

Friends between a rock and a heart place

She was a merchant banker; he'd never met a white person who wasn't an authority figure. Now this unlikely pair hope the film they have made will inspire other Australians, writes **Clara Iaccarino**.

SITTING in the shadow of Uluru with Uncle Bob and his family as he played the guitar welcoming the white stranger, director Melanie Hogan shrugged off the significance of a shooting star piercing the dusk sky.

It was her first visit to Australia's red centre and, no sooner had she dropped her bags in the youth hostel, than Uncle Bob Randall invited her to stay in Mutitjulu, the community near the base of Uluru where he lives.

While her Aboriginal hosts at once noted nature's sign, it is only in retrospect that Hogan appreciates the serendipitous star.

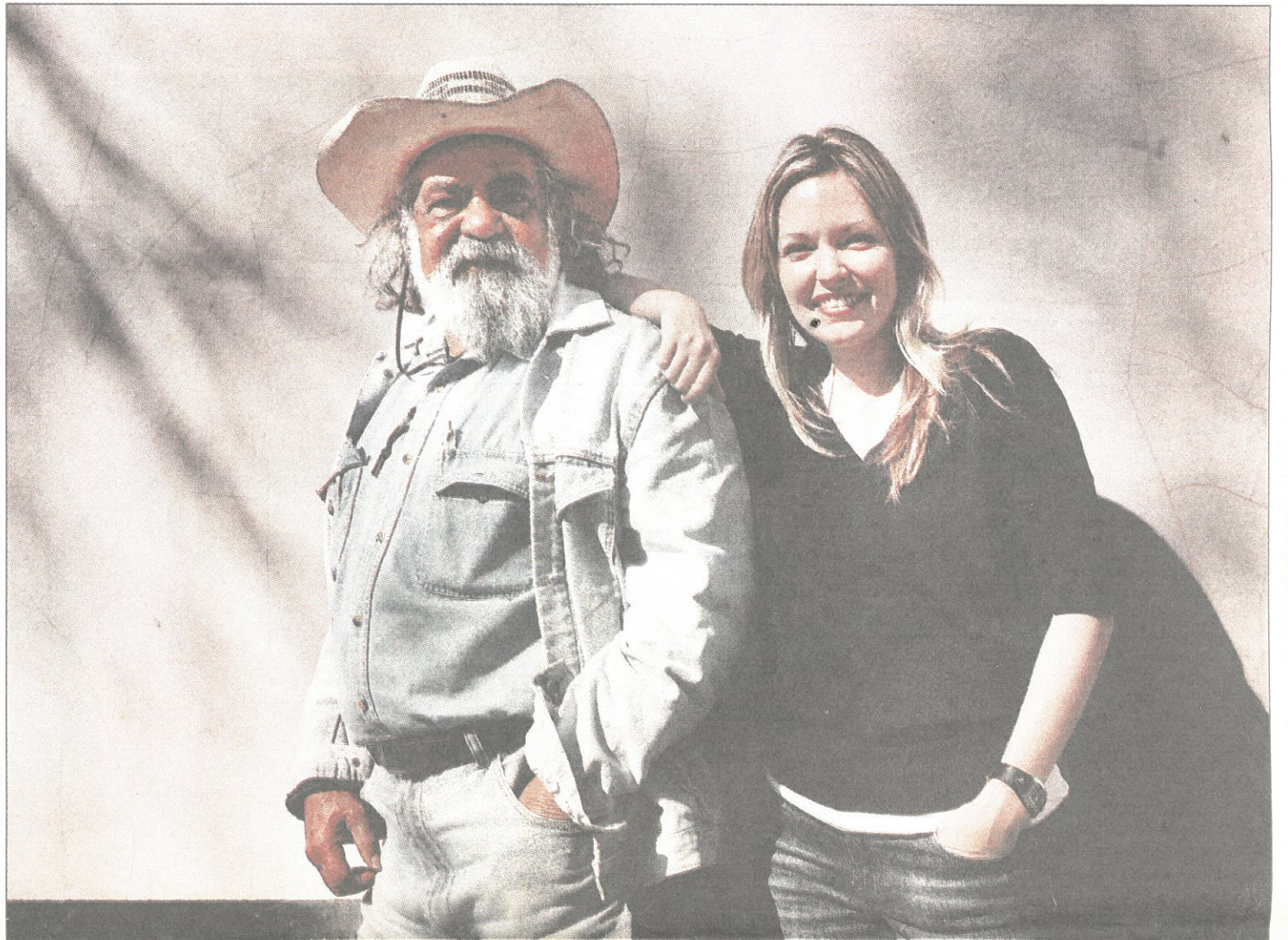
On a quest to connect with Australia's indigenous people, Hogan came across Randall's autobiography *Songman*. Instantly inspired, she wrote to the publisher, who put her in touch with Randall. He soon phoned, inviting her to visit him in the Northern Territory. Randall asked Hogan to help him combat the community's petrol-sniffing addiction by producing a film, and the Mutitjulu Community Health Clinic commissioned her to create *Petrol Wiyi*.

When Hogan returned home with the footage, she realised she had two films. One was a community-focused antidote to petrol sniffing, the other became *Kanyini*, a story about the treatment of Aboriginal people at the hands of white settlers.

While it is Randall's story, *Kanyini* is also a spiritual celebration of land, spirit and wisdom. As Hogan emphasises, it is a humanist film.

"I don't really see myself as a filmmaker," she says. "But I'm not an activist either. It's about being more human, being more real. Why do we have to put politics in it?"

As mystical in person as he appears on screen, 72-year-old Randall is an alluring soul. In *Kanyini* (which means interconnectedness in Pitjantjatjara), as he narrates heartbreaking tales of his childhood when he was separated from his mother, never to see her again, Randall ends each painful memory with a warm chuckle, his watery eyes sparkling.



