

MICHAEL HUTCHENCE

# Dogs of Space

A film by  
RICHARD LOWENSTEIN

## **DOGS IN SPACE**

### **SYNOPSIS**

Set against the backdrop of Melbourne's late 70s punk rock scene, Dogs in Space chronicles life in a chaotic, squalid share house. Hippies, addicts, students and radicals fill their days and nights with sex, drugs, parties and television. A series of chaotic vignettes are balanced with the central romance between Sam (Michael Hutchence), the lead singer of the band, Dogs in Space and his lover Anna (Saskia Post) as the house spirals out of control. Hutchence is a brilliant symbol of reckless youth in this, his first dramatic screen role, giving Dogs in Space instant cult status upon its original release in 1986.

Shortly following its release, Dogs in Space achieved cult status, and received Official Selection for the Berlin, Edinburgh, London, and New York Film Festivals. It has since been described by Geoff Andrew of Time Out as an "uplifting and deliciously different movie," and was also singled out for praise by Harlan Kennedy of Film Comment magazine as one of a number of films from the late 1980s which brought "shifting perspectives, structural experiment, and highly discomfiting stories and characters" into the fold of Australian cinema. Unscreened for over twenty years, this classic film has been painstakingly restored from the original negative and remixed in 5.1 digital sound.

### **PRODUCTION COMPANIES**

GHOST PICTURES PTY. LTD.  
CENTRAL PARK FILMS PTY. LTD.  
ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA  
THE BURROWES FILM GROUP  
FILM VICTORIA

### **AUSTRALIAN DISTRIBUTOR**

UMBRELLA ENTERTAINMENT

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ORIGINAL RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 1, 1987.

RATING: MA

RUNNING TIME: 103 MINUTES

ORIGINAL FILM STOCK: KODAK 5294, COLOUR.

ORIGINAL FORMAT: 35MM

DISTRIBUTION FORMAT: HDCAM

LOCATION: MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.

## **PRINCIPAL CREW**

PRODUCERS – GLENYS ROWE & RICHARD LOWENSTEIN

DIRECTOR – RICHARD LOWENSTEIN

SCRIPTWRITER – RICHARD LOWENSTEIN

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY – ANDREW DE GROOT

EDITOR – JILL BILCOCK

ART DIRECTION – JODY BORLAND

MUSIC – OLLIE OLSEN & ROWLAND S. HOWARD

SOUND RECORDIST – DEAN GAWEN

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS – ROBERT LE TET AND DENNIS WRIGHT

## **PRINCIPAL CAST**

MICHAEL HUTCHENCE as SAM

SASKAI POST as ANNA

NIQUE NEEDLES as TIM

DEANNA BOND as THE GIRL

TONY HELOU as LUCHIO

CHRIS HAYWOOD as CHAINSAW MAN

GARY FOLEY as BARRY

CAROLINE LEE as JENNY

EDWARD CLAYTON– JONES as NICK

MARTII COLES as MARK

PETER WALSH as ANTHONY

LAURA SWANSON as CLARE

ADAM BRISCOMB as GRANT

SHARON JESSOP as LEANNE

# PREVIEW

# FILM

*Releases, revivals and rarities reviewed, plus scurrilous scumbags Waldo Lydecker and C*  
*Edited by Brian Case and Geoff Andrew.*



**'Dogs in Space'** (A-Z for venues)

A squat in Melbourne, 1978: discernible among the roaches, mouldering cans of beans, Eno albums and the odd sheep are the truly terrible punk band of the title, a gaggle of hippies, students and nurses — all tireless party-goers — and sundry visitors including a chainsaw fanatic and two strangely amiable cops sniffing half-heartedly for drugs and worrying about the endless noise. Into this seething heap drifts the Girl, a taciturn waif whose perceptions of the house's giggling, garrulous grotesques form the narrative spring-

board for Richard Lowenstein's admirably adventurous film. Sure to be characterised as some sort of rock-movie, it is in fact a remarkably rich portrait both of a much-maligned sub-culture and of the end of an era: story, for the most part, is held at bay, with the vividly realised drongos interacting in impressionist fragments as apparently chaotic yet as carefully structured as 'Nashville'. Indeed, like Altman, Lowenstein has created a hybrid original. At once superbly crafted (the fluid camera-movements and imaginative 'Scope compositions evincing a truly sensuous

cinematic talent) and packed with the seemingly spontaneous observations of a surreal ethnological documentary, 'Dogs' steadily progresses from bemused comedy to surprisingly romantic elegy: perhaps Lowenstein's finest achievement is that he generously but unsentimentally allows his initially irritating, immature characters to become interesting and sympathetic. If it's finally impossible to categorise this complex, challenging movie, suffice to say it's funny, moving, uplifting and deliciously different.

