

'Reality show will damage reputation of Australian town'

Byron Bay locals protest planned Netflix reality series

CANBERRA, Australia, April 20, (AP): Angry Byron Bay locals are protesting the filming of a reality television series that some fear will damage the reputation of their trendy Australian tourist town.

Around 100 surfers paddled to sea Tuesday to form a cancel symbol off the coast of the New South Wales state town in the hope that Netflix will can the series about social media influencers.

Several Byron Bay businesses have refused to sign filming permits that would allow "Byron Baes," a contemporary abbreviation of "Byron Babes," to be shot on their premises.

"It's potentially going to threaten businesses if the portrayal of Byron is as absurd as I guess a lot of the doco-soap-reality shows are," Byron Shire Mayor Simon Richardson told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"As a community, we should have a right to be able to not be exploited and to go about our business and also just have a community that has its real and genuine concerns and challenges shared rather than a picture postcard filmed with people who have potentially been here for five minutes," Richardson added.

Ben Gordon is refusing to allow the eight-episode series to be filmed at his business, The Byron Bay General Store.

"They're proposing to drag our name through the mud and make millions of dollars without offering anything back to the community and completely misrepresenting who we are and it's totally wrong," Gordon told Nine Network television at the Main Beach protest.

"There was no consultation whatsoever. They just came in unan-

nounced," Gordon added.

Gordon led a community meeting on the subject last week and complained that most of the cast were not from Byron Bay.

Netflix said its first Australian reality series would "aim to build a connection between the people we meet in the show and the audience."

"The show is authentic and honest, and while it carries all the classic hallmarks of the form and embraces the drama, heartbreak and conflict that makes for such entertaining viewing, our goal is to lift the curtain on influencer culture to understand the motivation, the desire, and the pain behind this very human need to be loved," a Netflix statement said.

Reason

"The reason behind choosing Byron Bay as a location was driven by the area's unique attributes as a melting pot of entrepreneurialism, lifestyle and health practices, and the sometimes uneasy coming together of the traditional 'old Byron' and the alternative 'new,' all of which we'll address in the series," the statement added.

The town of 9,000 people is one of the most famous in Australia, partly because acting couple Chris Hemsworth and Elsa Pataky have built a mansion there. International celebrities who are based or spend time in Byron Bay include Matt Damon, Zac Efron and Simon Baker.

Richardson, the mayor, said the town 625 kilometers (388 miles) north of Sydney did not need the type of tourists who "might be turned

on by a vacuous vision of who we are."

"If we become a laughing stock through a really vacuous, fake show, it could have big — not just sensitivity challenges for us — but also economic challenges," Richardson said.

Byron Bay activists have successfully stood up to big business in the past. The town has prevented KFC and McDonalds from opening restaurants there after protest campaigns.

Also:

SANTA FE, N.M.: A television series starring **Josh Brolin** and now in production in New Mexico will employ up to 300 crew members and 2,000 people as extras and background actors, the state Film Office has announced recently.

"Outer Range" is produced by Amazon Studios and Plan B Entertainment and is shooting in **Albuquerque**, and **Las Vegas**, New Mexico, the office said.

Las Vegas is 88 miles (142 kilometers) northeast of Albuquerque. In the production, Brolin plays a rancher who "discovers an unfathomable mystery at the edge of L's wilderness" while fighting for his ranch and family, the office said.

"We are so excited about this television series that will feature so many of New Mexico's diverse landscapes and are grateful Amazon Studios has chosen New Mexico," said **Amber Dodson**, the office's director.

Film

Variety



This image released by Bleecker Street shows Ed Helms, (left), and Patti Harrison in a scene from 'Together Together.' (AP)

Film

Carax's 'Annette' to open Cannes Film Festival

Odd surrogate friendship in 'Together'

By Lindsey Bahr

The new film "Together Together" has a great premise: A single, straight man wants to be a father and decides to hire a surrogate to help. It's fertile territory that has been fairly unexplored in popular art and brings with it a host of built-in dramatic and comedic opportunities, especially with someone like Ed Helms leading the cast.

