youngest of the bunch is Alycia Debnam-Carey, 18, joined by her mum/PA who hangs out in the apartment sifting through scripts. Others with more empty diaries seek comfort in the gym, drink and the Hollywood sign, a site so visited in popular culture, I'm surprised budding actors can find space for a private epiphany.

I'm sure the six actors would prefer to be, you know, acting. The lack of opportunity at home partly explains why they left for the US. There's irony in Australian actors struggling for exposure, only to end up on Australian TV as actors struggling for exposure.

It is right that we encourage kids to follow their dreams but when adults do the same, we tend to judge dreams as indulgence. *Next Stop Hollywood* is the rare series that proves actors can be as entertaining trying to get a job as they are supposed to be doing it.

TUESDAY JANUARY 15

FREE TO AIR *Debi Enker*

Who Do You Think You Are?

★★★★ SBS One, 7.30pm

One of the sharpest formats ever produced by the BBC, this series exemplifies one of television's best methods: the elegantly simple (a family tree) fused with the beautifully complex, as a team of researchers dispatch a celebrity, in this case Australian singer Kate Ceberano, on a journey into her own family's past. As the layers are peeled back – in this instance, a journey across South Australia and an intriguing family heirloom of mysterious origin – a mosaic of four generations is assembled and Ceberano is alternately moved and delighted. Great stuff.

Michael Idato

Breaking The Magician's Code: Magic's Secrets Revealed

★★ 7mate, 7.30pm

OK, fair warning, if you are someone who either genuinely believes the Harry Potter books are based on fact or that David Copperfield has real magic powers (which is possible, considering he won the heart of Claudia Schiffer), don't watch this reveal-all because it'll shatter your dreams.

Magic, we learn through the actions of the Masked Magician, isn't magic at all, it's just a series of clever tricks using a variety of techniques and gadgets.

Watching exactly how it's all done – and how much effort goes into making something look effortless – does have a certain appeal if you're

one of those people who just has to know everything, but for the rest of us who like to maintain a little childish wonder, look away.

Scott Ellis

Coppers: I Love Nicking People

★★★ SBS One, 9.30pm

Made in 2010 for Channel 4 in Britain, this five-part series promises to show "coppers as you've never seen them before" and, to some extent, it succeeds. It's an unvarnished study, featuring candid interviews with police and impressions of them at work that include nose-picking, scoffing fast food and telling dirty jokes. But it also presents a portrait of people dedicated to their jobs, sometimes frustrated by them, and quietly efficient in conducting their duties.

The second episode, "I Love Nicking People", focuses on Team Three of the Cambridge road traffic unit and follows a handful of officers as they apprehend disqualified drivers, attend accident scenes and morgues, and discuss the emotional toll that their work can take.

Next Stop Hollywood

★★★★ ABC1, 9.30pm

It's week two for the six Australian actors trying to catch a break on the daunting obstacle course that is the Hollywood entertainment industry. They've arrived hoping to secure work during the TV pilot season and this engaging documentary series tracks them as they're trying to negotiate the formidable hierarchy of managers and agents, as well as the meetings, auditions and call-

backs. There's a whiff of opportunity, coupled with the disheartening reality of doors refusing to open or slamming shut.

Penelope is trying to figure out which agency might represent her best; Craig is working his few contacts and nervily interviewing stars on the red carpet as they make their way into an AACTA function. Haiha is fretting that her manager is still nowhere to be seen while Alycia gets encouraging news. Luke is determinedly training at the gym, endeavouring not to party too hard and making a play for the waitress serving him nachos at Barney's.

Meanwhile Michael is taking meetings that seem promising, although in his case, as with the others, the cameras are prohibited from filming those close encounters. They're all anxious but trying hard to be philosophical, and this thoughtful account of their trials and tribulations is aided enormously by the series' clever casting: these hopefuls represent a rich range of personalities and types, and each appears to have something worthwhile to offer.

The approach taken by director Gary Doust to their experiences is revealing of their struggles, though the series does provide a keen sense of the brutally competitive meat market that is Hollywood.

