



# the UMBILICAL BROTHERS

## A Hare-Raising Interview

Director Jim Hare explains the production of the Umbilical Brothers' latest DVD.

By Brenna Fender

The Umbilical Brothers' sophomore DVD, *Don't Explain*, is an impressive success, going Gold within the first two months of its Australian release. Although Shane Dundas and David Collins (better known as the Umbilical Brothers) are naturally largely responsible for this achievement, there is no doubt that director Jim Hare played an important part.

Jim is an American who immigrated to Australia in his early 20's. Now thoroughly immersed in Australian culture, he is a resident of Sydney, along with wife Vicki Larnach, son Brandon, age 12, daughter Jordan, age 10, and a fat cat named Pusska. Jim is the founder of *Hare Brained Ideas*, a production company through which he intends to create films showcasing Aussie talent.

Born and raised 30 minutes south of San Francisco, California, Jim grew up in a musical family. He performed in his first professional gig at age 12 when he played drums for his Dad's band. He learned to play various instruments over the years and eventually got a degree in Electro-Acoustics, studying film scoring with Dan Wyman, who worked on classic scores such as *Apocalypse Now*, *Halloween*, and *Lawnmower Man*. After working in the industry he decided that he'd like to try directing and editing. He still writes and produces music, most often for projects in which he is already involved. He wrote and produced the rock music at the beginning of *Don't Explain* and also *Roadie Rave* in the menu. His wife is also a musician and she produced the rendition of Pachelbel's Canon which is used on the DVD in the popular piece known as *The Flat*.

Jim agreed to share his experiences producing and directing *Don't Explain*.

### **BF: How did you get involved with the Umbilical Brothers?**

JH: I got involved with the Umbies through my last company, Elastic Wit. We made *Speedmouse*, which won a slew of international awards for DVD innovations. It was a great experience. It's funny, in those days I was totally intimidated by Dave and Shane because of their immense talent. I stayed quiet until pretty late in the project. My main contributions to that DVD were the menu experience and some of the special features. As soon as I started working with the guys directly, we really clicked. I could instantly let go and really get creative with them. The more outrageous the idea I threw out, the more enthusiastic the reaction. I adore their sense of exploration and desire to push the boundaries. We really see eye-to-eye on that.





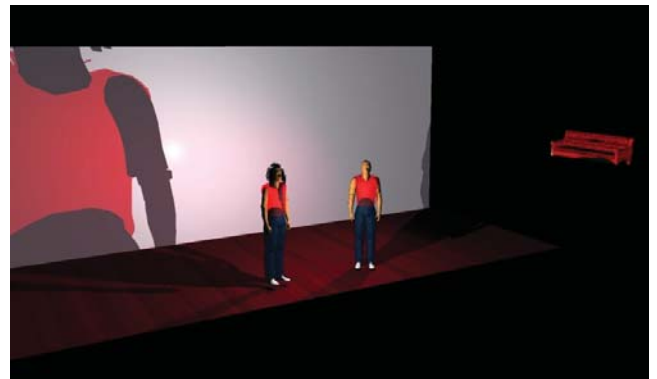
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**BF: Did you and the Umbilical Brothers collaborate on the planning of the filming, or did one particular person do most of that work?**

JH: The great thing about the Umbies is that they are so hands-on. I've worked with a lot of artists that I don't even meet until the shoot! With the Umbies you just can't do that; it's all about the planning. We discussed the shoot for about two months before agreeing on the final attack. I even came armed with 3D renderings to illustrate stage positions, lighting, and camera angles to spark discussion.

**BF: What pre-work was done to prepare for the filming?**

JH: We had to agree on some basic rules. For one, we had to find a way to keep both of them in the shot at the same time without making it look distant. I decided early on that I didn't want a lot of cutaways to just one of them because it breaks the magic. This was very challenging but we were able to come up with a series of angles that worked well. Since they spend some time on stage alone or across the stage from each other, it does happen from time to time, but if you watch the DVD, you won't often see it when they are together. This is very intentional.



**BF: How many people were on the film crew?**

JH: There were about 12 of us all up. The entire crew was hand picked. My Director of Photography (D.O.P.), Paul Howard, has been with me from the start. I trust him completely and we had long discussions about how we would make this project unique. Working with great people is the key to a project like this. If each person isn't pulling his or her weight, the whole thing will crumble.

