



## The Proposition

**John Hillcoat**

AUSTRALIA/UNITED KINGDOM, 2005  
English

104 minutes ■ Colour/35mm

Production Company: **Autonomous/  
Surefire Film Production LLP/  
Jackie O Productions**

Executive Producer: **Sara Giles,**

**Michael Hamlyn, Chris Auty,  
Norman Humphrey, James Atherton,  
Michael Henry, Robert Jones**

Producer: **Cat Villiers, Chiara Menage,  
Chris Brown, Jackie O'Sullivan**

Screenplay: **Nick Cave**

Cinematographer: **Benoit Delhomme**

Editor: **Jon Gregory**

Production Designer: **Chris Kennedy**

Sound: **Paul Davies**

Music: **Nick Cave, Warren Ellis**

Principal Cast: **Guy Pearce,**

**Ray Winstone, Danny Huston,**

**John Hurt, David Wenham,**

**Emily Watson, Richard Wilson**

Print Source/Foreign Sales Agent:

**The Works, Portland House,**

**4 Great Portland Street,**

**London W1W 8QJ United Kingdom.**

**T (44-207) 612-1080 F (44-207) 612-1081**

**joy@theworksltd.com**

Production: **Autonomous,**

**66A Great Titchfield Street,**

**London W1W 7QJ United Kingdom.**

**T (44-207) 612-1750 F (44-207) 580-3061**

**info@autonomous.uk.com**

In 1988, Australian John Hillcoat directed one of his country's greatest films: *Ghosts... of the Civil Dead*, a painfully graphic prison drama that skilfully combined poetic coloratura on the human cost of isolation with gang rape and breakout riots. *Ghosts* also marked the first foray into cinema for music iconoclast Nick Cave, a haunting presence at the centre of the film as actor and screenwriter.

Cave and Hillcoat reunite for *The Proposition*, a film that harnesses the same angry power as *Ghosts* to dissect the outback romanticism of colonial Australia. Unflinching, Darwinian brutality is moderated by moments of lyrical introspection; silence and isolation form the inner worlds of frightened characters, making their bloody encounters all the more painful and exhilaratingly dramatic.

*The Proposition* is an anti-Western, a profane genre that resurfaces when society is weary of war and violence to interrogate the intentions of the Cowboy and the nobility of the Savage. Late in the nineteenth century, newly appointed lawman Captain Stanley (Ray Winstone) does everything in his power to protect his dainty wife Martha (Emily Watson) from the wicked frontier culture surrounding their village. When he captures Charlie Burns (Guy Pearce) and his psychologically unsound younger brother, Mikey (Richard Wilson) – Irish outlaws whose family is linked to atrocities in the region – Stanley makes Charlie a proposition: bring his psychotic, poetry-spewing older brother Arthur (Danny Huston) to justice and

Mikey will live. This “deal” plays out in a violent maelstrom that consumes everything in its path.

It is hard to overemphasize the dramatic tension of this film or the excellence of its cast. Winstone is at his thundering best, vulnerable and headstrong, embodying the contradictions of colonial duty. Huston's mad poet and Watson's delicate ersatz princess are also extraordinarily well realized. John Hurt, playing a kind of dark sentinel drunk who pushes the story to its logical conclusion, is also wonderful, but it is Pearce's deceptively wistful ambivalence that fuels the film's mind-blowing tonal shifts and that forms its veiled moral core.

■ **Noah Cowan**

*John Hillcoat and Nick Cave present their earlier collaboration Ghosts... of the Civil Dead in the Festival's Dialogues: Talking with Pictures series this year.*

**John Hillcoat** was born in Brisbane, Australia. He studied at the Swinburne Film School in Melbourne, where he directed the short films *The Blonde's Date with Death* (81) and *Frankie and Johnny* (82). He has directed three feature films: *Ghosts... of the Civil Dead* (88), *To Have and to Hold* (96) and *The Proposition* (05).

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