Worth a look

Cops: Adults Only (One, 8.30pm)

Extreme ER: The Bronx

(SBS One, 8.35pm)

Survivor: Philippines

(Nine, 10.30pm)

FREE TO AIR *Bridget McManus*

Next Stop Hollywood

★★★★ ABC1, 9.30pm

This thoughtful insight into the cutthroat TV pilot season in Los Angeles, from the perspective of six Australian “unknowns”, elicits tears and high drama without the hysteria of reality talent screamers. The horror of the audition process, the humiliation of rejection and the euphoria of even mild success are powerfully conveyed by participants with their eyes on a prize beyond what a television talent quest can offer.

Ingenue Penelope Mitchell shares the giddy highs and crushing lows of her experience at the world’s biggest cattle call with grace and honesty, even when the maddening issue of her working visa threatens to derail her chance of starring in a “tasteful” coming-of-age movie directed by *Survivor* host Jeff Probst. HaiHa Le (*Bed of Roses*) stoically accepts the dearth of opportunities available to her, gleaning wisdom, comfort and a French polish from her manicurist aunt. Doe-eyed Alycia Debnam-Carey has infinitely better luck but is almost undone by the impossible choice she is forced to make at episode’s end.

Defiantly untrained Michael Clarke-Tokely (*Tangle*) and former *Neighbours* actor Luke Pegler speak about their leading-man potential in a sea of potential leading men. Craig Anderson (*Review with Myles Barlow*) looks up

his Australian acting buddy John Polson, whose TV directing credits include *The Mentalist* and *Lie to Me*, and takes a role in a dubious indie slasher project about a mute misogynist who insists on being addressed as “Scum”.

As darkly funny as it is painful, this expose of an actor’s lot should make anyone who buys the myth of overnight celebrity think twice.

Misfits

★★★ ABC2, 9.30pm

Mercifully not a series remake of the 1961 film in which Marilyn Monroe proved her acting credentials opposite Clark Gable and Montgomery Clift, but a British fantasy-drama about a gang of community service offenders who get hit by lightning and develop superpowers. Yes, really.

If not for the razor-sharp acting, especially from Matthew McNulty playing three identical characters, including the erotically sinister Seth, *Misfits* might be in danger of limiting its appeal to rusted-on lovers of television make-believe. It is, instead, a dark and compelling story of survival and loyalty, its fantastical premise absolving it of the pathos of serious hard-knock dramas.

The Cult

★★★★ 7Two, 9.50pm

Making clever use of the kind of creative licence usually only

afforded the fantasy genre with its outlandish yet not implausible plot this creepy psycho-thriller made in New Zealand is a skin-crawler. In tonight’s episode, Gina (Kate Elliott) is tortured by enigmatic cult leader Edward North (Latham Gaines) as she continues to fight for her freedom and that of the ailing Andy (played by edible Heath Ledger lookalike Kip Chapman).

Skins

★★★★ Eleven, 10.40pm

Unfortunately axed after just one season, when it became clear that American sponsors couldn’t support an honest, heartfelt portrayal of their teenage fellow citizens, this American remake of the British original is enjoying an afterlife as an Australian digital-channel filler.

This episode details the complexities of father-daughter love, as horn-playing prodigy Daisy (Camille Cresencia-Mills) defies her jaded pianist father’s wishes by auditioning for the Conservatory of Music. There are no *Flashdance*-style triumphs in this gritty Baltimore tale. What transpires between them is far more meaningful and heart-wrenching.

Worth a look

M*A*S*H (One, 6pm)

Family Ties (Eleven, 4.30pm)

MasterChef: The Professionals (Ten, 7.30pm)

green guide

Previews Your critical guide to the week

TUESDAY January 22

Next Stop Hollywood

ABC1, 9.30pm

THIS thoughtful insight into the cutthroat LA pilot season from the perspective of six Australian “unknowns” elicits tears and high drama without the hysteria of reality-talent screamers. The true horror of the audition process, the humiliation of rejection and the euphoria of even mild success are powerfully conveyed. Ingenue Penelope Mitchell shares the giddy highs and crushing lows of her experience at the world’s biggest cattle call with grace and honesty, even when the maddening issue of her working visa threatens to derail her chance of starring in a “tasteful” coming-of-age movie directed by *Survivor* host, Jeff Probst. Haiha Le (*Bed of Roses*), stoically accepts the dearth of opportunities available to her, gleaning wisdom, comfort and a french polish from her manicurist aunt, who built an LA business after arriving from Vietnam. Doe-eyed Alycia Debnam-Carey has infinitely better luck but is almost undone by the impossible choice she is forced to make at episode’s end. Defiantly untrained Michael Clarke-Tokely (*Tangle*) and former *Neighbours* actor

Luke Pegler speak with candour about their leading-man potential in a sea of potential leading men. Craig Anderson (*Review with Myles Barlow*) looks up his Australian acting buddy John Polson, whose television directing credits include *The Mentalist* and *Lie to Me*; and takes a role in a dubious indie slasher project. As darkly funny as it is painful, this expose of an actor’s lot should make anyone who buys into the myth of overnight celebrity think twice.

