



Media Release
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New season of SBS's award-winning documentary collection 'Australia Uncovered' features four extraordinary Australian stories that will entertain, inspire and fascinate

Premiering Thursday 8 February on SBS and SBS On Demand

Interviews Available

Images available [here](#)

Watch the trailers here:

Hitler's Jewish Soldier?

Last Chance to Save a Life

The Carnival

Psychedelics: Stepping into the Unknown

Australia's most compelling documentary collection, ***Australia Uncovered***, returns to **SBS and SBS On Demand on Thursday 8 February from 8:40pm** with a curated strand of four captivating stand-alone documentaries that explore incredible untold Australian stories and reveal new insights into some of the biggest issues facing Australia today.

Continuing weekly on Thursday evenings, the third season of the critically acclaimed collection investigates whether the story of a young Jewish boy who became Hitler's youngest soldier was in fact true – or a Holocaust Hoax – in ***Hitler's Jewish Soldier?***; follows brave patients and brilliant scientists in nail-biting real time as they trial an elusive therapy that could be the key to humanity's survival in ***Last Chance to Save a Life***; invites viewers on an epic road trip with six-generation travelling show family The Bells in ***The Carnival***; and provides exclusive access to a world-first psychedelic trial that hopes to help change the course of the global mental health epidemic in ***Psychedelics: Stepping into the Unknown***.

SBS Head of Unscripted Joseph Maxwell said: "SBS is thrilled to showcase another brilliant season of *Australia Uncovered*. This strand of single documentaries is made by some of Australia's best filmmakers. The four individual films take us into diverse, revealing, emotional and life-changing stories that promise to surprise and captivate our audiences."



Australian Government





Screen Australia's Director of Content Grainne Brunsdon said: "Screen Australia is delighted to support another compelling season of *Australia Uncovered*. This inspiring collection of documentaries explore and celebrate contemporary Australia in ambitious and engaging ways – shining a light on important and often untold stories from a diversity of voices."

Episode 1 – *Hitler's Jewish Soldier?* – Thursday 8 February on SBS and SBS On Demand from 8:40pm

Dubbed "The Mascot," Hitler's youngest soldier was, remarkably, a Jewish boy who hid his secret in Australia for almost fifty years before embarking on a rollercoaster ride to uncover his true identity. This is the astonishing story of Alex Kurzem, revealed for the first time in full in *Hitler's Jewish Soldier?* – the gripping first instalment in the new season of *Australia Uncovered*.

As a young boy during the Second World War, Alex Kurzem says he recalls watching from a tree as his entire village, including his family, were murdered by an execution squad. Having escaped certain death by fleeing into the frozen woods of Belorussia, Alex says he survived for several months before being captured and taken in by a Latvian battalion that was later incorporated into the SS.

Instead of killing Alex, the battalion made him their child soldier, their 'Mascot.' They gave him a false name, fake birth date, adorned him with a pint-sized uniform and armed him with a shorn-off rifle. When the Russians invaded and the fighting was deemed to be too dangerous, Alex was removed from the Front and fostered by a Latvian chocolatier named Jekabs Dzenis. The Dzenis family migrated to Australia in 1949, taking Alex with them.

Building a new life in Melbourne, Alex married and had three children, working in the circus before becoming a TV repairman. He kept his secret for almost fifty years, until – facing a cancer scare – he told his children his survival story.

Hitler's Jewish Soldier? investigates whether Alex's incredible survival story – as well as the discovery of his long-lost Jewish family in the late 1990s – is in fact true. As Jewish journalist and director Dan Goldberg journeys across the globe in a bid to solve the mystery of The Mascot, what unfolds is an astounding true crime-esque investigation that will keep you guessing until the very end.

Dan Goldberg, Creative Director, Mint Pictures, said: "This story crossed my desk in 2012 when I was a correspondent filing for Jewish newspapers in America, Canada, Europe, and Israel. Initially it struck me as a possible Holocaust hoax, and so I travelled from Sydney to Melbourne to interview this legendary 'Mascot,' then in his late 70s, in person. I filed several stories about this alleged hoax, which were syndicated around the world. Like most news, the story petered out and I went back to making documentaries.

"Until mid-2020 when, out of the blue, I received a call from The Mascot. What he told me triggered a moral obligation to file a new story. It quickly became evident that this truth-is-stranger-than-fiction story would make a ripping feature documentary. The end result is a staggering story that provokes bigger questions about secrets and lies, fact and fiction, family, and identity."

***Hitler's Jewish Soldier?* is a Mint Pictures production for SBS. Principal production funding from Screen Australia and SBS. Financed with support from Screen NSW.**

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Tel: +61 2 9430 2828



Episode 2 – Last Chance to Save a Life – Thursday 15 February on SBS and SBS On Demand from 8:40pm

In a world threatened by deadly antibiotic-resistant infections, new hope emerges from the unlikelyst of sources: viruses.

From the Emmy award-winning team at Genepool Productions, *Last Chance to Save a Life* – the compelling, intimate second documentary in *Australia Uncovered* – follows patients, doctors, and scientists in nail-biting real time as they experience the extraordinary potential and challenges of 'phage therapy,' an elusive therapy that could hold the key to humanity's survival.

Consumed by the reality of untreatable superbugs and fuelled by an unwavering determination, teams of brilliant young scientists in Melbourne and Sydney, led by Professor Anton Peleg and Professor Jon Iredell, are attempting to harness the power of phages. Bacteriophages – or 'phages' for short – are viruses that destroy bacteria.

