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By Lindy Brophy

Graduate student scores the big screen

A story written by a master's student in the Department of English has been made into a major international film starring Glenn Close.

Paradise Road, directed by Bruce Beresford, opens in Perth in June.

It is the story of a group of Australian, English and American women held in a Japanese prisoner of war (POW) camp in Sumatra, and how they made themselves into a 'choral orchestra', the power of the music keeping their spirits alive during their internment.

Martin Meader is studying for his master's degree in creative writing.

Several years ago, after graduating from UWA, he was studying at Swinbourne Film and Television School in Melbourne when he read a moving review of a concert in Perth by Red Cross workers, to commemorate the women and their choir.

Mr. Meader was intrigued by the story and set about researching it more thoroughly, including interviewing survivors from the camp.

Some months later, he met Oxford University graduate David Giles in the offices of the Queensland Film Commission. They developed a partnership and together worked on the project that they eventually called A Voice Cries Out.

They worked hard to get support for their film, travelling overseas several times to research and seek finance.

'When we met Bruce Beresford on our first trip to the UK and he read the script, he said: "You're onto a winner!";' Mr. Meader said.

'We secured a major part of the finance from Singapore and Bruce Beresford was ready to make the film as soon as we could get the rest of the money.'

'We finally negotiated rights with Village Roadshow and work started on the film in 1994.'

'Bruce Beresford has done quite a lot of rewriting. I am confident that our original script would have won an Oscar, but now, I'm not so sure.'



A Voice Cries Out was renamed Paradise Road, but although the name has been changed and the original script rewritten, the core of the story --- the power of music to uplift the human spirit under appalling conditions --- remains.

Glenn Close plays the part of Norah Chambers, a graduate of London's Royal Academy of Music. She was among a group of women captured by the Japanese when their ship was sunk in Singapore Harbour during World War II.

Norah trained and conducted the wartime women's choir. They hummed music in four parts, recreating instrumental and orchestral works, arranged by her and a missionary, Margaret Dryburgh.

Early reviews of the film say it is uplifting and moving, not sad and depressing as some POW films can be.

Mr. Meader has already won awards for his film projects. His short film, Mr. ZEEZEE, won the Swinbourne Film and Television School's Best Film Award in 1990 and it received an honourable mention in the 1992 Rochester International Film Festival of New York State.