Writer-director Nikole Beckwith ("Stockholm, Pennsylvania") instead chooses to focus on the relationship between Helms' character Matt and his surrogate, Anna (Patti Harrison) and it becomes just another semi-quirky, frustratingly surface exploration of two lonely headcases finding comfort in one another. In some ways, it's a quintessential Sundance film. The baby and the pregnancy become just a screenwriter's excuse to put these two together. It's too bad because Helms shows promise stretching in a more dramatic role and Harrison herself is a captivating presence.

Matt is a 40-something app developer living a comfortable life in San Francisco. Anna is in her mid-20s and working at a coffee shop. We're introduced to them as Matt is interviewing potential surrogates and it's hardly an instant connection. In fact, it's a terribly stilted exchange that is made only somewhat funny by the excruciating awkwardness of it all. It's unclear if there were any other candidates to choose from but Matt for some reason chooses Anna as his gestational surrogate and soon they're having another stilted conversation at the doctor's office. She's pregnant.

It's not the first pregnancy for Anna. In the interview we find out that she had a baby that she gave up for adoption as a teenager. The experience caused a rift with her family and she spent the next few years drifting and estranged. But she has a plan to get back on track and wants to use the money from the surrogate to go to get a college degree in Vermont.

From the start, Matt and Anna's relationship seems

misguided and unhealthy. Matt starts showing up at her work and apartment bearing gifts like pregnancy tea and supportive clogs. They visit the doctor's together. They go out to dinner. They choose colors for the baby's nursery. They even go to couple's therapy together and, separately, support groups for surrogates and expectant parents using surrogates. He monitors what she eats and how she's progressing and makes a big deal out of the fact that she's still dating in the first trimester. It all seems wildly inappropriate and overbearing, especially considering Anna doesn't even want to know the sex of the baby so she doesn't get attached. And although she talks about boundaries, soon she's staying at his house on the regular and bingeing "Friends" with him.

Limited

This might all be fine or understandable if Matt and Anna had some sort of chemistry with one another. I'm not even suggesting anything romantic. They're just two strangers thrust together by this surrogacy agreement and spending time with them is not fun, engaging or enlightening enough to sustain a movie. A strong supporting cast including Nora Dunn, Fred Melamed, Rosalind Cho, Sufe Bradshaw and Tig Notaro can't even help all that much in their limited time on screen.

Beckwith's script does have a few moments of grace and humor. Helms gets a particularly beautiful monologue about why he wants a child. And there are wry observations too about how all parenting books for single dads are for widows and divorcees. But there are far more clichés, contrivances and threads left unnecessarily dangling.

Recent films like the fertility drama "Private Life" and the adoption comedy "Instant Family" have successfully and entertainingly taken audiences on journeys through different facets of modern parenting. "Together Together" had a chance to do that for surrogacy and single fatherhood but comes up short. "Together Together," a Bleecker Street release

in theaters Friday, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America "for some sexual references and language." Running time: 90 minutes. Two stars out of four.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: Leo Carax's "Annette," starring **Marion Cotillard** and **Adam Driver**, will open the 74th Cannes Film Festival on July 6, festival organizers said Monday.

"Annette" is Carax's first English-language film and the French director's anticipated follow-up to his celebrated, surreal 2012 film "Holy Motors." Set in contemporary Los Angeles, "Annette" stars Driver and Cotillard as a glamorous couple — Driver plays a stand-up comedian, Cotillard a famous singer — whose first child is "a mysterious girl with an exceptional destiny," according to the festival's description.

