



Anna Campion on Getting Loaded

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London based ex-patriot Anna Campion was back in New Zealand to speak at the world's first screenings of her debut feature *Loaded*. However, while the film was having its Auckland premier, Anna was ground bound in Napier. Oh dear, the best laid plans of wombats and women, eh?

"They said: 'It's a bit windy tonight,'" explains Anna, over the phone from Wellington two days later. "I said, like: 'Yeah, fine, yes it is a bit windy,' thinking this was sort of conversational. They said: 'If it's too windy, you won't be going anywhere.' I said: 'You mean a couple of gusts and we can't take off?' They said: 'Well, we might not be able to land. It might be too dangerous.'"

So, that was that. Anna was disappointed, to say the least.

"You hardly ever get any sort of kudos as a film maker. Most of the time you're just a nutcase who works away in a white room, with screens in front of you. I thought: 'I really want to go and have some fun.' Last time I went [to Auckland] I went to a few bars, had quite an interesting time. No one seemed to go to sleep, actually. I thought: 'Maybe it's a warmer climate or something.'"

"I was really looking forward to going to Auckland because I thought they'd get it there, and apparently they really did get it there. I was kinda really furious."

If Auckland really did "get it", it could be precisely because it is the sort of 'city that never sleeps' Anna encountered on her last visit here. *Loaded*'s main themes are psychology, the cut and thrust of relationships, amateur

film making and (the key factor in the sleepless syndrome) LSD.

The plot revolves around seven English school leavers who travel to a remote English country house to make a film. No one can agree on the plot and style details of what rapidly degenerates into a schlock horror of ridiculous proportions. In-fighting escalates as it becomes apparent some members of the group are leaking personal details regarding others into the script. In an attempt to salvage any of the high spirits they set out with, the group decide to drop acid and video tape the results. As the trip progresses, life begins to imitate art tragically when a motor crash claims one of the party.

Anna began writing *Loaded* back in 1990, but it was 1991 before she really got the ball rolling.

"Film is such a long process, especially your first one (It doesn't matter if you're Jane Campion's sister or not, really), trying to get the money raised. Young people come up to me and say: 'Gee, I can't wait to get into film.' I think: 'Oh god, do you want a life? Do you like being poor?'"

"It's a closely guarded cartel, really, still pretty heavily male. You have to be able to run a long distance marathon, or you're just never going to get anywhere, as well as being a perfectionist maniac. If you're a real anal nitwit, this is the thing for you."

Anna found her link to the younger generation of her characters when she attended university in London as a mature student.

"I was hanging out with quite a lot of younger

people. I thought: 'Gee, I'm not having to talk down or anything.' In fact, they were giving me a few ideas. I thought: 'Hey, the whole way they're perceived is a little bit on the juvenilia level, and why do that? Let's raise it a bit and let's keep it a bit more as they really do chat, and then just test that out in rehearsals.' [I would] just say to people: 'Would you really say this or is this crap?'"

Research included setting up a camera and interviewing a couple of dozen "very cool looking kids". This exercise yielded some of the ideas for the trip scenes.

"There was quite a lot happening in London at the time with a lot of E," explains Anna, "but we didn't use Ecstasy because it really hasn't got the legal pressures on it. It's not quite deemed such a dangerous drug."

Or quite such an expensive drug, in the monetary sense, at least.

"The only dangers with [acid are], right, who made it and what's in it. Also, is everybody sane [laughs], before they take it? 'Cause some people can be naturally more imaginative and they'll probably fly off, and the walls will all go bananas, and so on. Other people will be able to drive a car. You can't predict that, that's the only little problem."

Bringing a young cast together to make a film about a young cast being brought together to make a film resulted in more parallels than those in this sentence.

"They were quite wild guys and girls. I went along to a couple of their... well, you wouldn't even call them discos; you know that music that was banned, that sort of serial music

[does an imitation of a techno beat] that goes on like that. I was thinking: 'Oh my god.' I'd rather [young people] were doing a lot of other things, but if they don't get into burglary and heavy violence, I think, more or less, the police attitude is 'leave them alone' in London."

The characters' attempts at film making drew another parallel, this one with Anna's own early efforts.

"I did make some really dumb, highly avant garde stuff. In fact, I threw a lot of money into something that was just too weird and ridiculous: [chuckling at the memory] this girl taking her clothes off in front of this sort of mentor, and then making this huge sculpture. It was even sillier, in a way, than the *Loaded* stuff."

Needless to say, it didn't thwart Anna's film making career plans. Her sister Jane was a source of great encouragement. Jane's own success proved a mixed blessing for Anna.

"You can pick up some of the more malicious people waiting in the wings. You feel like you've sort of been set-up, like Caesar with Brutus — 'Here's the second one, we'll have a good go at her' — dagger ready. Sometimes it's been good because they tend to think: 'Oh, maybe there's something genetic there, shall we put some money in?' So, it really is a mixed bag. In fact, Jane was so concerned about it that she said to me: 'Look, why don't you change your name? I don't want you getting all crap.' Then she revealed to me that some people have been quite vicious. But then I thought:

'Oh god, then I have to try and remember who they're talking about.' I also thought: 'It's good to have two sisters out there, not just for myself, but for other women,' because we are the only two that I know of. In the end, they can do what they like to you; basically, you've got to know somewhere in yourself that you're not that bad."

Perhaps those responsible for throwing stones at *Loaded* simply do not "get it", or maybe there was nothing in the genes after all. *Loaded* sure ain't *The Piano*, but how could one expect it to be? How many sisters do you know who share the same mind? Whatever the case, Anna believes showing the film to her home country first was the right thing to do.

"Quite often New Zealand gets it last, because everybody thinks they can't make up their own minds. 'Oh god, they won't know what to think. Look, tell you what we'll do, we'll send it off to America and we'll tell them what to think.' This time I just thought: 'Why?' They're grown up enough. If they like it, they like it. You don't have a different emotional response just because you're a New Yorker."

"It's good that where you grew up can get it. I've always thought they could anyway, but people were worried that [mimics a whiner] they wouldn't think it was funny. I mean, god, we don't come from Mars and then from Venus. It is the same human species we're delving into here — maybe they'll see the same joke."

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