I prefer to work with a very small crew to keep creativity and intimacy high. For this reason there is a lot of doubling up. I also worked as producer, my director's assistant also worked as assistant director, and Paul the D.O.P. worked as the lead cameraman. Belinda Ling is my assistant, and helps me with the logistical challenges and acts as an extra pair of eyes and legs on the set. But in this case she was also assistant director, whose role is to cue the director about upcoming action. We had the entire show mapped out, including stage directions and lighting changes, so Belinda could remind me what was coming up and where onstage it would happen. This was so important because the show is filled with blackouts and endless surprises. It is one of most challenging shows imaginable to capture live. I love shooting this way as everyone is completely dedicated and involved.



**BF: How did the filming differ on each of the two nights?**

JH: Paul and I did the first night completely on our own. Using only one camera, we ran around the entire theatre, scoping out the best shots and getting some difficult shots early. We then watched the footage with Shane and David the next morning so we could discuss any final modifications to the big shoot that night.

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***BF: Did anything go wrong during filming?***

JH: It wouldn't be a proper shoot if things didn't go wrong! But I didn't tell the guys about them, so I'm certainly not going to tell you!

Seriously though, that's the main reason I work with the best pros around, because the unexpected will always happen and everyone needs to be ready to tap dance a bit - especially me!

***BF: How did Shane and David have to alter their show to accommodate filming?***



JH: The great thing about the Umbies is that they don't alter the show; they want the home viewer to have the same experience as those sitting in the theatre. The main thing we had to do was make the setting film-friendly. Umbies shows traditionally happen in a black theatre, allowing the audience to use their imagination to create the surroundings. But on film, this looks quite oppressive and uninviting. We needed to liven it up a bit. Since they never do anything by halves, the guys flew in their favourite lighting director from New York just for the filming! The results were spectacular and the whole thing came to life.

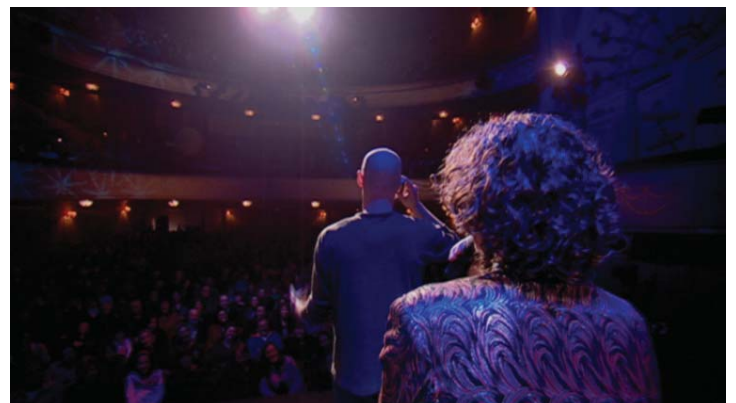
It's great working with people who don't want to compromise. We really pushed each other in a good way, making sure everything we did enhanced the final experience. We all wanted to make something special.

***BF: How many hours did you spend editing the film of the show itself?***

JH: It's hard to say. Umbies projects are always labors of love so I don't keep editing time sheets. If I remember correctly, I spent a few days editing a rough cut to show the guys and get comments. This was essentially to establish the look and pace of the show. The goal was to bring a sense of elegance that kept you in a particular head space. Too many shows are cut as "fly on the wall" representations. We wanted to really explore the subtext of the show and bring out different elements.

***BF: How were Shane and David involved in the editing process?***

JH: The guys are involved in every aspect of their projects. Editing is no different. We spent about a week together, fine tuning the edit. They are very clear about what they want but at the same time willing to take on suggestions and work within the limitations of reality.





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**BF: Do you have any good stories you can share from the filming and editing processes?**

JH: Let me put it this way, the only thing more entertaining than watching an Umbilical Brothers show is to edit with them. They are an absolute riot!



To stay creative, I do all my editing at home, so the guys would just come over and we kept it really relaxed. My kids are huge fans, so having their own personal Umbies when they got home from school was a real treat. My 10-year-old daughter, Jordan, would come in, make a few critical comments about the edit, and do some verbal sparring with the guys.

Jordan even worked on the DVD trailer/commercial with me, which is my voiceover by the way. I only know when an edit is ready when my kids sign off on it.