*Geoff Andrew*



## DOGS IN SPACE

**R**ICHARD Lowenstein's pseudo-punk epic is glamorous despite itself. Set in Australia's more urban wasteland in the late Seventies, it portrays a totally convincing group of layabouts and drug fiends who abuse a communal house, each other, and themselves. At the centre of this hedonistic household is the lousy garageband Dogs In Space, fronted by the narcissistic Sam (Michael Hutchence). The prima donna pop star carries off the role brilliantly after a (deliberately?) shaky start. Running a weary hand through dank hair does not necessarily constitute immersion in the part, but soon he's pulled out enough self-effacing flourishes to swing it.

And "Dogs In Space" swings. It rushes. It babbles and trips over itself. But it captures the spirit of the thing and the joyful egotism of the era with an accuracy and verve only an insider could attain. The entire cast are an energised, intimate ensemble. The comedy is irreverent and gritty and there are deft touches of melancholy, as when Sam kicks the keyboard player out of the band (this uses about three lines of throwaway dialogue but the emotions are pulsating).

The characters in "Dogs In Space" are sometimes adorable, sometimes repulsive. It is in a way a very wry and understated film which just happens to be full of yelling and parties and quaffing and coupling. Saskia Post in the key role of Sam's girlfriend and lighthouse Anna is positively translucent. After a climax of some chaos (Why? Why? Why do you set fire to your television?) and confusion ("What's that by the fridge?" "Oh, it's a sheep.") this adroit story attempts an ending of elevated romanticism. I can't say any more. But I was in *floods* . . .

People in "the business" will slag it off because it's too unnervingly true, too close to home. But it's the most effective innocence-and-experience message movie (because the least *preachy*) in some time. And it topples "That'll Be The Day" and "Stardust" as the best film about rock 'n' roll ever made. Because rock 'n' roll or whatever you want to call it is *not* just about *music*.

Let me do that again, it's a good feeling. The best film about rock 'n' roll ever made.

CHRIS ROBERTS



# The drug world: an ugly life on the periphery

## DOGS IN SPACE

Directed and written by  
Richard Lowenstein.  
Rated R.

Hoyts.

## Reviews by DAVID STRATTON

**O**N the basis of one short film (*Evictions*, 1982) and two features (*Strikebound*, 1983, and *Dogs in Space*), 27-year-old Melbourne filmmaker Richard Lowenstein is currently one of Australia's most interesting directors. He belongs, very loosely, to the classical documentary tradition, in that he's not so much interested in telling stories as evoking a time and a place and a way of life.

*Strikebound* dealt with a 1930s coal-miners strike in Gippsland, and its depiction of a community of Welsh-born mine-workers and their wives has stayed, indelibly, in the memory. The community presented in his new film is far removed from those working class heroes, but his people will, once again, be hard to forget.

The setting is the Melbourne inner-suburb of Richmond, about nine years ago. In a narrow street alongside a factory there's an ordinary two-storey house, a house which occupies the same central-point that the coal mine occupied in *Strikebound*. It's a house occupied by a variety of young people, some of them permanent residents, others more transitory. The place is a mess: there's garbage everywhere, empty beer cans, unwashed dishes all over the kitchen. Few of us haven't experienced a communal house like this at some stage of our lives. If we haven't lived in one, we've visited friends (or sons or daughters) in one.

Among the half-a-dozen permanent residents in the house are Sam (Michael Hutchence) and his girl, Anna (Saskia Post). Like the others, they're from straight middle-class families: like the hippies of the previous decade, they've opted out and become a peripheral part of the punk culture. Sam is a member of a punk band and takes hard drugs; Anna works as a nurse (she'd like to be an air-hostess) and goes along with Sam because she loves him.

There's also Tim (Nique Needles), who has temporarily gone off girls and

acts as an amiably off-the-wall father confessor to his friends: Luchio (Tony Holou), who tries, vainly, to study for his exams in a house where deafening music is constantly played and there's a party almost every night; Anthony (Peter Walsp) and Jenny (Caroline Lee), vegetarians and left-over hippies, who are into untrendy things like peace and love; and a young girl (Deanna Bond), who just drifts into the house and stays, never saying who she is or where she's from, and eventually losing her virginity to Tim.

