

Filmmaker burns bright

Raeburn has default personality trait — he is nothing if not tenacious, writes **Aspasia Karras**



STRAIGHT TALKER: Filmmaker Michael Raeburn struggled to get funding for 'Triomf' because he refused to compromise the story

Picture: ALON SKUY

IT'S raining like it's monsoon season in Bombay the night I meet Michael Raeburn. It's Sunday and he is on the phone at a French post production house in another room of the small house in Westdene where he is holed for the filming of *Triomf*, based on a prize-winning novel about a dysfunctional white family on the eve of the 1994 elections. Each room hums with the mysterious activities performed by the myriad people that populate the credits of any film. It's a four-intensive industry even on a

Sunday night.

"Just don't call me a British filmmaker," he says when he emerges. "I am from Zimbabwe." That fact alone could fill up several columns of this article, suffice it to say that he is less upbeat about his homeland than he was in 1993 when he made *Jit* a comedy that captured his hopes for the future of the country from which he had been expelled by Ian Smith for his hard-hitting film *Rhodesia Countdown*.

Thirty years later he made *Zimbabwe Countdown* questioning Robert Mugabe's betrayal of the

liberation war and documenting his own dismay at the unravelling state of his nation. "It's a catastrophe," he says with an air of finality, as he settles down on the couch to chat with me.

Another potential catastrophe is the inclement weather that has been delaying filming. It seems that being an independent filmmaker is a precarious balancing act between finding funding and maintaining your creative vision.

Delays are untenable for the filmmaker whose struggle to make *Triomf* has taken him to every possible funding source only to be

rejected, partly because he refused to compromise the story and set it in another context.

The fact that he is now shooting the film seven years after he bought the rights is testament to his default personality trait — he is nothing if not tenacious.

It is the strength of the story that gave him the energy to pursue what must at times have seemed a Sisyphean task. "*Triomf* has a universal quality, poverty is dramatic. The context is a metaphor, it's the end of one world and the beginning of another.

"The pressure of six days to elec-

tions trips this guy's mind, it's just too much."

As to what drives this filmmaker a story he relates about a Hollywood agent is telling. He had just filmed the highly acclaimed *The Grass is Singing* based on Doris Lessing's novel, and was being feted by a Hollywood agent. "He was appalled that I might want to read the script of a film he was offering me... that interview with the agent is what drove me out. You have to know what you are making films for, and what kinds of films you are making, you really end up making what you know."