

Sales Agent for **Toomelah** is

Ryan Kampe | Visit Films  
89 5th Ave #806, New York NY 10003 USA  
Email: [info@visitfilms.com](mailto:info@visitfilms.com)  
Telephone: +1.718.312.8210

Cannes 2011- Lerins S8 +33 (0)4 92 99 32 19

**Toomelah** (Un Certain Regard)  
**Après le sud** (Director's Fortnight)

Screening schedule <<http://www.visitfilms.com/ZZZspecial/Visit2011Cannes.pdf>>

International Cannes Publicist for **Toomelah** is

Mia Romley Davies  
4 New Burlington Street, London, W1S 2JG  
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7148 3770 Mobile: +44 (0) 7791 670 465  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7148 3774  
Email: [mia@romleydavies.com](mailto:mia@romleydavies.com)

Australian Publicist for **Toomelah** is

Tracey Mair | TM Publicity  
P. O. Box 2506, Byron Bay NSW 2481  
Telephone: +61 (0)2 6680 7106 Fax: + 61 (0) 2 6680 7108  
Mob: +61 (0) 419 221 493

Brochure Production Supported by Screen Australia

SCREEN AUSTRALIA AND BUNYA PRODUCTIONS PRESENT IN ASSOCIATION WITH  
SCREEN NSW AND VISIT FILMS DANIEL CONNORS CHRISTOPHER EDWARDS AND DEAN DALEY-JONES "TOOMELAH"  
COMPOSER IVAN SEN RE-RECORDING MIXER SAM HAYWOOD DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY IVAN SEN PRODUCER DAVID JOWSEY WRITER AND DIRECTOR IVAN SEN

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A film by IVAN SEN



TOOMELAH



## THE DIRECTOR

Ivan Sen was raised in Inverell, New South Wales, Australia. He graduated from Inverell High School in 1989 and then undertook a degree in photography at Griffith University in Queensland. He studied filmmaking at the Australian Film Television and Radio School, where he completed a Bachelor Arts in Directing in 1997.

Throughout the late 1990s Sen worked on numerous short films, before making his feature film debut with *Beneath Clouds* in 2002. The film follows two teenagers, Lena (Dannielle Hall) and Vaughn (Damian Pitt) who hitchhike together to Sydney, each for their own reasons. It won Sen global acclaim, screening at the 2003 Sundance Film Festival and winning the Premiere First Movie Award at the 2002 Berlin Film Festival and the 2002 Best Director Award at the Australian Film Institute Awards. Sen has subsequently written and produced a number of award winning documentaries. His documentary *Yellow Fella* screened in Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005.

Toomelah is selected for the Cannes International Film Festival 2011 - Un Certain Regard.



## THE STORY

In a remote Aboriginal community, Daniel, a sensitive, troubled 10 year old boy from a broken home, yearns to be a "gangster" like the male role models in his life. Skipping school, getting into fights and running drugs for Linden, the local gang leader.

Daniel's home life becomes increasingly difficult. He has to deal with the return of an elderly Aunt, who was removed from the mission when she was a young child. Daniel watches her, as she struggles to reconnect and find her place in the community.

So Daniel moves in with his gang and is well on his way to becoming a little gangster. Yet his sometime girlfriend Tanitia still holds out hope for Daniel, trying to get him to go back to school.

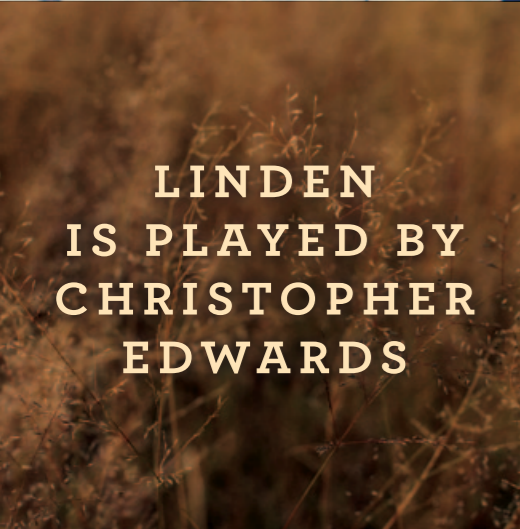
Then a rival drug dealer Bruce, returns from prison, and a drug turf war erupts, leading to a showdown between the groups.

