

# When angels only pretend

The emergence of a cinema of red apple, wine and blood: Will this be the revival we have been waiting for?

With his record-holding lowbudget feature El Mariachi, Robert Rodriguez made history in of 24. With a sum of only US\$ 7,000 in hand, he proved the possibility of making a box-office hit which inspired a whole generamakers. Unfortunately, Rodriguez did not fuel the flame he ignited, as he was welcomed to the Hollywood high-budget film industry. alised by Rodriguez, a young filmmaker duo is ready to venture on an unprecedented mission in the Sri Lankan cinema. The Nation talks to Chinthana Dharmadasa and Udaya Dharmawardhana about their low-budget debut feature How I Wonder What You Are

This will be an unprecedented moment in the annals of Sri Lankan cinema. On one hand, this is going to be the first time two directors collaborate in a single major production. On the other hand, this will be the inauguration of 'the first indepenis at loggerheads with the mainalternative filmmaking convenplexities of modern, urbanised thal blow on the current 'deadly' which are cheap in terms of their production cost as well as quality. nspired by the works by Wong Kar Wai (an internationally renowned Hong Kong director) and

'The April 9 Movement' upon the concept "when cinema becomes you," the two directors started nurturing their own traumation experiences which are, of course, taunted with 'red apple, wine and blood' on a script. First Independent Cinema in

Sri Lanka Speaking of their journey of the low-budget filmmaking tradition which is the foremost step towards realising an 'Independent cinema,' the duo is highly critical of the existent 'mainstream' cin their opinion, it is the "privileged cinema" which forthwith annihi lates the emergence of new filmmakers with no capital. There is no such thing called "a cinema init might not be impossible for an ambitious filmmaker to realise which is going to be released in his hopes otherwise. There are no networks, formal of informal added another dimension to the in my opinion, this move will be within the so-called Sri Lankan visual treatment." Significantly, film industry, which are essential for the progress and survival of

The gross average budget of a film is Rs.10 million. In confrontation with the seemingly impossible challenge of raising such a huge amount, the duo decided to bid adieu to their "cel- they initiated a novel form of cinluloid dream:" "We didn't have ema via utilization of available the keys to unlock the doors of resources. In fact, the hand-held that privileged space. So, we had tion, the director duo is ready to to think of alternative ways for tic of the New Wave. Thematicalour cinematic expressions. The best way possible was to deconstruct the stereotypical format. by urbanised French lives, and human life through a low-budget film. Undeniably, this will be a lethe level of the script in keeping we opted for the DV technology. We had to make use of available locations, and the limited equipment within our access. We made use of the natural light in natural environments. This is a one-loca-screening tradition inaugurated tion film, and therefore, we had to make it visually poetic as much

With the onset of the month of May starts the wedding season. With million and one

things that go into the preparation for the dream day for most young women, making

gold jewellery takes a foremost place. As the purpose of gold jewellery in a marriage

ceremony has a traditional significance beyond its purpose of decoration and beauty.

The Nation took a walk down Sea Street, Pettah – better known as the gold capital of

### Unprecedented moment

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ilarities with the politics behind the French New Wave, launched by legendary figures such as deadly situation Jean-Luc Godard, François Truf- The film will faut and Eric Rohmer in the late 1950s. Rejecting the mainstream affluent filmmaking tradition, camera was a unique characterisly, the New Wave directors invariably selected the problems faced

Alternative screenings From the point of scripting up to screening, the film positions itself beyond the outskirts of maindirectors, How I Wonder What You Are will follow an alternative by Asoka Handagama with *Me* Mage Sandai. Interestingly, the are determined to paint a story of as possible to make it watchable. film is dedicated to Handagama as possible to make it watchable. red apple, wine and blood on the fabric of a human life in a state of a spiritual death. Having formed a spiritual death. Having formed as possible to make it watchable. Even track dollies were used and everything was filmed with the hand-held camera. However, it watchable. This is deducted to Handagana whom the directors consider to be a heroic figure in Sri Lankan hand-held camera. However, it cinema. The duo rejects the main-



cause it allows no flat form for the creators to be actively engaged country, and thereby to receive to be networked with likeminded audience members. Undeniably, a groundbreaking step towards building up a cinema-culture in Thus, the film Sri Lanka, the absence of which will is the root cause of the current

The film will be screened in week of May. It features Prasanna W. Jayasiri, and Mahendra Perera posed by Jayanth Dharmawardhana while the theme song is by