Lowenstein's objective is not to tell a straightforward narrative about these people, so audiences looking for a conventionally structured film will come away frustrated. Rather, the aim is to tell a story obliquely, in the margins as it were, while exploring the lives of these young people as if they were the subjects of a documentary about a lost tribe. To achieve this, Lowenstein and his superlative young cameraman, Andrew de Groot (who was also responsible for the images of *Strikebound*) have created a wholly authentic world. It's not, frankly, a world everyone will be happy to enter; it's noisy, often unlovely, often rather harrowing. But as a depiction of a lifestyle it seems utterly honest.

One of the extraordinary achievements of this immensely impressive film is the ensemble acting. As Sam, Hutchence — lead singer of the group INXS — is most effective; Saskia Post makes Anna a heart-breaking character who goes along with the man she loves until it's just too late. Indeed, all these young actors are beyond praise, and there are also a couple of marvellous cameos: the ever-reliable Chris Haywood as a visitor with a weird fixation for chainsaws, and Fiona Latham as a very serious, very radical girl who finds it impossible to communicate her ideologies in this apolitical environment.

I can't comment on the quality of the music in the film: Lowenstein has suggested that it isn't meant to be good, but it's certainly loud. Teenagers will doubtless be attracted to the film by its musical soundtrack, but few of them will be legally admitted, thanks to the controversial decision of the Film Censorship Board (and the usually more responsible Films Board of Review) to impose an R rating on the film.

Censorship will, I suppose, always be a contentious issue, and the rights and wrongs of the matter are really outside the scope of this review. Suffice to note that Lowenstein has stated that one of the themes in the film was motivated by the death of a friend from an unexpected drug overdose; and that, although admittedly there's drug use throughout the film, the use of hard drugs is always accompanied by pain and anguish and, eventually, death.

I find it hard to believe that anyone could come out of the film feeling that the use of drugs would be fun: on the contrary, the film's message (underlined by an opening title stressing that the film's makers do not advocate drug use) seems to be manifestly anti-hard drugs.

Censors have made mistakes before, and in rating *Dogs in Space* in a way that teenagers won't be able to see it, I think they've made a mistake again. Hopefully the full reasons for their decision (their official statement — that the use of drugs in the film is depicted as "not only acceptable but also 'trendy' and attractive" — seems nonsense) will soon be made public. Meanwhile, the film has lost its prime Christmas booking at Hoyts as a result of the R rating and stands to lose a good deal more financially. It's too good a film to deserve such a fate.



Sam (Michael Hutchence) and Anna (Saskia Post) ... a life of hard drugs and punk bands.



## DOGS IN SPACE

### PRINCIPAL CREW BIOGRAPHIES

#### WRITER/DIRECTOR/PRODUCER – RICHARD LOWENSTEIN

Richard Lowenstein graduated from the Swinburne Film and Television school in 1979 and has produced, written and directed five feature films including *Strikebound* (1984), the *Dogs in Space* (1986), *Say a Little Prayer* (1993) and 'He Died With A Felafel In His Hand' (2000) and most recently the feature documentary *We're Livin' On Dog Food* (2009). He has also directed the television films *Ghost Story* (1995) and the UK featurette *White City* (1985). *Strikebound* was nominated for nine AFI Awards, winning for Best Production Design, won the Jury Prize at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in 1985 and was officially selected for Critics Week at the 1985 Venice Film Festival. *Dogs in Space* was in official selection for the Berlin, Taormina, London, Edinburgh and New York Film Festivals and *Say a Little Prayer* was also in official selection for the Berlin, Giffoni & Bellizona Film Festivals.

Richard has directed numerous landmark music videos for the likes of U2, INXS, Pete Townshend, Hunters & Collectors and Crowded House along with many award winning TV commercials including one for the Sandinista Government of Nicaragua's 1990 election campaign. He has also produced two satirical TV series for SBS Independent, 'John Safran's Music Jamboree' and 'John Safran versus GOD' as well as the feature documentary 'Intangible Asset Number 82'. He is a partner in the Melbourne-based production company, GHOST and also an active partner in the feature film production and sales company, Fandango Australia Pty Ltd with Italian producer Domenico Procacci and Australian producer Sue Murray.

Richard is currently financing his sixth dramatic feature film as a director, *Neil, Neil, Orange Peel* which is due to shoot in 2010.