"Every Leo Carax film is an event. And this one delivers on its promises," said Pierre Lescure, president of the festival. "Annette" is the gift that lovers of cinema, music and culture were hoping for, one that we have been yearning for during the past year." Cannes was canceled last year due to the pandemic but is planning — "with confidence and determination," the festival said Monday — an in-person edition this summer, two months later than its usual May dates. **Spike Lee** is set as president of the jury. Selections are to be announced at the end of May.

Amazon Studios will release "Annette" in the US late this summer in theaters and on Amazon Prime. The film's release in France will coincide with its Cannes premiere.

"We couldn't have dreamed of a more beautiful reunion with cinema and the silver screen, in the Palais des Festivals where films come to assert their splendor," said **Thierry Frémaux**, Cannes' general delegate. "Carax's cinema is an expression of these powerful gestures, these mysterious alchemies that makes the secret of cinema's modernity and eternity." (AP)

NEW YORK: The pandemic can't stop **Ziggy Marley** from celebrating the Earth.

The son of reggae icon **Bob Marley** and **Rita Marley** will be one of the highlights of Nat Geo's Earth Day Eve 2021 streaming concert on Wednesday.

"Any time they call me, I'm there for this. Any time they want me," he said from Los Angeles. "Everything is being done a bit different but we're still doing it, which is the main point."

Marley will be joined at the concert by **Willie Nelson**, **Yo-Yo Ma**, **Angélique Kidjo**, **AURORA**, **José González**, **Maggie Rogers**, **Rostam** and **Valerie June**. A world premiere new music video will also air from My Morning Jacket.

"We're making art to make a change and challenge the status quo," Marley said. "We need more art like that in this time. We need more music like that. We need more artists like that. So I am just happy that we are using art in that way."

Marley will pull out an acoustic guitar and sing a song appropriate for the event: "I Don't Wanna Live On Mars" from his 2014 album "Fly Rasta." The opening line is: "I don't want to live on Mars/I don't want to drive space cars."

"Whatever happens to this planet is going to happen to us all," he said. "It's not going to happen just to the rich or just to the poor. It's going to happen to us all — the good and the bad."

Jessica Nabongo is hosting the Earth Day event with **Brian Skerry**, **Dr. Jane Goodall**, **Lillygol Sedaghat**, **Dr. Lucy Hawkes** and **Dr. Rae Wynn-Grant** making special appearances. (AP)



ROME: The Venice Film Festival said last Thursday that it will give its lifetime achievement award this year to Oscar-winning director and actor **Roberto Benigni**.

The Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement is to be awarded at the 78th edition of the world's oldest film festival, scheduled for Sept. 1-11 on the Lido.

Benigni wrote, directed and starred in "La Vita e Bella," ("Life is Beautiful"), which won the Oscar for best foreign language film, best actor and best musical score in 1999.

In announcing the decision,

Venice director **Alberto Barbera** called Benigni "one of the most extraordinary comedy actors in an admittedly rich gallery of Italian performers," and noted his more recent solo performances reading Dante's "Divine Comedy."

Benigni, perhaps best remembered for climbing on top of the audience chair when he won the Oscar, was more restrained on



Marley



Dockery

Thursday. "My heart is full of joy and gratitude," he said in a statement. (AP)

NEW YORK: The original principal cast of "Downton Abbey" are returning for a second film that will arrive in theaters December 22 this year. Focus Features announced Monday.

"Downton Abbey" creator **Julian Fellowes** has written the sequel's screenplay, and **Simon Curtis** ("My Week With Marilyn") is directing. **Hugh Bonneville**, **Michelle Dockery** and 86-year-old **Maggie Smith** will all be back, along with some new faces, including **Hugh Dancy**, **Laura Haddock**, **Nathalie Baye** and **Dominic West**.

Production began last week on "Downton Abbey 2."

"After a very challenging year with so many of us separated from family and friends, it is a huge comfort to think that better times are ahead and that next Christmas we will be re-united with the much beloved characters of 'Downton Abbey,'" said producer **Gareth Neame**. (AP)

Features

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