Daniel is caught in the middle and thrust into a world of brutal violence. Linden and his gang are all taken off to jail.

Daniel is suddenly alone and vulnerable. He has to work out where his life is heading and make a choice for his future...



**DANIEL  
IS PLAYED  
BY 10 YEAR  
OLD DANIEL  
CONNORS**



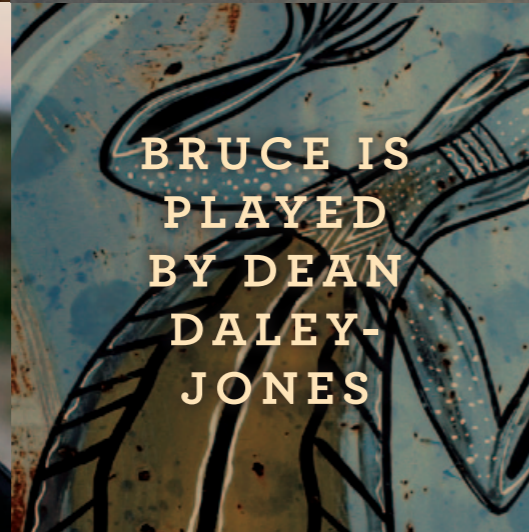
**LINDEN  
IS PLAYED BY  
CHRISTOPHER  
EDWARDS**



**TANITIA  
IS PLAYED  
BY DANIEKA  
CONNORS**



**BRUCE IS  
PLAYED  
BY DEAN  
DALEY-  
JONES**



## THE PROCESS

The script was written directly from experiences and memories I have from visiting Toomelah.

Existing locations, houses and cars within the community have been used in the film, giving a realistic portrayal of the world and way of life in Toomelah.

The movie explores the interweaving complexities of the issues facing Toomelah, the community. From incarceration, deaths in custody, the stolen generations, and substance abuse, to identity, cultural extinction and education. It's all there, but these issues never dictate to the audience. They are just a part of the fragments of everyday life. The audience constantly travels through the eyes of Daniel as he navigates his way in search of his place in the community.

**Toomelah** was shot in a very unique way. The film has quite a lot of dialogue, and all of the cast were first time actors except for one. My challenge was to create strong performances and maintain the script's dialogue at the same time. To achieve

this, I needed these totally inexperienced actors to feel very comfortable. So my idea was to pretty much make the film with no crew. It was a big gamble, but I felt it was the only way I could get close to the performance level I wanted. As a result, I put a lot of pressure on myself. But I think the performances in the movie are just extraordinary.

The Toomelah mob are very talented, and their beautiful spirit transcends every scene in the film. I hope this spirit will be embraced by audiences. They are very likeable characters. Slowly we got the film shot, but it did take me a while to come down off the stress hormones. So when we got the Cannes news it was mostly relief. I thought, thank god for that, wow! And I could finally relax a little.

- Ivan Sen

UNIQUE,  
AUTHENTIC,  
INSPIRIATIONAL



## THE MISSION

Toomelah is an Aboriginal community of around 300 Gamilaroi people in northwest NSW. It is positioned on the banks of the Macintyre river on the border of Queensland and NSW. During heavy rain, the mission becomes an island, cut off from the outside world, like it was for so many years under Government policy. Toomelah was set up in 1937 under the jurisdiction the NSW Aborigines Protection Board. It was established to manage reserves and control the lives of Aboriginal people in New South Wales. It caused mass dislocation of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands. The creation of the Toomelah reserve brought together people from the surrounding Gamilaroi and Bigambul nations. In 1937, a Federal and state policy of assimilation was introduced. All Aboriginal people were expected to live like European Australians.

In 1940, The focus on assimilation resulted with the removal of 'light-skinned' children from their families. This policy had a dramatic effect on Toomelah, with the forced removal

of many children. The Church played a major role in the assimilation process of the Toomelah people, replacing many aspects of traditional culture.

Today, Toomelah is surrounded by flat grasslands, which give way to Eucalypt covered riverbanks. Cotton farming and grazing take up much of the local land. The Toomelah reserve is only a few hundred acres in size, but is surrounded by thousands of acres of farmland.

During the 1980s, Toomelah gained national publicity for some of the worst living conditions in Australia. The Toomelah people still suffer from the many health and social issues that plague Australia's Indigenous communities. A major issue is the future for the many young Gamilaroi people and this is the central theme of the film.