Conventional medical options are no longer an option for the patients, so they will be injected with trillions of phages, with the hope that the phages can defeat their bacterial enemy. Neither the scientists nor the patients know if this radical approach will work. As the clock ticks, together they embark on an audacious experiment.

In this riveting real-time narrative, the power of human resilience shines brightly as patients and their families are faced with the reality of the failure of antibiotics, from the heartbreaking goodbyes of loved ones, to finding hope in unexpected recoveries.

Last Chance to Save a Life bears witness to the global renaissance in phage therapy, shining a light on Australia's trailblazing contribution to dealing with arguably the greatest global health threat of our time.

Emma Watts, Director of Last Chance to Save a Life, said: "When I first brought up phage therapy with my doctor friends I was met with extreme scepticism. They rolled their eyes at my naivety. Apparently, this strange medicine (that had been adopted by the Soviets) would 'never catch on in the West.' But over a few years, I watched as a handful of the world's leading medical institutes began to research phage therapy. Eventually, I heard a whisper that a hospital close to home in Melbourne was about to start trials. I knew then this was a story I had to tell."

Last Chance to Save a Life is a Genepool Productions film for SBS. Principal production funding from Screen Australia and SBS. Financed with support from VicScreen.

Episode 3 – The Carnival – Thursday 22 February on SBS and SBS On Demand from 8:40pm

The Carnival – the epic and fascinating third documentary in *Australia Uncovered* – follows six-generation travelling show family The Bells as they journey across the country with their convoy of trucks and workers, battling not only to keep Australia's oldest show on the road – but also to keep their family's legacy alive.

The Bells have been touring Australia for over a hundred years. Six weeks is the longest they stay in one place. As the family face some of the toughest times they've ever seen, including unprecedented bushfires and a global health pandemic, they're preparing to hand over the reins to the next generation, with the empire expected to be handed down to the next boy in line.

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Filmed over seven years and a Walkley Documentary Award Finalist, *The Carnival* is a larger-than-life road trip that unveils not just the mystery surrounding traveling show-people, but also the struggles of a family grappling with adapting a traditional way of life to the modern world.

Isabel Darling, Writer/Director of *The Carnival*, said: "In late 2015, I ventured into the Bell family's camp and was immediately struck by their unique lifestyle. Their existence is a subculture marked by ceaseless journeys across the country, skimming through various towns and cities, with the rare exception of a stay in Batemans Bay NSW for six weeks every Christmas. It was here that I first encountered the Bell family.

"Over the next seven years, I had the privilege of documenting this family's traditional show life continuously. My children and I travelled the country, chasing after trucks and sharing campfires beneath the starry desert skies. I am overjoyed that audiences now have the opportunity to embark on the same adventure and gain insight into the real lives of the 'showies.'"

The Carnival is a Sideshow Films production for SBS. Principal production funding from Screen Australia in association with Shark Island Foundation. Financed with support from Screen NSW, Torchlight Media and JOTZ productions.

Episode 4 – *Psychedelics: Stepping into the Unknown* – Thursday 29 February on SBS and SBS On Demand from 8:40pm

Anxiety is the most common group of mental disorders experienced by Australians aged 16 to 85, according to the latest ABS figures.¹ Could psychedelic assisted therapy hold the answer to our mental illness epidemic? This is the question explored in *Psychedelics: Stepping into the Unknown* – the thrilling final instalment in the third season of *Australia Uncovered*.

As the head of Australia's first clinical psychedelic laboratory, Dr Paul Liknaitzky is fast emerging as a leader in this ground-breaking area of research. In a world first, Dr Liknaitzky and his team at Monash University trial the use of psilocybin (the active ingredient found in 'magic mushrooms') in psychedelic assisted therapy to treat Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). For two years, *Psychedelics: Stepping into the Unknown* is granted exclusive access to what unfolds.

We meet the participants before their treatment begins and witness their daily struggles living with anxiety. We follow them through treatment, including extraordinary psychedelic dosing sessions, and intense and intimate therapy. Their experiences are raw, courageous, and life changing.

After two eventful years, the trial concludes, and the brave participants reflect on the impact it has had on their lives. For Dr Liknaitzky, the Monash team and the many Australians seeking relief from their mental health struggles, the future of psychedelic therapy is only just beginning.

Darren Dale and Jacob Hickey, Producers of *Psychedelics: Stepping into the Unknown*, said: "We know that millions of us will suffer from anxiety and other mental health illnesses at some point in our lives. The possibility that psychedelic assisted therapy could potentially offer hope is a fascinating prospect and one that we wanted to interrogate and explore. Gaining access to a world first trial has been extraordinary and it's been a privilege to document its progress and the lives of those involved."

Psychedelics: Stepping into the Unknown is a Blackfella Films production for SBS. Principal production funding from Screen Australia in association with SBS. Financed with support from VicScreen.

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***Australia Uncovered* premieres with *Hitler's Jewish Soldier?* on Thursday 8 February on SBS and SBS On Demand from 8:40pm. The four-part collection continues weekly on Thursdays from 8:40pm.**

Screeners and images available via the **SBS Screening Room**

For all media enquiries please contact:

Lara Wallace | 0428 088 201 | lara.wallace@sbs.com.au

Jordan Byrne | 0425 325 055 | jordan.byrne@sbs.com.au

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020-2022). *National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing*. ABS.
<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/2020-2022>.

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