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**Saturday Night at the Movies**

Three-part special on the story of Australian cinemas

Starts Saturday, January 17, 7.30pm EST on FOX Classics

This month, FOX Classics presents *Saturday Night at the Movies*, a three-part special on the story of Australian cinemas.

For most of the past one hundred years Australians have been going out to the pictures. Today, despite movies being delivered in multiple formats, more than half of us still go out to a cinema at least once a year. But there was a time when most people went every week, and it was by far the most important entertainment event in their lives.

Produced by Graham McNeice from Shadow Productions and narrated by Graeme Blundell, *Saturday Night at the Movies* is an ode to the picture palaces, the flicks in the sticks and the drive-ins around the nation - the beauty of the buildings and the customs and conventions of times gone by with the flourishes of velvet curtains, standing for the National Anthem, gloved commissionaires, candy men with trays and so much more.

The episodes feature more than 90 interviews with historians, theatre owners, managers, projectionists, ushers and usherettes, directors, actors and all of them movie lovers, including John Brown AO, Anthony Buckley AO, Philip Brady, John Burgess, Bill Collins OAM, Frank Crook, John Cronin, Mark Day, Wendy Day, Denise Drysdale, Alan Finney OAM, Bob Francis OAM, Ian Hanson, John-Michael Howson OAM, Matthew Le Nevez, Brian Leonard, Baz Luhrmann, Prue MacSween, Todd McKenney, Molly Meldrum AM, Andrew Mercado, Di Morrissey, Jack Mundey, Bob Rogers OAM, Peter Smith OAM, Ken Sutcliffe, John Tapp OAM, Jack Thompson AM, Maria Venuti AM, John Wood and Ann Wills.

In the early 20th century movies were often played in rented halls. Then, following World War I, film exhibitors became empire builders and the names which would become famous began to emerge – Hoyts, Union (Greater Union), Birch, Carroll & Coyle. The Depression hit hard but the industry survived and post World War II there was a golden age of prosperity and by 1951 there were more than 1600 movie theatres spread across the country.

**Episode One: The Golden Era and the Empire Builders**

– to air January 17 at 7.30pm EST

- An overview of the glory days of the cinemas when there were Saturday matinees for the children with adventure movies, extra cartoons and serials but it was Saturday night that was the big night out. Ladies would get their hair done for an outing to the movies and everyone was dressed to impress.

- The emergence of the business of cinemas, the distribution and the architectural wonders. Stuart Doyle founded Union Theatres, later amalgamated to become Greater Union. Frank Thring (Snr) ran Hoyts and had his plush Regent Theatres. There were the magnificent atmospheric theatres; five were built but only two remain - The Capitol in Sydney and the Forum in Melbourne. The Coyle Brothers (later part of Birch, Carroll & Coyle) and their Wintergarden chain of cinemas in Queensland. The story of Dan Clifford in South Australia and his Star Theatres as well as T.J. West and his West/ Olympia Theatres; and South Australia's Wallis Chain of Cinemas which still exist today. The episode covers other independents such as the Ace and Grand Theatre circuits in WA and Hobart’s State Theatre; the birth of the Village Roadshow empire and more recently, the Palace Theatres, created by the passionate Antonio Zeccola.
Episode Two: *The Theatre Beautiful, Drive-Ins and Flicks in the Sticks*
– to air January 24 at 7.30pm EST

- Focusing on the beauty of the cinemas in the big cities and the suburbs - The Regent, Wintergarden, Prince Edward, St James, Embassy, Mayfair, Esquire, Lyceum, Century, Paris, Plaza, Barclay, Athenaeum, Regal, Roxy, Odeon, Civic, Kings, Empire and Ambassador.

- Perhaps our most popular cinemas were the drive-ins, and this episode relives all their fun and games for both families and lovers alike. Surprisingly, our first drive-in was actually at a sports park in Townsville in 1941 and heralded a booming business nationwide. Now, only a handful of them survive.

- The stories of travelling picture show men bringing the films to outback and often open-air “cinemas” and many community halls before the regional cinemas were built. Invariably every major town in Australia boasted of one or more picture theatres, and often they were the most loved building in town. Some, like the Sun Theatre in Broome, have survived for almost a hundred years.

Episode Three: *The Coming of Television, Survival and Restoration*
– to air January 31 at 7.30pm EST

- The introduction of television in the US was a shock and a warning for Australian cinema owners. From 1956, Australians were no longer dependent on movies for their main entertainment – they could stay at home, without paying any money or having to dress up to see movies and newsreels, and also got sitcoms, nightly news and sports. The cinemas began to decline and the wrecker’s ball was in full swing nationwide.

- However, while TV was only black and white the cinemas fought back. The movie makers countered with blockbuster movies on bigger, wrap-around screens such Todd-AO and Cinerama. Eventually some of the picture palaces lost the fight. Some closed down and others survived by being transformed into multiplexes.

- There were still people passionate for the old theatres and who worked to preserve them. This segment tells of how some great cinema buildings were saved – including Melbourne’s Regent, Plaza and Her Majesty’s; Sydney’s State and Capitol; North Adelaide’s Capri and Piccadilly and Hobart’s State. Entertainer and entrepreneur Mike Walsh has been one of the most active savours, with his showpiece restorations of Melbourne’s Her Majesty’s and the art deco Cremorne Orpheum in Sydney. Many in regional Australia, such as the Laurieton Plaza in NSW, have been fully restored to their original magnificence.

- The ongoing passion of cinema lovers Australia-wide continues to preserve this great heritage for future generations.

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