Skins

Channel Eleven, 11.40pm

UNFORTUNATELY axed after just one season when it became clear that American sponsors couldn’t support an honest, heartfelt portrayal of their teenage fellow citizens, this American remake of the British original is enjoying an afterlife as an Australian digital-channel filler. This episode details the complexities of father-daughter love. There are no *Flashdance*-style triumphs in this gritty Baltimore tale. What transpires is far more meaningful.

The Cult

7Two, 9.50pm

MAKING clever use of the kind of

creative licence only usually afforded the fantasy genre with its outlandish yet not implausible plot, this creepy psycho thriller made in New Zealand in 2009 is a skin-crawler. In tonight’s episode, Gina (Kate Elliott) is tortured by the evil cult leader Edward North (Latham Gaines), as she continues to fight for her freedom and that of the ailing Andy (Kip Chapman).

Misfits

ABC2, 9.30pm

MERCIFULLY, not a series remake of the 1961 film in which Marilyn Monroe proved her acting credentials opposite Clark Gable and Montgomery Clift, but a British fantasy-drama about a gang of community service offenders who get hit by lightning and develop superpowers. Yes, really. If not for the razor-wire acting, especially from Matthew McNulty playing three identical characters, including the erotically sinister Seth, *Misfits* might be in danger of limiting its appeal to rusted-on lovers of television make-believe. It is instead a dark and compelling story of survival and loyalty.

BRIDGET MCMANUS



Next Stop Hollywood conveys the highs and lows of the LA pilot-season audition process

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Paul Kalina

Next Stop Hollywood, ABC1, 9.30pm

FOUR weeks into their bids to take Hollywood by storm - or at least have an agent take their call - things are finally happening for our star-struck actors. Alycia is juggling conflicting offers to star in a feature film and the teen drama *The Carrie Diaries*, the "prequel" to *Sex and the City*, which, coincidentally, has just premiered in the US to lacklustre reviews. Craig is reinvigorated by LA's thriving comedy scene, HaiHa has overcome her crisis of confidence, while the optimism of the ingenue Penelope appears, for once, to be reasonably well founded. The documentary settles into a pleasant rhythm tonight, with setbacks and disappointments taking a back seat to openings and opportunities. Four episodes in, we've come to know and care about the actors as they take small steps to realise their dreams. Director Gary Doust's considerable skill here is to juggle those personal dramas with telling insights into the business of Hollywood and the actor's craft.

TUESDAY FEBRUARY 5

FREE TO AIR *Kylie Northover*

Packed to the Rafters

★★ Seven, 8.45pm

It's a big night of surprises tonight, which this once top-rating program probably needs now the series has moved so far away from its original premise. Youngest son Nathan returns from London with several announcements that leave Julie and Dave exchanging pantomime-style glances and hamming it up no end.

Ben, meanwhile, decides to make a spur-of-the-moment life change, which leads to some excruciating mother-and-son exchanges between he and Julie in which they wring out a metaphor until it's a husk of its former charming – if twee – self. It's hard to imagine where this series can head now the Rafter house is well and truly not packed.

Next Stop Hollywood

★★★ ABC1, 9.30pm

It's the final episode of the ABC's engaging documentary series (it could fall into the "reality" category, but features too much actual reality) following six Australian actors trying to get a break during LA's "pilot season" – a journey made by scores of actors every year. The program's hopefuls have all had "proper" experience, but for most of them it's still been a hard six weeks.

Tonight follows the six in their final week in LA, and there are some emotional moments. Actor and writer-director Craig finally lands a meeting with famed agency UTA but when the *Next Stop Hollywood* crew are keen for some details, he insists

he's not allowed to divulge anything – and there's a rare moment of hostility between him and the program's producers.