In 2008, the two directors collaborated in making the music by the Super Star singer by Robert Rodriguez's Sin City, the video featured two 'fallen angels' (in a literal sense, because the two lovers fall from a high-rise building to sic video tradition in terms of

manticise pain, in line with its mission of initiating a cinema of red apple, wine and blood. With the premiere around the corner, the director-duo looks triumphant. They have successfully manipulated a 'hierarchical' system, and they have a reason to be happy. They are grateful to Chanto Endless World, a production company for handling post-pro-

shapriya for providing then

Rukshan Abeywansha) duction. They are hopeful about the future, and also are aware of gels is extended by How I Wonthe repercussions of their act of der What You Are and as its tagsubversion: "For us, this was a suicidal mission, and from the with the audience. Therefore, they intend to go into the audiences in they pretend." The story of the intend to go into the audiences in they pretend. The story of the beginning, we were ready to be called 'cinema terrorists.' We had various communities around the is yearning for connectivity, or to opt for an alternative wave bemore precisely, he is looking for- cause we had no other option. ward to the arrival of 'an angel. she is not strong enough to keep

### **Udaya Dharmawardhana**

Having studied photography under Lal Hegoda, and later, film-directing under Prasanna Withanage, Udava studied cinema in India. He is one of the mos prominent local music video directors at present Currently, he is directing his second film Les Papillions Noirs, a French-Sri Lankan production.

#### **Chinthana Dharmadasa**

A graduate of the Peradeniya University, Chinthana began his career as a film critic and script writer He also studied cinema under Prasanna Vithanage. His first short film Afterwards, He Fell Sleep won him a one-year scholarship of filmmaking at highly reputed Lodz Film School, Poland. He is also the co-script writer of Alone in a Valley by Boodee Keerthisen: which is in post-production at the moment.



Wilde story's latest

By Peter Marshall

The only novel Oscar Wilde ever penned became a classic almost on publication back in 1890. Over the years it has been adapted to film numerous times. This latest adaptation is by Director Oliver Parker and features a star-studded cast, including an Oscar nominated turn by Colin Firth

The timeless retelling of what is essentially a Faustian tale of a man who sells his soul to the devil only to wish he could buy it back, stars Colin Firth, Ben Hallward.

The film is set in Victorian England where Firth plays the devils advocate to Dorian Gray's pleasant, well mannered and handsome young man. Slowly Firth, as Lord Henry, begins to work on his subject, persuading him that a life of libertine vice is far preferable to the 'dull' alternative of goodness and virtue. The only two things worth having, he proclaims, are vouth and beauty.' Soon Gray is vacating brothels, despite being engaged to a young lady at the

Meanwhile, Dorian's friend Basil Hallward, an artist, paints a portrait of the handsome oung man, a portrait that all Dorian's friends agree is a perfect likeness. The crux of the story is that after an off-the-cuff comment about throwing away spirit becomes more and more corrupted and rotten by his lifestyle, it is the painting tha soul and the decomposition of

of not aging with time. Perhaps Dorian's greatest noral outrage, apart from at a party when he seduces a some moments later is when ne violently kills Basil after the artist realises the truth of

It is years later, when Dorian's old acquaintances have all aged out Dorian of course has not aged at all, that he falls in love with Lord Henry's daughter Emily Wotton, played well by Rebecca Hall. Lord Henry, a man who may have talked like a libertine but who lacked the courage to follow his convictions is now horrified that the

enough though the main failing of the film is the fact that the morale of the tale is hedonistic excess eventually brings about the revellers downfall and that this new of a new direction to add anything that the audience in the economy of their use: short story,

## Sunanda wins 'Best Lyricist' award

At the annual art competition held among iployees of the People's Bank, organised y the People's Bank Art Circle, Sunanda odagoda of the People's Bank West Zone II Budun wandina ath osawa depa wandim: nme.' He also won a special award for the

/inoda Rasanga' publication. People's Bank's Annual Art Day was eld recently at the Elphinstone Theatre with the participation of its Chairman W Karunajeewa, CEO/MD P.V. Pathirana and

other officials of the Bank. On that day, the winners of the various Art Circle to select the Best Lyrics, Best oem, Best Short Story, Best Drama, Best Art, Photography, etc., were presented with



# All that glitters...

throughout history and wearing gold jewellery meant that a person is of status and class in olden times and, in fact the crown of the monarch which signifies sovereignty and supremacy of the state was made out of gold.

