



FANTASY CAVE

Director: Michelle Savill Producer: Matt Henley

A group of cave dwellers beaver away night and day to create an immersive fantasyland, but is it really for the children?

**PREMIERING AT NZIFF 27 JULY 2015
AVAILABLE ONLINE FROM 28 JULY 2015**

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Hidden in the provinces of the North Island of New Zealand, one attraction has been entertaining children and adults alike for 25 years. What started as a Christmas Cave has bloomed into a dense, highly detailed labyrinth of animatronic curiosities. *Fantasy Cave* seeks out the secretive 'Cave Dwellers' responsible for its existence and asks the question: why do we create?

LONG SYNOPSIS

Dannevirke's Fantasy Cave is a blend of southern Hawkes Bay history and fairy tale wonderland run by a tight core of cave dwelling locals. Started in 1989 as a Christmas cave for the locals, it's now celebrating its 25th year and the volunteers welcome 17,000 people through the cave every year.

The Fantasy Cave is little known outside the boundaries of the Manawatu-Wanganui region. The 'Cave Dwellers' are an unassuming and camera shy collective of Dannevirke's senior citizens that has historically received little national attention. This documentary goes behind the scenes to catch a glimpse of their day-to-day activities, and their relationships, in an attempt to understand their motivations, all the while exploring the greater question: 'Why do we create?'

Director: Michelle Savill

Michelle Savill works as a writer, director and producer of films, music videos, animations and commercials. Her work has been screened at numerous international festivals including Aspen, Rotterdam, Clermont-Ferrand, Melbourne and Edinburgh. Michelle's recent short film *Ellen Is Leaving* won the Best Narrative Short Film Award at SXSW Film Festival and the Golden Gate Award for Best Narrative Short Film at San Francisco International Film Festival.

Producer: Matt Henley

Matt Henley has been working as a director of photography in Wellington for the last five years, shooting short films, music videos, special effects/animation and commercials. His work has screened at Camerimage, Clermont-Ferrand, NZIFF and Locarno.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Michelle and Matt were drawn to the aesthetic of Fantasy Cave; the visual possibilities when captured in camera and the driving force of the 'Cave Dwellers,' a collection of Dannevirke's more senior of citizens. The combination of the live animatronics and light displays with the passion and activity of these people was enticing. What drove this group of retirees to spend so much of their personal time working on this curiosity?

From the outset the Cave Dwellers welcomed us with open arms and allowed us to film, without question, every element of their life in and at Fantasy Cave. It is not often that the older generations of New Zealand society get given an opportunity to express themselves which made this project all the more satisfying – being able to give this group of people a forum to be celebrated in a different arena.

Loading Docs is a forward thinking initiative which is allowing these sorts of stories to be brought to the forefront of New Zealand's collective consciousness using contemporary forms of media – something which has recently been missing from our national media and storytelling.

PRESS RELEASE

In a town with a population of 6000 people you'd expect to find a supermarket, petrol station, The Warehouse, maybe a butcher if you're lucky but you probably wouldn't expect to find a 'fantasy cave' inhabited by a group of senior citizen cave dwellers. But in Dannevirke, Hawkes Bay that's exactly what you'll find.

Though often confused for one, the Fantasy Cave is not a brothel; it's a fairytale wonderland built to inspire the young children of Dannevirke. It is also a 3-minute documentary made by Michelle Saville and Matt Henley as part of the 2015 Loading Docs scheme that will be released online.

The documentary makers spent several days filming with the volunteer retired community who run the Fantasy Cave, which sees 11,000 people through its doors each year. It started as a Santa's cave in 1989 and is now open year-round on Saturdays with a range of displays and dioramas depicting fairy tales, nursery rhymes and well-known stories. Director, Saville, says the film is less a story about the cave itself and more a story about connection – how a group of elderly people faced with retirement have banded together in order to maintain a purpose and to establish human connections with their community. She hopes the film will give the audience a sense of positivity about the human condition.

The Loading Docs initiative that *Fantasy Cave* is a part of supports 10 filmmaking teams to experiment with the confines of a 3-minute timeframe to make innovative and creative documentaries that tell New Zealand stories, this year based around the theme of connection. *Fantasy Cave* has been selected to premiere at the NZ International Film Festival on the 27th July, screening before the feature *The Brand New Testament*, after which it will be available to view online at www.loadingdocs.net and on **TVNZ OnDemand** along with the other nine films.

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