Meanwhile, Michael meets some big names – Gary Busey and Bryan Cranston among them – on Oscars night, and asks their advice; HaiHa is still struggling to be picked up by an agency; Penelope is close to landing a role; Luke auditions for a potentially life-changing role with Warner Brothers (dangerously picturing the car he'll be able to afford should he land it) while our youngest aspiring star Alycia heads to North Carolina to begin filming on new series *The Occult*.

Without giving anything away, not everyone gets a Hollywood ending in tonight's finale. But there's always next pilot season.

Parenthood

★★★ Seven, 9.45pm

It's a bit of a racy episode of *Parenthood* tonight, opening with Crosby and Jasmine getting it on on their kitchen floor, and Crosby later learning that Adam and Kristina schedule their sex, which they refer to, in their synced Google calendars, as "funky time".

We learn all this with good reason, of course, and by the episode's end Jasmine is wishing Crosby was more carefree and more like Adam when he misses an appointment.

Young love is also explored as Drew, beginning his senior year, finds himself dumped on the first day. One of tonight's highlights is Sarah's new

boss, grumpy photographer Hank (the brilliant Ray Romano, in a recurring role) explaining his experience of women, and later offering Drew some sage advice.

Against the Wall

★★ Seven, 10.45pm

It seems odd that US cable channel Lifetime, which produces "TV and movies for women", made this cop show – until you actually sit through an episode. *Against the Wall* is billed as police drama with an edge of female empowerment, but it's more a cavalcade of cop-show and strong-female-character clichés.

Our own Rachael Carpani (Jodi Fountain from *McLeod's Daughters*, pictured) is Abby Kowalski, who takes an opening in Internal Affairs in order to rise to the level of detective, working with the pregnant but feisty Lina Flores (Marisa Ramirez). The problem is, regular cops hate Internal Affairs, and Abby is from a proud family of regular, hard-bitten Chicago cops – her father and three brothers are all IA haters. They all, somewhat inconveniently, work in the same station, and who are often, it would seem, being investigated by IA. It might be prudent not to get too into *Against the Wall* – it was never renewed for a second season.

Worth a look

The Drum (ABC News, 6pm)

As it Happened: Nazi Hunters

(SBS Two, 8.30pm)

Weeds (Nine, 11.30pm)



Ruth Ritchie

Hollywood or bust

Six wannabe stars strive to be the Next Big Thing – just don't call it a reality contest.

Are we just watching awards shows for the frocks – if we watch at all? I correctly guessed 84 per cent of this year's Golden Globe Award winners. Hugh, Anne, Ben, Claire, Daniel and Damian. As if they were ever going to lose. Without contentious winners or Ricky Gervais pulling down the pants of rich, smug, pretty people, ***The 988th Golden Globe Awards*** (Arena, Monday, noon) delivered exactly the disappointment we get every time we bite into a cup cake.

Once upon a time, when the jury agreed with my superior taste, I felt validated. On the occasions that we failed to concur, I'd blame swine flu or corruption. Has anyone recovered from Marisa Tomei getting that Academy Award for *My Cousin Vinny*? Don't even get

me started on Gwyneth Paltrow in *Shakespeare in Love*.

The trick is not to base these choices on our own taste but to second-guess the Academy or, in the case of the Golden Globes, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (loosely, a group of pissed, needy Hungarian hack journalists who wanted to feel important – and now, spookily, they are).

Next Stop Hollywood (ABC1, Tuesday, 9.30pm) appeals to my

ancient, if somewhat deluded, belief in my ability to pick a winner. Ostensibly this is a show about six young Australian actors spending six weeks in Hollywood during pilot season. It's a serious documentary series, not a contest, and yet the audience is compelled to predict the winners.

This is such a refreshing break from reality contests. Nobody is

being voted off the island or asked to leave the building. Hollywood will do that for them. Fickle fate and 50 other unforeseen forces will relegate some to obscurity, and quite possibly some to the dizzying stardom where every door in the universe opens and they suddenly urinate gold cordial.

Next Stop Hollywood has been perfectly cast. With such varied ages, personalities, charisma, shapes and sizes, any or all of them are prospective future nominees. They are not all hot, connected or obviously freakishly gifted. It's highly likely one of them is a Hemsworth. But which one? And if the Hemsworths hadn't caught fire yet, and were just attractive

unknowns, could we have predicted their trajectory?