However, with changing of times gold iewellery has become an essential item for joyous occasions and Sea Street, being the gold smith's street in Pettah, has become a popular destination for jewellerv lovers in Sri Lanka.

In South Asian weddings gold is the most valuable and important aspect as the very bond between the couple is signified through golden wedding band and everyone who comes to the occasion expects the bride to be festooned and adorned in

With the wedding season coming ahead in the month of May many people are looking forward to purchase gold jewellery and the Sea Street becomes a busy hustling place with the growing demand. Hence, *The Nation* visited Sea Street to find out about this glitzy trade. Best deal

When walking along the Sea Street passing boutique like jewellery stores and grand showrooms, one can see the busy businessmen and shoppers wandering about going from store to store to get the best deal. Mostly, these shoppers who admire the magnificent works of art under the brightly lit fluorescent lights are the ladies who have come to purchase jewellery for brides and the salesmen

Gold has been the symbol of wealth and success exhibit the jewellery that are neatly placed in velvet jewellery making works. Now with the new tech-lustre to the jewellery.

The art of making gold jewellery has a history in Sri Lanka. According to the traditional system, the goldsmith has to put the gold in a crucible tong in order to melt it. The goldsmiths heat it until the melting point arrives and they pour the melted gold into the ingot mould to get the desired shape and work on the jewellery to draw designs.

However, the process has changed with the development of technology. Eranda Silva the jewellery designer of Muthukarupan Chettivar explained how the latest system of gold

casings with intricate details, showing excellent worknology the goldsmiths are aware of the melting point in gold and accordingly they heat the gold



Malleable gold The purest form of gold is 24 carat which rings rise and according to Eranga, Muthukaunder the melting temperature of 1945° F. The means the 24 parts in gold are pure gold without casting is done by an electronic system and the any traces of other metal. Speaking to The Na- which have elaborate lustrous designs during the casting machine pours the melted gold into a wax tion Eranda Silva said that the most popular one mould and by the rolling mill or by hammering is 22 carat in Sri Lanka. 22 carat gold being 91.3% they get a specific shape to design the jewellery. in purity is popular in jewellery making because The new electronic system allows the traders to intricate designs can be beautifully carved as it is produce jewellery with lower time consumption, soft and malleable. Even though it is soft, 22 carat wastage and it gives the jewellery a fine finishing gold jewellery does not get damaged quickly and touch. Eranda Silva told us that the gold jewel- can be worn for years. The softest type would be 24 (bride's necklace). According to a Hindu ritual, lery is machine cut and the craftsman adds the carat gold and the hardest would be 10 carat gold the bride's family buys jewellery on an auspirefined designs by hand to add more quality and as it has 41.6 percent of gold and the rest is other cious day which is called "akshaya tinitiya" and



kinds of metals usually harder than gold and it this year it has fallen in May and the gold jewellers the integration western culture the exchanging of is these metal that gives different colours to the are expecting fair business on the auspicious day wedding rings has given the gild jeweller a good opgold (white gold, rose gold). However the Euro- as most brides-to-be come to Sea street on that day. portunity and with demand for necklaces the demand peans prefer 18 carat jewellery while the Middle The Muslim community purchase "savadi" for their for wedding bands also rise during the wedding sea-Eastern customers go mostly for the 21 carat gold brides and the Sinhala customers choose alluring son. Ladies, even though there is no wedding, will aljewellery. Being one of the oldest jewellers in designs for the brides' necklace commonly known as ways look forward to a pair of earrings or a pendant Sea street, Muthukarupan Chettiyar which has *"Kara Malaya."* been established in 1933 serves all types of cusGold jewellery and Asian weddings are bonded todazzling trade will not go archaic as long as ladies tomers and has been in the trade long enough to gether very well because as a social norm and tradi-will have an eye for glitter and glamour. know the tastes of the customers. In the months tion the bride's necklace is made out of gold and with rupan Chettiyar has a big demand for necklaces

Part of dowry The Tamil customers mostly purchase gold jewellery for weddings to adorn the bride as well as to present the dowry. They also demand glamorous Bombay designs for their "thali kodi"









