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## Film's twisted path to success

Michael Bodey | June 02, 2008

**ONCE you have conquered New York, Dungog is not the obvious next destination. But it was for the makers of the Australian film *Bitter & Twisted*, first-time writer-director Christopher Weekes and producer Bridget Callow.**

After generating glowing reviews at Robert De Niro's Tribeca Film Festival last month, the film had its Australian premiere last night at the conclusion of the second annual Dungog Film Festival.

Callow said choosing the burgeoning festival in NSW's Hunter Valley "was a no brainer for us". They turned down a poorly scheduled slot at the Sydney Film Festival in favour of Dungog because "Dungog was going to make a song and dance for us", she said.

The story of the \$200,000 self-financed film is as unlikely as that of the Dungog Film Festival. It might not be Cannes or Sundance but the festival, founded by producer Allannah Zitserman and director Stavros Kazantzidis, has established itself as a key weekend of local film programming and industry seminars.

For the makers of *Bitter & Twisted*, last night's premiere was another step on an unlikely journey, one that is likely to lead to a distribution deal and already has Weekes attached to a US film project.

The film, about a family and friends coming to terms with the death of a young man, stars Noni Hazlehurst, Steve Rodgers, Gary Sweet, Matthew Newton, Leeanna Walsman and Penne Hackforth-Jones. Weekes and Callow are still bemused the lead, Hazlehurst, took a punt on two untrained 24-year-olds and a crew all younger than 30.

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