



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy New Year from your FISH committee!

Yes, we do know that the ABC screened the John Clarke film on New Year's Day, but we consider it a see-again documentary. We are looking forward to seeing it at the Empire on 15th/ 17th February. It is a gentle underlining of the extraordinary power of satire and humour to make a meaningful criticism of stupidity and pomposity in our blessedly orderly lives in Australia (in comparison with that of others).

We are delighted to welcome you to the 2026 FISH year:

With best wishes,

**Roz Garwen.**



### FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

**President:** Roz Garwen 4886 4142 & 0414 820 890

**Guest Enquiries:** Deborah Blay : 0400 411 004

**TEXT ONLY minimum 24hours notice**

**Website:** [www.fish.org.au](http://www.fish.org.au)

**Email:** [fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com](mailto:fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com)

**Membership:** [Fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com](mailto:Fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com)

Membership is closed

**Enquiries:** [fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com](mailto:fishfilmsadmin@gmail.com)

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### FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2026

8.15 pm Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2026

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## *But Also John Clarke*

### **Synopsis:**

Lorin Clarke's film about her late, much-loved father John Clarke offers insights and giggles in equal measure.

### **Review: Stephen A Russell**

As beloved a Kiwi import as Crowded House or pavlova, the late, great satirist John Clarke may have been worshipped as fictional sheep-shearer Fred Dagg across the ditch, but here he was arguably best known as one half of a multi-channel political flame-throwing duo with Bryan Dawe. So it felt like the nation was torn in half when Clarke unexpectedly died while hiking in Victoria in 2017.

Luckily for us, he and his family were prolific home video enthusiasts, with his eldest daughter, Lorin, enjoying impromptu interview sessions with her father. These recordings, alongside a wealth of archival footage and effusive talking heads, form the basis of her illuminating documentary, *But Also John Clarke*.

In New Zealand, it's *Not Only Fred Dagg But Also John Clarke*, a nod to Clarke's adoration of the classic Dudley Moore and Peter Cook's BBC sketch show, *Not Only... But Also*.

He'd study their routine religiously while working in the back offices of NZBC. Something his family did with taped comedy bits in the way others would study sports manoeuvres.

It's an abundantly comforting documentary, with Lorin acknowledging, 'We shared him, in a sense, with strangers at the supermarket or while walking the dog'. His celebrity, half of which was established across the water before the kids were born in Melbourne, followed the family wherever they went.

An emotional Sam Neill, best mates since their uni days, confirms that it would take three hours to walk 100 yards in his company because he'd always take the time to talk with fans who flocked to his side.

Holding truth to power can sometimes be a dreadfully earnest business, but not so with Clarke, who had, as a plethora of his pals can attest, the most mischievously twinkly eyes that made it incredibly hard for his comedic partners and others to maintain a straight face.

*A Current Affair* presenter Jana Wendt certainly struggled keeping it together on air before the pair decamped, with their faux interviews intact, to the ABC's *The 7.30 Report*. She notes their sharp-witted spitfire was both horrifying *and* hilarious on live television.

With oodles of smarts behind the silliness, Clarke was ferociously well-read, loved playing with language and performing poetry aloud. While he may not have excelled academically, that was more about his rebellious refusal to temper his high-spirited humour in the face of authoritarian bullies masquerading as respectable disciplinarians.

That included his father, Ted, though the documentary is at pains to put his violent and dismissive nature in the context of a spirit shattered by the horror of World War II. A shadow that also haunted his mother, Neva, who lost two fiancés to the earth-shattering conflict before marrying Ted. The pair would clash incessantly, with Clarke even pressed into service by his mother during the divorce proceedings.

Perhaps this is why Clarke ensured there was such abundant love for his own partner, art historian and writer Helen McDonald, and their kids? It's certainly a treat to see glimpses of the real man behind all the multitude of faces he wore professionally, in *But Also John Clarke's* beautifully drawn portrait of an impeccably crafted artist peddling seeming anarchy.

In a sure sign of Clarke's kindness behind the scenes, several comedians credit the fictional sport of farnarkling inventor with giving them a hand-up in their early days.

People like Andrew Denton, who received a supportive call while smarting from the cancellation of his show *The Money or the Gun*. Both Anne Edmonds and Wendy Harmer note how hard he championed women writers and performers.

I'll leave the last words to Clarke himself, with this wise piece of advice: 'Life would be pretty boring if we didn't make it funny.'

Source: [www.screenhub.com.au](http://www.screenhub.com.au) ~ Stephen A Russell 3/9/2025: Edited extracts.  
Accessed 14/1/26

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## COMING UP:

March	<i>Quisling: The Final Days</i> [Norway]	Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup>
April	<i>EL47</i> [Spain]	Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 21 <sup>st</sup>
May	<i>The Third Man</i> [UK]	Sunday 17 <sup>th</sup> & Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup>
June	<i>The Teacher who Promised the Sea</i> [Spain] By popular request	Sunday 21 <sup>st</sup> & Tuesday 23 <sup>rd</sup>

## **Some thoughts on: *The Movie Teller***

Can you cast your minds back to early December and recollect this gentle film's charming tale?

I have found this very hard to do, as it seems so much has happened between then and now, but more of that later. Having said that, this film was the perfect end of year lead in to the festive season.

Set in the driest place on earth, (not including Antarctica), the Atacama Desert in Chile was a fantastic and fascinating location. The isolation of the mining town made it a microcosm of humanity, far from the world beyond, with all the faults and strengths of our species on display.

This seemingly simple film, (despite every second person's name beginning with 'M'), dealt with the good, the bad and the ugly. Such warmth and joy were created by the cinema loving family. Such sadness with the father's mining accident and the mother's abandonment of the family, and fear, as the eldest daughter is compromised so wickedly by the local loan shark after hiring her for a private 'film telling'. Such delight in Maria Margarita's wonderfully creative and enjoyably entertaining solution to earn money for her now financially desperate family.

At this film's heart, despite the isolation, is the joy of films, the love of cinema, enabling escape from hardship, (if only momentarily), and the pleasure of the stories and their retelling. No matter the saltpetre mine, the desert, the domestic issues and even Pinochet's doctrine, the human spirit wins through, seeking joy wherever it can be found.

Since our screening, we've had the joy of the festive season, but in many ways, this period seems to have been turned upside down. The world feels crazier than usual as the immense sadness and futility of Bondi and Gaza, the ongoing tragedy of the Ukraine, a Greenland invasion thought bubble and even a president condoning the cold-blooded murder of his own citizens see a world desperately seeking peaceful resolutions on so many levels.

Cinema, the love of film, is even more important these days. To dwell in a different space for a few hours to be transported to another time or experience that is so uplifting and restorative, helps us deal with the realities 'outside'.

This film was a perfect example.

Thank you -- FISH for the great and valuable work you and The Empire do for us all.

**Ross Armfield**  
**Reviewer in Chief**

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