# The life and times of a self-confessed Lankaphile: Part Two

BY PETER MARSHALL

Only part of Richard's career was spent in the feature film industry - discussed in the last edition mostly as a scriptwriter. After becoming disillusioned with features due to trickery and bloated egos as he puts it, he turned to what was actually his favourite form of film-making, the documentary. Before working in features he had, around 1970, attended a British Film Institute course on documentary history. As fate would have it, one of the classics screened was 'Song of Ceylon' by Basil Wright, who was present. Richard guizzed him on what it was like to film in Cevlon, unaware that in 18 months time he would be working on the island with Lester James Peiris on the God-King. He says Song of Ceylon was the documentary that greatly influenced his perception of the genre: "I have viewed it dozens of times, given talks on it to film students, and written about it extensively." he said

"I got married to Sharmini, the very first news producer at Rupavahini, in 1984 and subsequently she set up a specialist documentary production company. Over a period of 10 years she directed and scripted documentaries to service UN-affiliated

organisations, foreign and local NGOs, educational name for a small Sri Lankan species. establishments and government departments. One "My first commission as an author, in 1988, was the Editor, and possible the subject of my favourites is Dr. R. L. Spittel: Surgeon of the a book titled B.P de Silva: Royal Jeweller of South-Wilderness, made in 1987 for Rupavahini. It was East Asia, which relates the life of de Silva - from then that I got to know Spittle's wonderful daughter, Magalle, Galle – who migrated to Singapore in 1872 and he told me of his interest in editing Christine, who unfortunately died recently."

Richard and the third phase of his career was loom- after him that is located today in Singapore and ing. He said he wanted to concentrate on more 'pure' Colombo, but which is now more associated with writing - which scripting films and documentaries watches than jewellery. didn't involve due to the medium's strictures.

In fact at the age of fourteen I won second prize in Lanka, and has been writing for the various editors the Brooke Bond National Travel Scholarships and that have come and gone ever since. Of course, ev-Educational Awards in England for a short story regarding an anaconda and a Mayan temple. Rather ent approaches, and he had to learn the nuances like Song of Ceylon, this was another pointer to my of travel writing. This knowledge was of tremendous future, for years later I wrote an essay. "The Ana- help when he became editor of the magazine travconda of Cevlon", which includes a spurious report elsrilanka in 2003 at its inception, as he had a team of a giant anaconda found on Colombo's outskirts. of enthusiastic scribes who had little experience of Published in Scotland in 1768, this fantasy provided travel writing and needed to be quickly steered in the the first instance of the name anaconda, later bestowed on several large South American snakes but late 2008 due to financial difficulties.

and became the leading jeweller in the city. The book A decade of working in this field was enough for also documents the history of the company named

In 1990 Richard was asked to contribute to Ser-"I'd wanted to be a 'pure' writer since childhood. endib. the in-flight magazine of what was then Air

probably derived from the Sinhala henakandaya, the

Apart from being Editor he also wrote some 150

articles in five years, which exhausted matter alike. However, Richard's enthusiasm seems to have rekindled of late a similar publication in the future, when tourism flourishes. Fortunately Dileep Mudadeniya, Managing Director of the Sri Lanka Tourist Promotion Bureau, recognised the strengths of the magazine and now the text of all 59 issues of *travelsrilanka* is available on the Sri

Lanka Tourism website. In the mid-90s Richard decided that he wanted to become a regular feature contributor to a newspaper to showcase his work for a Sri Lankan readership and decided on The Sunday Times. "Who knows," he said to me with a smile, "today I may have chosen The Nation!" Since 1996 he has bombarded the resilient Features Editor with articles on virtually every Sri Lankan subject imaginable.

From 1999 to 2005 he gained valuable experience in reviewing books - particularly those with a he read many descriptive books and novels about Sri Sri Lanka association - for the prestigious *Times*Lanka from Robert Knox's *An Historical Relation of* for Sindbad in Serendib: Strange tales and curious east coast. Yet although the incident was witnessed



Gardens of Complete Design, and James L.A. Webb's Tropical Pioneers: Human Agency and Ecological Change in the Highlands of Sri Lanka, 1800–1900.

Supplement forwarded to Richard an appeal from the Oxford English Dictionary for volunteers to assist with the revision of the second edition that would result in the third edition. He answered the call from Colombo with the request, readily accepted, that he restrict his research to words of Sri Lankan origin or association - Sri Lankan English. In 2001 and 2002

Higher Education Supplement in Ceylon to Michael Ondaatje's Anil's Ghost, search- aspects of Sri Lanka was not published until 2008. by those aboard a passing steamer, "Tales of Giant England. It contains some essays on fascinating Regeneration: A Reappraisal of were first used prior to the date given in the diction- the island in antiquity. Photography in Ceylon, 1850— ary. Ten years later he is still involved — in fact the 1900, D.J. McConnell's The For- work is projected to last 36 years, so he'll need to est Farms of Kandy and Other pass the baton to someone else, sometime!

