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DARCY GLADWIN AND THE MUSINGS OF A WEB PROPHET

At any time in film history, the emergence of a truly free and independent cinematic vision has been cause for celebration. With his film **Godplex**, a surreal journey that follows a poet/prophet spruiking 'internet religion' across the vastness of New Zealand, **Darcy Gladwin** embodies such a visionary. A much younger man when filming began nearly a decade ago, Gladwin started shooting guided only by a draft script and the vital personality and intellect of his leading man and friend, beat poet **Shane Hollands**. Ahead of an intimate screening of his film in Sydney's inner-west, Gladwin spoke to SCREEN-SPACE from his London home...



"The story was inspired by our lives travelling as musicians throughout New Zealand, realising the messianic qualities of what we were doing and that the poet that I was travelling with could be a great screen persona," says Gladwin, a self-described 'inter-media artist', whose experience across music, photography, film and design led to him writing, directing and editing his debut feature. A non-pro actor, Shane Hollands is a highly respected alternative culture figure in his homeland for his 'Beat Generation' poetry stylings; his low-key charisma and live-reading experience made him a natural before the camera. "Shane also has an encyclopaedic mind," Gladwin says of his friend (pictured, *above*: the director, left, with his star), who has conquered dyslexia and deals with a degenerative bone condition to perform his unique oratories, "so he brought a huge amount of knowledge (regarding) religion, history, popular and alternative culture. There was continual research and discussion (and) the result is a gut-feel composite."

Hollands plays Clark Duke, an insurance consultant reborn as a new-age spiritual guru when he launches an e-religion concept called Virtology. After his home is destroyed by fire, he hits the road in an effort to define his own inner enlightenment and talk up his philosophy, undertaking a journey that soon attracts an eclectic mix of followers and doubters. Portraying Gladwin's fascinating cast of characters are such personalities as Melbourne-based painter **Marko Maglaic**, Maori performance artist **Mika**, veteran Aussie character actor Gil Tucker, actress Alison Walls and feature debutant Katie Bierwirth. (Pictured, *right*: Shane Hollands as Clark)



At the core of Clark's musings is the notion of 'Elephant Consciousness', an invention of Hollands that the director part-explains as, "They're big, beautiful, oppressed beings, (yet are) the smartest animals on the planet. Shane was toying with creating a religion in his backyard and struck up the Elephant metaphor. Godplex was a lovely home for the idea to root and sprout." A narrative that examines the exploration of faith and spirituality fronted by a poetic preacher will be labelled as an allegory of modern religion, but Gladwin is circumspect regarding any didactic intent. "(That is) a reading I would ally with," he concedes, "but I do hope that any lines found inside be wavy and that preaching is quite far from the mode of cinema that I aspire to."



The ethereal nature of Duke's journey allowed Gladwin to create a visual storytelling style that is distinctly dense and complex. Recalling the avant-garde cinema of the 1980s and the free-spiritedness of 1960s counter-culture art, **Godplex** looks contemporary while evoking bohemian aesthetics and a Jack Kerouac/Timothy Leary-type personality all its own. "It has been a great struggle

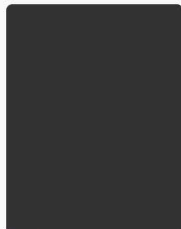
for me to identify where I sit in film culture, as I feel like an endless explorer and nothing satisfies," admits Gladwin. "As a low budget filmmaker, I'm looking to create a cohesive visual style with resources at my grasp. So finding environments and objects that don't suck is a really important first consideration." He points out that the staging of key moments embraces a vibrant use of composition. "I think that the Godplex cinematic frame is conservative, which allows the content to speak clearly. Overall the style is gut-feel, 'Do-it-Yourself', and I've enjoyed that a lot." (Pictured, *above*: Gladwin, on location in Auckland, with AD Rina Patel).

Given his debut feature took years to complete, Darcy Gladwin admits he might do a couple of things differently on his next shoot. "I've heard that producer-type people can be valuable additions to a team," he says with a laugh. He refused to let the long passages between production on the film slow him down, stating proudly, "I continued to make and perform music, shoot documentaries and music videos, and have a baby." He regrets nothing of the process that has resulted in a bracingly unique film experience bound for cult status in years to come. "I loved the process of shooting over many years," he says, "because there was space for a lot of thought, learning and reflection."



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