Probably not. If Lena Dunham were one of the six, we'd probably rule her out first. Since Dunham has proved that a dumpy,

unglamorous 26-year-old woman can produce, write and star in a comedy that has succeeded by breaking all the traditional sitcom rules, only a fool would predict success by the Hemsworth Scale of Action-Figure Good Looks.

What Dunham has achieved in *Girls* (aside from critical acclaim and nominations in every major award in every category possible) is a rare and special treat. ***Girls*** (Showcase, Monday, 5.50pm) is proof that authenticity, talent and a break

at HBO might be all it takes to succeed and succeed big.

In the new series (more fat nudity; more humiliating sex with all the wrong people), Dunham's Hannah Horvath and her cronies talk a lot about "pretty girl jobs". It's a great expression. As Dunham stood on the Golden Globes stage this week accepting two awards, she made a hefty statement about the people who get the pretty girl jobs.

With Dunham, Tina Fey, Adele, Amy Poehler and Jodie Foster delivering the brightest spots in the evening, we might be entering the Era of the Interesting Talented Woman. When that fad passes, the pretty girl, with all the job offers in ***Next Stop Hollywood***, gets my vote.

Doco TV series, Next Stop Hollywood, follows aspiring Aussie actors in LA

[Mon 07/01/2013 02:52:43]

By Emily Blatchford

Director Gary Doust doesn’t believe in overnight success.

That is, until one cropped up in his latest documentary series, *Next Stop Hollywood*.

Debuting on the ABC tomorrow night, *Next Stop Hollywood* follows the plight of six Australian actors who head to Hollywood during the infamous pilot season.

Doust observes the trials and tribulations of Alycia Debnam-Carey, 18 (Sydney); HaiHa Le, 29 (Melbourne); Penelope Mitchell, 22 (Melbourne); Michael Clarke-Tokely, 22 (Melbourne); Craig Anderson, 35 (Sydney); and Luke Pegler, 30 (Sydney) as they each attempt to find fame in LA.

“I guess we set out to blow the lid off the overnight success story,” Doust says. “There’s a lot of (rumours about) overnight success with actors and how they just go over to Hollywood and get this big movie and suddenly they’re famous.

“Actors like Naomi Watts were there a long time before they get their big break. It takes a long time... The irony is that one of our actors, I guess, could be seen as an overnight success.”

Exactly which actor hits the big time is something Doust understandably doesn’t want to reveal just yet, but he does confirm “at least one” of the six ends up with more-than-pleasing results.

Recording the observational documentary, however, proved to be a surprisingly trying task, what with the red tape associated with filming in LA and also having six very stressed actors as subjects.

“Because they do a lot of shooting in LA, you have to be incredibly organised and know in advance where we were planning to shoot, but as we were observational and didn’t know where we were going to shoot, it was difficult,” Doust says.

“We needed permits to shoot on the street and you needed three different permits to film someone in a car travelling from the airport to Hollywood. It was a red tape nightmare. But we worked with it – most of the time we had permits.”

As for the actors, Doust says the extraordinary pressure they placed on themselves created a fairly intense emotional roller coaster, and acknowledges the crew and cast did not always see eye-to-eye.

“The pressure for the actors over there is tough even without a film crew. It’s costing them a lot of money to be there, they’ve got limited time – there’s this feeling of ‘I’m close but I don’t know if the phone is going to ring or not going to ring,’” Doust says.

“On top of all of that a film crew is in your face asking questions. I know that the pressure for the actors was hard with us and certainly for Luke it did reach a bit of a boiling point, which is talked about in the series. For me it was really important to show the pressure the actors were under.”

According to Doust, the joy, as well as the challenge, of the series is truly having no idea how it would turn out at the end.

“I think (my favourite part of shooting) was the day to day challenges of not knowing what to shoot next. I really enjoyed that challenge, thinking on your feet. Watching the stories unfold as they happen – that’s the real joy of observational television – you don’t know what’s going to happen, and there are a lot of surprises.

“These days most shows start with a pre-determined outcome of where they think the characters will end up, and I guess for us it was ‘how will they go, what sort of obstacles will they have?’

“Not knowing which one of our actors were going to have success, whether any of them would or who would, that was part of it – watching them navigate the ins and outs and ups and downs.”

Scheduled to screen in parallel with this year’s Hollywood pilot season, *Next Stop Hollywood* will kick off tomorrow night on ABC at 9.30pm.