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Night Fare

A short film about the Melbourne
taxi drivers of the Red Pepper restaurant

Press Kit

www.nightfare.com.au



TAXI

Short Synopsis

In the lonely night, Melbourne's Punjabi taxi drivers meet at the Red Pepper Indian restaurant to share the food of their homeland. *Night Fare* follows one driver in from the cold and into the bustle of a midnight sanctuary.

Long Synopsis

In the dead of the lonely night, Melbourne's Punjabi taxi drivers meet post-shift at the Red Pepper Indian restaurant. Outsiders in a foreign land, they find solidarity and companionship by sharing the food, language, music and culture of their homeland. *Night Fare* follows one driver in from the cold night and into the bustle of this early-morning scene. What emerges is an impression of a lively and unknown pocket of a new culture establishing itself in the heart of the sleeping metropolis.

NG HOURS



Technical Information

Ratio: 16:9
Format: Standard Definition PAL,
Stereo on Digibeta
Running Time: 5 minutes 40 secs
Shooting Format: DVC Pro 50

Shot over four nights in August 2009 and post-produced in September and October of 2009, *Night Fare* was made as part of the coursework requirements of the Graduate diploma of Documentary production at the Victorian College of the Arts and Music, University of Melbourne.

Directors Statement

I became interested in the Red Pepper restaurant and it's taxi-driver patrons in December of 2008. I had been out late one mid-week night in Melbourne's CBD and at about 2am my friends and I were looking for a taxi home. Normally a taxi would be easy to find at the top end of Bourke street but although many taxis were parked there, none had a driver ready to whisk us back to our homes. As we walked further up the street we noticed the Red Pepper Indian restaurant was the only place still open and it was absolutely packed with taxi drivers eating their post-shift meals. One of them agreed to give us a lift and on the way home I came to thinking about the restaurant, it's patrons and how as a Melbournian I had little knowledge of this place and the culture that was bubbling away inside it. This film is my attempt to connect with this small sub-culture nestled in a pocket of the city I know and love.

My initial idea was to interview a number of the drivers to talk about their experiences of taxi driving; what had brought them from India?; are they planning to stay in Australia?; did they imagine driving taxis as a career?; what drew them to the Red Pepper – the food? the convenience?; etc. However after spending a number of nights at the restaurant meeting the drivers themselves, I realised that their experiences are so varied and my questions so numerous, that this was all too much to fit into a short-form documentary. And so I decided to change my approach, to offer an impression – an almost observational point of view – of this mini cultural phenomenon taking place in the early hours of the morning at the end of Bourke street.

I thought about how films such as *Havana Suite* (Fernando Pérez, 2003) and *Our Daily Bread* (Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2005) manage to provide an insight into time, place and activity without the need for dialogue. Thus I decided to forego traditional interviews and concentrate solely on constructing a film that encapsulates the environment, the people and the activity through observational techniques. Rather than present stories and arguments with the usual didacticism of documentary, I hope *Night Fare* offers a glimpse into a world that for those who would not otherwise experience such a world, find as fascinating as I did.

However, far from taking a direct cinema approach, *Night Fare* is at least in part a highly choreographed film. Many of its camera angles, sounds and actions are thought out and designed in advance. This is particularly true of the opening and closing sequences in which the camera follows a lone driver in from the street and back out again. This style corresponds to an idea that the film is an impression, or an approximation of a typical experience for one Red Pepper customer. It is a film that gives its audience a feel for the environment rather than a strict observational reality. In this way *Night Fare* is an approximate artifice that re-constructs a world observed during many nights research. And what delicious researches they were.

Indians in Melbourne

Indians now account for the fifth largest immigrant group living in Australia. Yet apart from going to an Indian Restaurant once in a while, mainstream Australia seems to have little interaction with Indian culture. Recent reports of racially motivated attacks on Indian students in Melbourne and Sydney highlight the lack of understanding some Australian's have for this growing migrant culture.

In recent years, many of Melbourne's educational institutions have marketed their services in India's northern regions, specifically in the wealthy Punjab region. As a consequence Melbourne has seen a large increase of Indian migrants take up residence in the city. With a need to support themselves whilst studying, many Indian students turn to driving taxis as a way of financing their living expenses. Although the process for becoming a taxi driver is neither cheap nor easy, it can provide a relatively decent wage. Melbourne has therefore seen a relatively fast shift in the ethnic background of many of its taxi drivers in recent years.

Yet, as has always been the case in Australian history, influxes of new migrant groups rarely settle in their new home without some degree of cultural adjustment and occasionally, serious antagonism from the pre-existing culture. Perceptions of the habits, attitudes and interaction with this new group of taxi drivers has equally been a process of cultural adjustment and a topic of much discussion in the media and other public spheres.

The Red Pepper

The Red Pepper Restaurant on Bourke street was opened four years ago. It is a hugely successful business and after its establishment the owners soon opened a second restaurant two doors down in order to cope with the demand. It is in a very slim, double story terrace building. The interior has white, sparse walls that are lined with the odd piece of Indian artwork or photograph. The hard wood floor is populated with snugly fitting tables that form a slim aisle down the centre of the dining room. The décor is generally minimalist but has enough personality to it that one might call it comfortable.

The main counter where customers order and pay for their meals is placed, oddly, at the back of the dinning room and separates the kitchen from the dinning space. This spacial configuration encourages a steady stream of customers walking up and down the main aisle and hence encourages a distinct sense of busy activity and the transience of its customers.

Red Pepper serves cuisine from all over India but specialises in north Indian, Punjabi food. This is a reflection of the owner's homeland but also corresponds to the part of India that most taxi drivers originate from. The owner decided to open the restaurant after friends of hers told her how good her cooking was. She has no professional training in cooking but serves food in traditional Indian ways. The food itself is cheap, the decor pleasant, and the service friendly and practical. It is cosy enough to offer refuge from the outside night but not atmospheric enough to encourage lingering interactions. This particular combination seems to be perfect for taxi drivers and indeed the owners are also very aware of catering for the needs of the taxi drivers. At one stage Red Pepper even offered a separate taxi driver menu. This service is no longer available as the speciality menu has now been incorporated into the main menu.

Credits

Writer Director Editor WILLIAM HEAD

Featuring KARAMUIR SINGH BAIDWAN
and the Indian taxi drivers of Red Pepper restaurant

Cinematography GUIDO RAMBECK
Sound Recordist DALYAH BAKHEET
Steadicam Operator DAVID WILLIAMS
Stills Photography KATIE MITCHELL
Production Manager JOEY GEORGE
Production Assistant VESSAL SAFAEI
Taxi Car Mount Driver ROSS RICHARDS

Supervising Producers STEVE THOMAS STEWART CARTER
Technical Advisor GORDON LYON
Online DECLAN LOUGHRAN
Soundmix NEILL S. BELL

Sound Design TESSA ELIEFF
Music Dollar written by HARMEET SINGH
Music by HARMEET SINGH and PETER JOSEPH HEAD

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Social Justice Award and the Anthony Ganim Post-graduate Award

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Television, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2009

Night Fare will screen as part of the VCA and Music graduate
screening program at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image
on December 10, 18 & 19

For more information, interviews with participants and production
stills please visit www.nightfare.com.au

Contact

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