

# VOGUE

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# there's no place like home

However big their budgets, New Zealand's film-makers share an independence of spirit and unbridled love for their homeland

Words Clare Barker





*Whale Rider* star Keisha Castle-Hughes at the Academy Awards in 2004.

I t's an ear-numbingly cold Sunday evening during the 2004 Auckland International Film Festival and Emily Barclay – the latest Kiwi prodigy to arrest audiences with the maturity of her acting craft – has taken to the stage at The Civic theatre. She picks up where *The Piano*'s Anna Paquin and *Whale Rider*'s Keisha Castle-Hughes left off (the latter put her film career on hold after this year's Academy Awards, swapping Hollywood for high school in a bid to reclaim some semblance of a normal childhood). Nineteen-year-old Barclay, in black with a punkish pink ruffle skirt and a gothic slash of blood-red lipstick, looks more like Karen O from New York band The Yeah Yeah Yeahs than the vulnerable teenager she plays in *In My Father's Den*.

The film, the latest celluloid triumph to cement New Zealand's place on the movie-maker's map, is the first from visionary newcomer Brad McGann. It has just had its New Zealand premiere (it opened the Sydney Film Festival in June) and the moist-eyed audience is going wild. Everyone is here from Barclay's fellow cast members – with the exceptions of Miranda Otto and compelling Brit Matthew MacFadyen – to producer Trevor Haysom and Prime Minister Helen Clarke.

In fact, Clarke kicked off the proceedings with a stirring patriotic speech about the strength of the local film industry. And why not? Several major movie projects are currently in production here, including the epic romance *River Queen* with Samantha Morton and Kiefer Sutherland, and the Anthony Hopkins vehicle *The World's Fastest Indian*. Down south Naomi Campbell is in town, where her beau Adrien Brody is gearing up to shoot Peter Jackson's latest baby, *King Kong*. Tilda Swinton and Dawn French are on their way, having signed up for the film version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. And forget all that guff about sheep: New Zealand's pastures are now better known for their starring role in *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) movies than for harbouring the fluffy protagonists of so many grubby jokes.

This year *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, the final film in Jackson's Tolkien trilogy, scooped so many Oscars the competition surely wished they'd stayed home. Jackson was crowned Best Director, his colleagues took out Best Art Direction, Costume Design, Film Editing ▶