REACHING OUT: Bob Randall and Melanie Hogan (above); and a still from *Kanyini* (left). Main picture: FIONA-LEE QUIMBY



"Life just has to be lived," he grins. "You don't have a choice, you keep going. [Laughter] works for me. I think I've sung [the anger] out. I didn't think I'd ever live through it."

An active member of the Aboriginal community, Randall was named Indigenous Person of the Year in 1999. His song *My Brown Skin Baby (They Took Him Away)* became an anthem for the stolen generation and led to an ABC documentary of the same name, which

won a bronze prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

For the first 26 years of her life Hogan had no contact with indigenous Australia. She worked in corporate finance for Macquarie Bank before leaving in 2000 to study at the New York Film Academy. She then completed the directors' course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art. After a brief stint in television, she scored an assistant role with director Shekhar Kapur (*Elizabeth*) and worked on projects with the BBC and Working Title in Britain. When she returned to Australia she began writing and researching and realised her desire to connect with black Australia.

Just as Hogan had no indigenous contacts, Randall says his only knowledge of white Australians was as authoritarian figures. Through *Kanyini* he and Hogan have a simple but noble hope that "every Australian sits down and has a conversation, connects with indigenous Australians".

"We've got to make the first move," Hogan says. "We've got to show compassion. We were the bullies."

Kanyini has caught the attention of prominent Australians, garnering particular support from key figures in the entertainment

industry. Hogan says Toni Collette loves it and in a support testimonial the actor urges everyone to see this film. "It is a film that reminds us of the truth of life, as well as the truth of Australia's history," she says.

As appreciative as they are of the support, both Hogan and Randall seem almost surprised by the attention their "little film" has aroused. Hogan says she has a dream to "heal this country" but she turns to Randall for affirmation. "You always say don't go for big things," she murmurs.

"When you believe in something you've got to take the risk," she adds. With Randall introducing her as "a good one", Hogan found the doors opened and she was able to secure David Page as composer, as well as earning the trust of the community where she was filming. "It's about openness, not cynicism," she says. "If we sit together we can make a change."

If the audience perceives Randall as a spokesman for the greater Aboriginal community through *Kanyini*, he doesn't mind. He is used to representing his people and recognises the opportunity for the film to open the hearts and minds of viewers.

"It's just my story," he smiles.

Crocs, the new choice for snappy dressers

They look like cut-off wellies, but with holes - and they're everywhere. **Paula Coccozza** tries to make sense of Crocs.

THERE are some trends that it is best to sit out, waiting quietly until they pass. Those, for instance, who have stuck to straight-leg jeans while skinnies ruled suddenly look one step ahead. Then there are the trends it is best not to acknowledge at all. Fashionistas have tried this approach with Crocs - the clog-like rubbery shoes with holes all over them, so named because the upper part of the shoe resembles a reptile's snout - but to no avail.

Not only are they not going away, they are multiplying. In the last financial quarter, the

Colorado-based Crocs Inc, purveyor of Crocs since July 2002, reported a net income of \$US15.7 million (\$20.6 million) compared with \$US3.3 million for the same quarter in 2005. Its factories are producing up to 3 million pairs a month. Jack Nicholson has a pair in sea blue.

"They are stubbornly unstylish," says British *Vogue*'s Emma Elwick. "My nieces have them and they are five... But celebrities have been papped in them and now people are jumping on the bandwagon."

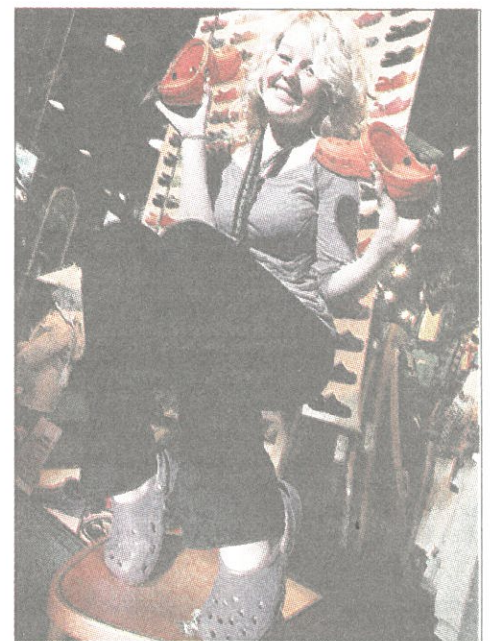
How have these shoes won over so many people? Devotees describe Crocs as a one-shoe answer to all their problems. Apparently, they let the sand and water out (through those holes) when you visit the beach - but so do flip-flops.

To make matters even more perplexing, the Croc's broad snout of an upper turns even the best-looking feet into a cartoon shape: it gives exaggerated width but no height.

There is, of course, a history of shoe sleeper hits. The Birkenstock Madrid was a hit (and not

for the first time) in 2003. Then there was the return of the Scholl, the Havaianas flip-flop and the moccasin. Like ugg boots, which have their roots in surf culture, or Havaianas, which came from the beaches of Brazil, the Croc has the kind of back story that appeals to lovers of fashion underdogs. It was devised in Colorado as a shoe for seafarers and became a story in the *Rocky Mountain News* before the fashion press had heard of it.

None of which would offend were it not for the fact that fans seem to see their Crocs as an expression of personality. They come in 17 shades and choosing a colour, like picking your favourite Spice Girl, is intended to signal something to the world. Like the early drivers of motor cars who would flash their headlights at each other as they passed, people in Crocs seem to identify with each other. It is as if they share a secret. They don't, of course - only that they have a predilection for silly shoes. But we can all see that.



WARNING: Crocs are everywhere. Picture: KEN ROBERTSON