<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/lowenstein.html>

#### PRODUCER – GLENYS ROWE

Born in Melbourne in 1953, Glenys attended University High School before moving to Adelaide and graduating from Flinders University in 1977 with a B.A. (Hons) degree majoring in film. She managed the National Film Theatre of Australia and worked with the Australian Film Commission as before becoming exhibition manager at the Australian Film Institute. She then joined Ronin Films to market Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson's Academy Award nominated *First Contact* and Richard Lowenstein's *Strikebound* before producing *Dogs in Space* in 1986. She has since produced the feature films, *Feeling Sexy* (1999), *Idiot Box* (1996) and *Greenkeeping* (1992) and in 2003 became the General Manager of SBS Independent (SBSI).

## DOGS IN SPACE

### CINEMATOGRAPHER – ANDREW DE GROOT

Andrew de Groot is one of Australia's most notable cinematographers. He graduated from Swinburne Film & Television School and two years later received an AFI nomination for his first feature as Director of Photography on Richard Lowenstein's *Strikebound*. He has photographed further feature films including *Dogs in Space*, *He Died With A Felafel In His Hand*, John Hillcoat's *To Have & To Hold* and Lynn-Maree Milburn's *Memories & Dreams* amongst others.

Andrew's dedication, passion and experience has seen him involved at the development phase of many projects both feature and documentary. He co-produced Amiel Courtin-Wilson's documentaries *Chasing Buddha* and *Bastardy* as well as Emma Franz's *Intangible Asset Number 82*. In 2000 he co-founded the production company GHOST with Richard Lowenstein & Lynn-Maree Milburn. He is currently co-producing the feature documentaries, *Ecco Homo*, *The Martin Grant Project* as well as Amiel Courtin-Wilson's *Ben Lee: Catch My Disease*.

### EDITOR – JILL BILCOCK

Jill Bilcock was born in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. She is a graduate of the Swinburne College of Technology. She won the 2002 Eddie Award (best edited comedy or musical feature film) for *Moulin Rouge!* for which she also received a nomination for the Academy Award for Film Editing. She has been nominated four times for the BAFTA Award for Best Editing. Three of these nominations were for *Moulin Rouge!* – (2002), *Romeo & Juliet* (1996) and *Strictly Ballroom* - 1992). The fourth BAFTA nomination was for *Elizabeth* (directed by Shekhar Kapur - 1998). Jill's other feature film credits include *Strikebound* (1984) *Just Friends* & *The More Things Change*.

### MUSICAL DIRECTOR – OLLIE OLSEN

Ollie Olsen is a musician and a composer. He was born in Melbourne and studied synthesizer under the legendary Felix Werder before teaching himself guitar and playing in a number of punk bands in the late-seventies. In 1977 he formed the bands, *The Young Charlatans* with Rowland S. Howard, *Whirlyworld*, *Hugo Klang*, *No* and *The Orchestra of Skin and Bone*. In 1984, Ollie supervised the reforming of many of the 'Little Bands' and worked on the production of music recordings for the *DOGS IN SPACE* soundtrack along with composing the song, *Rooms for the Memory*, sung by Michael Hutchence and released as a single in 1986 to coincide with the Australian premiere of the film. He has since composed music for the feature films, *Head On* and *The Loved Ones*.



## DOGS IN SPACE

### DIGITAL RESTORATION

After six years spent tracking down the original picture and sound materials, the original Super 35mm and magnetic sound of *Dogs In Space* were found in a Melbourne suburban garage in 2006. Once it was aired and cleaned, every frame of the negative was individually scanned at 4K resolution on an ARRISCAN and all the blemishes and negative damage removed digitally before the end result was re-graded under the supervision of the post-production company Complete Post and the original Cinematographer, Andrew de Groot.

The twelve reels of 4 track 35mm magnetic sound of the *Dogs In Space* original sound mix were discovered in a tea chest and had undergone significant damage. The tapes were initially baked in an adapted kitchen oven in order to stop the magnetic oxide shedding from the polyester backing tape. Once the tape was baked, it became temporarily playable with no perceptible deterioration of the sound and was then transferred on one of the only working Magnatech 35mm players in Australia to digital audio files which were then remixed and enhanced to a 5.1 digital track by the sound post production house, Soundfirm and restriped back onto whatever digital or 35mm delivery format was required.

The restoration of *Dogs In Space* and the accompanying feature-length documentary on the Melbourne Post-punk era, *We're Livin' On Dog Food* premiered at the Melbourne International Film Festival in 2009.

### WORLD SALES

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Available in HDCAM, e-cinema or PAL or NTSC Digibeta