It was Robert Knox, of course, who was the originator of Sri Lankan English. Twenty-odd words introduced to the English language by him appear in the dictionary, the most recognised universally being In 2000 the Editor of the *Times Higher Education* Buddha, pooja and rattan. Richard Boyle's research resulted in the book - although it's more of a glossary - called Knox's Words: A study of the words of Sri Lankan origin or association first used in English and epigraphists with a peculiar mystery to solve. literature by Robert Knox and recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary. It was published in 2004.

Since the mid-1990s he worked towards the com-

London. Books such as Christo- ing for references to the 90-odd Sri Lankan English It consists of 15 essays. The title essay, "Sindbad pher Ondaatie's Woolf in Cevlon. words in the Oxford English Dictionary. His task was in Serendib", explores Sindbad the Sailor's account has been found. Yasmine Gooneratne's analysis to provide a greater range of illustrative quotations of Serendib in the 1001 Arabian Nights. Remarkable of The Village in the Jungle, John from literature, suggest revision of definitions, and for its detail and accuracy. Sindbad's tale shows that Falconer and Ismeth Raheem's discover antedating quotations that proved words long-distance sailors and traders were familiar with

"Horace Walpole, Serendipity and The Three Princes" examines a 16th-century Venetian tale that, although it unfolds in India rather than Serendib, inspired Walpole's 1754 coinage of the fashionable indeed hackneyed - word serendipity.

"Mulgirigala: Rock of Ages" reveals a hitherto undocumented portrayal of a grayestone referred to as dealer magazine in the UK and the subconti-Adam's Tomb, drawn around 1766. This tomb, supnental publication Himal Southasian, which is posedly located near Mulgirigala, is inscribed in an headquartered in Kathmandu of all places. But unknown language, thus providing archaeologists "The Anaconda of Ceylon" has already been men-

tioned. There's also an essay on a giant squid. In 1874, the London Times featured a first-hand acpilation of a themed collection of previously published count of an attack by a giant squid on the schooner articles, revised and expanded. It took a long time, Pearl, which had sailed from Galle, off the island's

Squid" reveals that, strangely, no record of the Pearl

The concluding essay, "C.G. Jung's Field of Vision", brings us into more recent times with the psychologist's 1934 visit to Sri Lanka and subsequent near-death experience, in which he imagined floating in space above the island. Although Jung wrote his autobiography before humankind entered space, his convincing description of earth orbit foreshadows astronauts' accounts.

During the past two years Richard has been a regular contributor of Sri Lanka material to Bookhis main aim at this time is to complete two new books. The first is a collection of revamped film essays titled There Should Have Been Ghosts, but Weren't.

More important, though, is a collection of British interactions with Ceylon/Sri Lanka - imaginary, biographical and historical – tentatively titled Zeylanica Britannica. This work, Richard hopes to publish in

characters such as the "Great Beast 666", the occultist Aleister Crowley: the Victorian actress and mistress of George Bernard Shaw. Florence Farr: the infamous "Bloody" Mary Palliser; and his great friend Mike Wilson, who became Swami Siva Kalki.

because jewellery is their best friend. Thus, the ever

All in all, Richard Boyle's career has been as diverse as it has been interesting, though throughout the man's recollections of his life's work, one thing above all else is clearly evident. The fact that a man born in England, is now, as much as





## Gray The Classic Oscar

incarnation on film

Barnes in the title role and Basil

partaking in heavy drinking and

his soul for pleasure. As Dorian's represents the corruption of his nis spirit, while he is unaffected y his actions, even to the point

young girl and then her mother what is happening, then dumps nis dismembered corpse in the River Thames, desperate to keep

monster he's created has desires for his child. The performances are solid

all too obvious, that unbridled rendition doesn't offer enough doesn't expect. On the plus side, the special affects are refreshing audiences have grown so used to films being driven solely by the quality of the CGI content it will come as a refreshing surprise to have a film that uses its visual wizardry to underpin the film. and not make it. That said, the mid section of the film does drag a little and whole thing has the feel of a novel that could have been wrapped up adequately in a Not as good as the classic

novel, but still an exciting piece of cinema (none the less) with some adequate performances, and one great one by Colin Firth.