

VAL RIDES INTO TOWN

The man who has played Jim Morrison, Batman and a swords 'n' sorcery hero is here for Supanova, writes **Sally Browne**

"Balderdash!" Val Kilmer roars down the phone line when responding to the charge by his good friend and *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* co-star, Robert Downey Jr, that he is "chronically eccentric".

"It takes one to know one," he adds with a chuckle. "I never really saw myself as eccentric, but the older I get the more I can recognise that I haven't done things the conventional way in Hollywood," Kilmer, 51, says.

That unconventional career has taken him from spinning planes in *Top Gun* to wielding swords in fantasy *Willow* to embodying Jim Morrison in *The Doors*, channelling Doc Holliday in western *Tombstone*, to being one of the most enigmatic men in a bat suit in *Batman Forever*.

Now he's turning his hand to more diverse projects, including playing western hero Wyatt Earp in *The First Ride of Wyatt Earp*, a ghost-haunted writer in Francis Ford Coppola's *Twixt* and a "terrible motivational speaker" in *Lotus Community Workshop*, a short film by cult director Harmony Korine.



Convention star Val Kilmer is here for a fanfest.

"Isn't it great? I laughed when he said that sentence," says Kilmer. "He's such a clever writer."

Kilmer is also embarking on a project close to his heart – a film called *Mark Twain and Mary Baker Eddy*, which he plans to write and direct himself. In the film, in which he plays Twain, he looks at the relationship between the great American writer and Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Science movement, in which Kilmer was raised. Twain was scathingly critical of Baker Eddy in his lifetime.

"In my story Mark Twain was very mean to Mrs Eddy in the press but he said privately to his daughter

that he was really sorry, he really liked her and he really wanted to meet her, so in my movie – he never met her in real life – he does meet her and he apologises, so it's a kind of a reconciliation that I think is necessary for our mortal man with the immortal man."

Kilmer, who now lives on a ranch in New Mexico, grew up in Los Angeles, where he went to high school with actor Kevin Spacey. As well as enjoying sports and outdoor activities, he was a keen poetry and theatre buff from a young age, and, at 17, was the youngest person to be accepted into the Juilliard drama program.

"It's funny, because I have two teenagers, one who is officially not a teenager any more – she turned 20. I thought I was all over the place, I had so many interests, but now that I have my own teenagers I'm trying to encourage them to be like I was when I was a kid.

"I was kind of always an outsider even though I was involved in lots of different groups and team sports; I loved the theatre but I didn't really hang out with the theatre gang and played tennis and basketball and surfed and went backpacking and was just active all the time. I loved Shakespeare though, so I kind of had that dual existence where I'd get restless but I could settle down for five hours and read old English."

Today, Kilmer is looking forward to joining the ranks of other unconventional people at Supanova, Australia's pop culture expo, where he will be joining actors at the signing table including *Back to the Future's* Christopher "Doc" Lloyd, *Lord of the Rings'* Billy Boyd, *Dexter's* Julie Benz and *Merlin's* Colin Morgan.

"I've been to Comic-Con twice so I have some familiarity with it but never out of the country, so I'm really looking forward to it. I love Australia, I always have such a great time."

Supanova is at the RNA Showgrounds today.



CON ARTISTS JAZZ IT UP

In the last few years, jazz has skyrocketed in popularity in Brisbane, thanks in no small part to the Queensland Conservatorium, writes **Marie-Christine Sourris**

As we huddle in the central stairwell inside the Queensland Conservatorium, a constant stream of students buzz up and down around us.

Most are disinterested in the camera lights and recording equipment they carefully navigate their way around. Bulky double basses bob away on their backs as they hurry to class. Many balance sturdy black instrument boxes with a stack of classroom books in their arms.

Streams of music mix together in one disharmonious melody – a bunch of tubas belting out a C scale in the courtyard; a string quartet warming up down the hall; jazz seats echoing from one of the auditoriums.

It is the latter sound that has brought us here today to the Queensland Conservatorium, one of the two largest conservatoriums in the country.

Since launching as an official degree as part of Griffith University's Bachelor of Music and Performance in the mid-'90s, the Jazz strand has attracted aspiring musicians from all over the country. Only 80 to 90 students are in the jazz department at any one time at the South Bank-based institution, which has churned out popular music acts like Katie Noonan, Megan Washington, Kristin Berardi, Elly Hoyt and Misinterprotato.

Having such a tight group within the larger 800-strong Con community is nice, says student Matt Hunter, because it means everybody knows each other.

It is also extremely helpful – everyone becomes a potential bandmate for weekend gigs, the lifeblood of any struggling musician.

Performing from about the age of 16, Hunter now has a residency at a restaurant on weekends, the practical side to studying music, and also