

# Governor urged ex-Age editor to stand up to Kennett

By STEVE FOLEY  
and RICHARD WILLINGHAM

A FORMER Victorian governor, Richard McGarvie, privately encouraged then editor of *The Age* Bruce Guthrie not to be "crowded" by withering attacks on him by premier Jeff Kennett, and to maintain the paper's scrutiny of his government.

The unprecedented intervention by the governor has been revealed in a new book by Mr Guthrie, in which he tells how Mr McGarvie invited him to lunch at Government House in 1997 at the height of an unrelenting campaign by Mr Kennett against the newspaper.



Jeff Kennett and Bruce Guthrie

Pressure from the premier, backed by leading business figures, who accused Mr Guthrie of being too negative, ultimately saw Mr Guthrie vacate the editor's chair after less than two years.

His battles with Mr Kennett feature strongly in his explosive memoir, *John Bites Minich*, to be published by Melbourne University Press next week. Exclusive extracts will appear in *The Age* and *The Sunday Age* this weekend.

Mr Guthrie writes that on the day of his visit to Government House he was ushered by an aide to a private room to find a small table set for two. "To my surprise, McGarvie and I were dining alone, to my astonishment, after extracting from me an understanding that our conversation was confidential. . . . He steered me for the fight

against the premier. *The Age* was an essential part of democratic life in Victoria and we must not be cowed by Kennett, he said, adding: "More power to you, Bruce," Mr Guthrie recounts.

"Given that the governor sat down every week with senior Kennett ministers as the governor-in-council to sign off on government business, this was extraordinary. I left Government House feeling, if not uplifted, then certainly a little less alone. Soon the pressure was back on again though."

Mr McGarvie, a former Supreme Court judge, was appointed by premier Joan Kirner just before Labor lost office in 1992. He had been a long-time member of the ALP but had resigned from the party after being appointed to the bench. He died in 2003. "I no longer feel bound by the agreement which I have honoured until now," Mr Guthrie writes.

In another revelation, Mr Guthrie says the office of then federal treasurer Peter Costello wanted him that Mr Kennett had vowed in a one-on-one conversation that he was determined to "kill" Mr Guthrie and *The Age*. Yesterday Mr Kennett dismissed Mr Guthrie's claims. "I don't take anything that Bruce Guthrie said as accurate, given my experiences in the past, and I have no reason to believe this is accurate," he said.

"I suggest this is another example of where an individual is using a relation, however distant it may be with me, to help sensationalise what would otherwise be a boring publication. . . . It is a bit of the ongoing mediocrity of Bruce Guthrie."

The book also gives Mr Guthrie's account of his sacking as editor of the *Herald Sun*. He sued his former employer, headed by Rupert Murdoch, winning substantial damages in the Supreme Court this year.

# Spirit born anew in the purifying flames of destruction

By GABRIELLA COSLOWICH



BILL VIOLA does not like to preach with his art. He does not like to tell an audience what to think, preferring instead to make a work and let it go, allowing viewers to bring their own layers of meaning to it. But this giant of contemporary art, who has twice represented his native America at the Venice Biennale, could never have expected the nuances and poignancy that one of his works, *Fire Woman*, would have for a Melbourne audience.

The 11-minute video, which opens at the Melbourne Festival tonight, shows the silhouette of a woman standing before an immense, thundering wall of flame. The work is shown only after dusk, in the contemplative hush of Saint Carthage's church in Parkville, on a six-metre high screen. In the stillness and diffused light of the church, the wall of flames is all the more formidable, conjuring visions of hell, and, inevitably, the hellish memories of Victoria's recent bushfires.

But the work, ultimately, is about liberation and transformation. The woman surrenders herself to the flames, falling into them in sumptuous slow motion, and as she does the flames begin to dissolve into undulating waves of pure golden light. "When she falls, she is taking the leap of faith. . . and immersing herself in the element that is threatening to consume her. And there is a beautiful thing in Buddhism, and it's in Christianity: it's in all religions, of giving oneself to one's enemy, or giving oneself to what's ever is tormenting you," says Viola, who is in Melbourne as a guest of the festival.

*Fire Woman* screens in a loop with the equally mesmerising 10-minute video *Tylian's Ascention*. Viola is a man of faith, but not in the official or dogmatic sense. He is a firm believer in the afterlife. As a six-year-old, he fell into a lake, sunk to the bottom, and saw heaven.

"It was beautiful, no fear, I wanted to stay and then my uncle grabbed me and pulled me out," he says.

But Viola shuns organised religion, just as he shuns organised art movements — organised anything for that matter. His spirituality is an altogether private affair. He meditates each morning, sitting on an Islamic prayer mat, in front of a white Christian cross.

"I really believe very strongly that all religions have at their core something very good and positive. And the irony — especially of the three monotheistic religions — is that they're at each other's throats, literally and metaphorically, and yet they all worship the same God."

# Melbourne tipped for Phantom sequel

By ROBIN USHER

ANDREW Lloyd Webber's sequel to the most profitable musical in history, *The Phantom of the Opera*, has had its New York opening cancelled twice, but the show, *Love Never Dies*, looks set to open in Melbourne mid-next year.

The composer's production company, Really Useful, is to make an announcement in Parliament House next Tuesday that is expected to confirm six months of speculation that Melbourne has snared yet another national premiere.

It coincides with news that one of the most successful shows that Melbourne has seen, *Mary Poppins*, is closing next March despite hosting near capacity audiences since opening at Her Majesty's in July.

This is likely to cause consternation among the public, who quite reasonably expected the show to run for most of next year to meet demand. But it is believed co-producers Cannon Mackintosh and Disney are keen to honour a booking for the show to transfer to Sydney.

After five years of success in London and New York, they are now mostly motivated by pride in their production, since its box-office returns are almost guaranteed wherever it is playing.

It will be replaced at Her Majesty's by the new Australian production *Dr Zhivago*, starring Anthony Warlow.

*Love Never Dies* opened to mixed reviews in London in March and was scheduled to transfer to Broadway next month.

But that was pushed back to next year before being cancelled. A report in the *New York Post* suggested last month that Melbourne would get a new production that could later be transferred to Broadway.

Artist Bill Viola with his haunting work *Fire Woman*, showing as part of the Melbourne Festival.

Picture: MICHAEL CAMERON/ARTS