

F*** Club: Gatekeeping⁵ in the New Zealand Film Industry

By [REDACTED]

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Have they told you yet? The first rule of filmmaking? Because for many of the hopeful up-and-comers in Dunedin, no one's bothered. Contrary to what local brochures, and filmmaking classes are trying to make you believe, Dunedin, for all its rich history of art and culture is not one known for its film scene.

So the big question is, why? It seems we have everything needed to be a city pumping out arthouse indie hits. Beautiful locations, talented innovators and the drive to create. But the answer to our big why lies in the hands of the current industry. Because, unlike art, literature or music, which Dunedin is known for being proficient in, filmmaking is one of the few disciplines that is largely inaccessible to the young creatives wanting to make it their future.

So, what is the first rule of filmmaking? The first rule of filmmaking is that you do not talk about making films. At least not to them young folk.

Current young filmmakers would agree. When local authorities market Dunedin's film potential, the ears of young creatives wanting to be in the film scene are quickly filled with syrupy, but empty promises. In the eyes of [REDACTED], current Year 11 student at [REDACTED], and founder of film production company [REDACTED], the Dunedin being marketed as an indie filmmaker's dream is something just shy of an illusion. When it comes to genuinely supporting our local young talent, production support is few and far between. [REDACTED] has experienced several hiccups in his filmmaking that he believes older filmmakers do not. When asked about his challenges while filmmaking, [REDACTED] said "I find it challenging juggling filmmaking and school work particularly considering as someone trying to get into the industry, I do nearly everything myself, writing, shooting, editing, delivering."

In some ways, there's a gatekeeping of funding, resources and knowledge from young filmmakers by older creatives. But this gatekeeping isn't always deliberate. Like previously stated, there's a serious lack of opportunities for all filmmakers in Dunedin. The film industry is extremely competitive. This means, that even if it isn't deliberate, there's a culture in which the language of making films is spoken and interpreted behind closed doors. If you're not already in that room, it's difficult to know whether or not the room even exists.

But, now we do know where the room is. How do we get there? In Dunedin, young filmmakers all have similar stories about a lack of clear pathways. Right now, both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] offer students

courses in film and media, yet students in both talk about the lack of set job opportunities once leaving school.

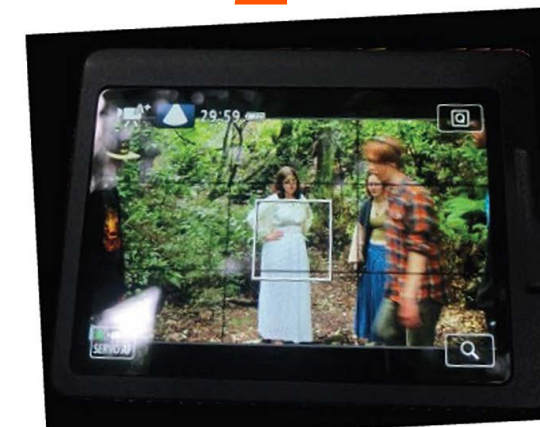
As frustrated as we can be about the lack of opportunities for young filmmakers in this city, Dunedin is actually a breeding ground for some

of New Zealand's best artistic endeavours. As a UNESCO city of literature, and famously home to some of Aotearoa's most successful musicians like Six60, The Clean and The 3Ds, Dunedin boasts a rich history of successful creative endeavours. But our city has an uncomfortable gap of achievements in local filmmaking. In Dr. Geoff Lealand's Cinemas of New Zealand, he notes that New Zealand's film infrastructure is notoriously centralised, and largely based in Auckland and Wellington, while other regions, like us here in Otepoti, are left fighting for creative scraps.

Lealand argues that "filmmaking continues to rely upon deeply entrenched networks of capital, mentorship and access, all of which are unevenly distributed." In Dunedin, this lack of access really shows. Even nationwide youth filmmaking competitions like the New Zealand Youth Film Festival are always held in Auckland or Wellington.

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In between what seems to be a series of unending concerts, literature festivals and theater shows in Dunedin lies an eerily silent film scene.

This makes absolutely no sense. In the past, when young Dunedin filmmakers have been given a chance, they've made waves. The 1999 black-comedy film *Scarfies*, written by local Dunedin brothers Robert and Duncan Sarkies, and directed by Robert, was a box-office hit centering completely on an absurd Otago university experience. It grossed \$1.2

million dollars, and showed the world that when given a chance, young kiwi filmmakers could produce greatness. Yet they're constantly left out to dry.

Robert Sarkies talked in depth about his

portrayal of Dunedin in a 2018 Critic Magazine interview. "Every time you put something out into the world, and it resonates with the culture, it becomes part of the culture. It was my dream that it would help give that culture, for a period, a specific identity, in the same way the capping shows of old and the Dunedin Sound did."

Robert and Duncan Sarkies, although brilliant, were not the only talented young filmmakers in Dunedin. Rather, they were really the only ones given a chance. The New Zealand film commission gave them \$1.6 million dollars to create what would soon become an iconic gloomy, dull picture of mid-winter Dunedin.



They were able to make those iconic choices because someone believed in them. So when will another set of young creatives get that chance? Not much has changed in terms of opportunity since Dr Lealand's findings. In 2020, a report by Screen Industry NZ showed that over 85% of Aotearoa's screen production jobs are located in only three cities. Auckland, Wellington and Queenstown. How many of those jobs are available to young people making films? Young Dunedin filmmakers

aren't getting lost on the path, they're being banned from trekking it. Dr Alistair Fox argues in *New Zealand Cinema: Interpreting the Past* (2011), "filmmaking requires more than isolated

opportunities. It requires a sustained ecology of creative, technical and financial support". This is something Dunedin can't offer.

So, young filmmakers in Dunedin are severely lacking in funds, resources and investment. This means for many young filmmakers, their only choice is to leave. Filmmakers, old and young alike are told to move to Auckland, jump onto a film crew in Queenstown or try to get a job at Weta. Attractively, unlike Dunedin, there are unique filmmaking opportunities offered to young people. But this isn't just an economic loss, this is a cultural one.



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