

FILM IN THE EIGHTIES

STEREOTYPES AND ACTION HEROES

The Australian film industry continued to thrive in the 1980s after its revival in the 1970s. Iconic films *Gallipoli* (1981), *The Man from Snowy River* (1982) and Paul Hogan's *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) and *Crocodile Dundee II* (1988) all enjoyed success domestically and internationally. They were distinctly Australian in portraying stereotypical Australian male qualities such as bravery, mateship, resourcefulness, larrikinism and a lack of respect for authority. There were certainly other Australian stories being told; the book and then film, *Puberty Blues* (1981) was unique in that it candidly explored the world of teenage girls within Australian surf culture.

Despite the success of these films, US action blockbusters *The Terminator* (1984), *Lethal Weapon* (1987) and *Die Hard* (1988) as well as science fiction films *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi* (1983) and *Ghostbusters* (1984) provided considerable competition for the Australian film industry. *Back to the Future* (1985) was a film that many young people could identify with, as it featured a teenager witnessing the shortcomings of his own parents when they were teenagers. Other teen films the likes of *Footloose* (1984), *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Pretty in Pink* (1986) and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) also seemed to strike a chord with young generation Xers, as they all starred young actors and were set in the world of teenagers (albeit US teenagers) just as had happened in films of the 1950s for the baby boomer generation.



SOURCE 4.5.4 The sprawling bush landscape as represented in *The Man from Snowy River* (1992)

- Q** 1 What interpretation of Australian culture is portrayed in this image?
- 2 Why is the story of *The Man from Snowy River* so easily identified as Australian?

MUSIC IN THE NINETIES

International artists of the 1980s such as Michael Jackson and Madonna were still very popular in the 1990s, as were many of the big bands including Bon Jovi, U2, Guns N' Roses (who had emerged in the mid-1980s), and Australia's INXS and AC/DC. **Mainstream music**, promoted heavily by large recording companies on radio and television, was mostly classed as contemporary rhythm and blues, contemporary rock, or simply **pop**. Pop music lyrics were mostly about love and relationships and were not overly threatening to parents or conservative values. Some have compared much of this music to the bubblegum music of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the way it was deliberately produced for a particular market (in this case generation X). Janet Jackson, soft rockers Alanis Morissette and Sheryl Crow, and ballad singers such as Michael Bolton, Celine Dion, Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey were all popular.

Pop groups such as Backstreet Boys and the Spice Girls from Britain performed catchy lyrics to electro-pop music with highly choreographed video clips completing the package. A young Britney Spears burst onto the world stage in the late 1990s, drawing upon much of the same techniques. Even hip-hop had become mainstream in the 1990s, and hits from the likes of MC Hammer with 'U Can't Touch This' influenced dance and fashion trends.

POP MUSIC IN AUSTRALIA

In 1991, the Australian band Yothu Yindi released their hit song 'Treaty'. Yothu Yindi became known for their distinctive sound, combining didgeridoos, Yolngu Aboriginal language and dance with contemporary instruments. Their success reflected the mood of the time, as Australian people of all backgrounds more readily



SOURCE 4.5.5 Natalie Imbruglia performing in London, July 1998

embraced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, while acknowledging that there was still a lot to be done to mend the relationship with the country's first inhabitants. Australian performers Savage Garden, Natalie Imbruglia, Kylie Minogue and boy band Human Nature were popular in the 'mainstream' music scene of the 1990s.

ALTERNATIVE ROCK AND GRUNGE

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the emergence of **alternative rock**, a style of music that produced guitar-based, raw sounds combining many different musical influences and styles. Alternative rock lyrics of the 1990s dealt with social and emotional issues that appealed to young people. Groups such as Violent Femmes, R.E.M., Red Hot Chilli Peppers, Counting Crows and Smashing Pumpkins from the United States often found early success on university campuses or in small 'underground' nightclubs and bars frequented by young people. Similarly, Britain produced bands such as Oasis and Blur.

The '**underground**' scene was born out of opposition to the heavily commercialised music of the 1980s. It became an important outlet for youth culture to choose the way in which it would express itself. Small youth radio stations played the music of the Whitlams, You Am I, Regurgitator, the Cruel Sea and Spiderbait in Australia. Although classed as 'alternative', this type of music eventually reached vast numbers of young people, as the new technology of compact discs (CDs) allowed popular artists to be signed up by large recording companies who promoted their music globally. The Australian government-owned Triple J radio station played a significant role in bringing alternative music to a wider audience, as well as uncovering new Australian talent such as the band Grinspoon.



SOURCE 4.5.6 Members of the band Nirvana, including the deceased lead singer Kurt Cobain (left)

- Q** 1 Describe how Nirvana is being portrayed in the photograph?
- 2 Is this photograph posed? How can you tell?

A musical phenomenon of the early 1990s was the style of music known as **grunge**. It emerged from the alternative music scene in Seattle in the United States and was based on heavy drums; loud, distorted guitars and 'power chords'; lyrics that reflected the angst of many young generation Xers; and the deliberate absence of synthesiser-based sounds. The most well-known grunge band of the 1990s was Nirvana, with its lead singer and guitarist Kurt Cobain epitomising grunge culture and the 'whatever' attitude of some generation Xers. Other groups included Alice in Chains, Soundgarden and Pearl Jam, with Australian teenage group Silverchair becoming very successful locally and internationally.

DID YOU KNOW? While the serious alternative and grunge music scene was evolving, in 1991, Australian group the Wiggles started their successful global career entertaining children.

RAVES

The discos of the 1970s and dance parties of the 1980s evolved into **raves** in the 1990s. Raves were an aspect of 1990s global sub-culture rather than popular culture, but were attended by large numbers of young people. They were introduced to Australia via Europe and Britain in particular, and represented another rebellion by youth against commercialised music. Originally taking place in inner-city suburbs, and later spreading to outer suburbs and rural venues, young people gathered in warehouses or pavilions at showgrounds to dance through the night to energetic, electronically generated **techno** music. Raves usually included elaborate light and laser effects, video



SOURCE 4.5.7 Silverchair formed in Newcastle, New South Wales. Their debut track 'Tomorrow' spent six weeks on top of the Australian singles chart in 1994.

- Q** 1 How is Silverchair being portrayed in a similar way to Nirvana in Source 4.5.6? What can you learn about the nature of popular culture from this?
- 2 What explanations for the development of grunge music can be found in Sources 4.5.6 and 4.5.7?