Another funny time was when we wrote the credit roll. It was their idea that I have a full page of credits to myself. This comes from *Speedmouse*, where production designer Michael Walker had a full page of credits.

**BF: Please tell us a little about putting together the extras.**

JH: Many of the extras are clips of existing TV shows and appearances, which came in ready to go. I put the other bits together with the guys. Doing extras with the Umbies is a great experience. Often we just do things on the spot. They will come up with an idea and we just run with it. The great thing about the working environment is that we have all the tools at our disposal. We'll do a bit of editing, then run upstairs to the recording studio and do some dialogue or effects, pull out a camera and do some extra shooting, and then go back downstairs to the editing suite to put it all together, all in the same afternoon. It's a truly inspired approach that never loses its sense of spontaneity.

We had a great time doing the sound design for the New York section of *More Stuff That Didn't Make the DVD*. This is where a giant bear takes over Time Square. We spent just as much time cracking ourselves up as we did actually recording!

We only did two takes of the extras menu. It was one of those rare moments where everything just worked. We did it quite late in the day and still had the entire chapter menu to do afterwards.

The chapter menu, which has the entire audience filled with threatening bears, was a challenge. I had the guys lie on their backs and do a series of passes holding two puppets straight up. I had them take turns since it was back-breaking work. I composited all the passes in post production, slowly building the audience two bears at a time! Did I mention this was a labor of love?



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**BF: The extras live menu appears to be one continuous shot - was that hard to do? And who WERE all those people anyway?**

JH: Ah the extras menu. That was Dave and Shane's brilliant idea and I love it! Yes, that is very much one continuous take.

My trusty assistant Belinda found the majority of [the people in the shot], but Shane and David also invited some people along. They were all really good sports and happy to go on the ride with us. I especially like the "actor" and the hat guy. Genius.

**BF: The menus are always unique on Umbies DVDs. How do they come about?**

JH: We always have fun with the menus, but they can be tricky. What we do is come up with a scenario or setting beforehand, but purposely don't script anything specific. We get in there, look around, and say "Go!" [The Umbies] make my life as a director easy because I can rely so heavily on their ability to create something from nothing. Then it's just a matter of fine tuning it. The menus should always look spontaneous and unrehearsed because they are. It's a little insight into the way their minds work.



Here's a secret about the production – there's only one Roadie suit. Watch the menus again to see why this is interesting...

**BF: Did you edit together the "home video" or did David and Shane bring that to you edited?**

JH: Ah, *The Other 22*? The guys basically picked their favourite two hours of tour footage and dumped it in my lap! I had a great time reducing it down but it wasn't easy. Everything they do is hilarious so deciding what to leave out isn't obvious. I think we came up with a good selection of stuff.

**BF: I heard that you all filmed "behind the flat" on the famous *The Flat* scene. Why didn't the video make it onto the DVD?**

JH: We spoke many times about this: "Do we show what happens behind the mysterious flat?" In the end we decided to keep a secret for just a while longer... We'll leave it at that.

**BF: Are there any Easter eggs on the DVD?**

JH: I should probably say yes and let you look for the next 10 years, but I guess that would be mean. We decided that there is so much content to get through that hiding any would just be too much.



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**BF: What would you do differently if you could?**

JH: Everything! If I could, I would happily do the entire thing again from scratch! I learned so much and only now do I know how to do this particular project perfectly. Don't get me wrong, I'm really proud of what we have made here, but I'm a perfectionist and produce things for myself first and foremost. But if I've done my job then I hid things well and only I will ever know where the issues are!



**BF: What's your next project?**

JH: I'm working on several other comedy DVDs and TV specials for Australian and U.S. comedians, and I'm also preparing the international versions of Don't Explain. The international version will include subtitles in multiple languages (including my favourite, bear language, which was my son Brandon's idea). But the big news is that I'm moving into feature films in 2008. There is so much talent here in Australia and I've got to get these guys on the big screen.

I'm really looking forward to making feature films. I love every aspect: writing, directing, producing, editing, special effects, and so on. Most of all I can't wait to slow the process down. I'm so used to getting an hour or two of finished material in a single day; being able to focus on perfecting a scene or two will be a real luxury.

I've been looking for a new challenge and this will be a big one. I'm forming a new production company to make the films, though I will continue to make comedy DVDs and TV specials at the same time because I love it.

Certainly beats working!

**BF: Thanks, Jim!**