



The upside and downside of COVID-19

Don Groves · Film News TV & Streaming · March 20, 2020



Ben Allan and Clara Chong.

While production shutdowns are causing mass unemployment among all sectors of the screen sector, some practitioners see an upside.



Main Course Films' writer/director Clara Chong and producer/DOP Ben Allan are in post on *Wabi-Sabi*, a deeply personal feature doc on ageing and death centred on Clara's mother, who suffered from multiple system atrophy (MSA), a rare neurodegenerative disorder.

"Because Clara and I do the majority of our projects together, doing post production at home has meant we can do things like put the kids to bed and then go back to colour grading," Allan tells IF.

"Now in the time of the coronavirus, it means we can be social distancing while staying on schedule with post on the film and our other projects."

Producer Steve Jaggi, who has Rosie Lourde's debut feature *Romance on the Menu* in post, sees an upside for Australian content creators, predicting: "There will be significant opportunities for Australian content producers as global production has all but ceased while demand is going through the roof and will only continue to grow. We are receiving numerous emails every day from buyers who are in desperate need of new content."

The Brisbane-based Steve Jaggi Company, which on Monday will close its office for two weeks while staff work from home, is re-gearing its slate towards series and films aimed at digital platforms and away from art-house and festival-driven content.

The producer intends to start shooting a tropical romance directed by Christine Luby as soon as insurance policies permit and he is developing co-productions with Vancouver-based Sepia Films and projects with Rhiannon Bannenberg, Rosie Lourde, Hayley McFarlane, Claire Harris, Adrian Powers and Caera Bradshaw.

Jaggi adds: "While there will be opportunities there will also be drastic changes. Production time-frames will shorten and budgets will shrink. We will see a shift to smaller crews utilising new technologies, smaller camera and lighting setups."

Insuring cast and crew is problematic for producers since insurance companies excluded pandemics from their coverage.

"This is a big issue for everyone," says CJZ's Nick Murray, who has several drama series in the pipeline for later this year and *Reputation Rehab* in post for the ABC.

"If you've got a show going into production from now on and you put your cast and crew through medical check-ups, no one will be able to cover for COVID-19. If someone contacts the disease you would have to shut down temporarily."

A Screen Australia spokesman said: "Our content and legal teams are aware of this and working with our stakeholders as this situation evolves."

The producers of Baz Luhrmann's untitled Elvis Presley biopic for Warner Bros. initially said the start date had been pushed back for about two weeks to allow time for Tom Hanks, who plays Colonel Tom Parker, to recover after he and his wife Rita Wilson tested positive for the disease.

But today a spokesperson said: "Despite valiant efforts, due to current world events production on the Elvis film cannot proceed at this time. We will commence principal photography once circumstances permit."

Matchbox Pictures hopes to resume production on *Clickbait* and *The Real Housewives of Melbourne* as soon as it's safe to do so.

"While everyone is working from home across our Sydney and Melbourne offices it is business as usual. We are pressing on with a lot of development and we're going to get a lot of writing done," says Matchbox Pictures MD Alastair McKinnon.

The postponement of the Cannes Film Festival and Marché du Film is a blow to the Aussies who were planning to attend.

'Moon Rock for Monday.'

Lunar Pictures' Jim Robison had booked his flights and was hoping to secure rest-of-the-world sales for *Moon Rock for Monday*, a coming-of-age road movie starring George Pullar and Ashlyn Loudon-Gamble from first-time writer-director Kurt Martin, which is in post.

"Producers rely on markets to not only nurture pre-existing relationships with sales agents but establish new ones," Robison says. "I imagine our development timeline across our slate will suffer a dent. I don't think I will be attending anymore."

Chong and Allan self-financed *Wabi-Sabi* and are in discussion with a UK network and a US sales agent. The duo began filming at her mother Kazuko's aged care facility last August a day after she said she was feeling suicidal.

The title refers to the Japanese philosophy of finding perfection from imperfection. Clara showed her mother work-in-progress footage in October. "She cried for the person she was and the person she became, but mostly she cried because she said she was so happy I was telling her story," Clara says.

Kazuko died on February 22 with her two daughters by her side.

In other COVID-19 related developments, *Wicked of Oz*'s Justin Dix is in London and hoping to get one of the last flights out of the country.

"With self isolation looming on my return, I plan on working on several smaller independent projects we have in the works and trying to work out if they can be done with reduced crews and perhaps sporadic schedules," Dix says.

Talent agent Sarah Linsten fears for the future of performers, observing: "Securing a job is as hard as it always has been but the thought of cancellation without pay and all future projects put on hold is devastating.

"The impact will be big and it will come down to the basics. How did I pay my rent and bills? If there is no acting, then there has always been casual jobs to get the funds which are now also gone."

McGregor Casting's Kirsty McGregor says: "I'm still working on shows which are in pre pre-production that weren't planning to shoot until later in the year - but this could change any day."

Tasmanian-based location manager, copywriter and content producer Kate Fox set up the Facebook page Hobart Freelancers & Sole Traders in Film and TV after many of her colleagues had work cancelled.

"The screen industry in Tasmania was only just starting to take off, largely thanks to productions like *The Gloaming*, *The Nightingale* and *Rosehaven* showcasing the island to interstate and international filmmakers and marketers," Fox says.

"I'm hearing now from others in the Facebook group and industry friends that many large-scale shoots and campaigns are being put on ice."

TAGS

- #ADRIAN-POWERS
- #BAZ-LUHRMANN
- #BEN-ALLAN
- #CANNES-FILM-FESTIVAL
- #CHRISTINE-LUBY
- #CLICKBAIT
- #JIM-ROBISON
- #JUSTIN-DIX
- #KATE-FOX
- #KIRSTY-MCGREGOR
- #MOON-ROCK-FOR-MONDAY
- #RHIANNON-BANNENBERG
- #ROSEHAVEN
- #ROSIE-LOURDE
- #STEVE-JAGGI
- #THE-GLOAMING
- #TOM-HANKS
- #WABI-SABI

SHARE TWEET SHARE

Related < >

Leave a Reply

Logged in as clarachong@maincoursefilms.com. Edit your profile. Log out? Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

Notify me of new posts by email.

SUBMIT