Ellen puts Barnett on the US map

SYDNEY: Courtney Barnett is the latest Australian artist taking America by storm. The Melbourne singer-songwriter (pictured) has appeared on the Ellen show, performing her song Depreston. Her promoters described her as "one of my favourite artists" before Barnett broke into song. Depreston was shown Aussie musicians the love in recent times with Sheppard and Chet Faker also appearing on her show. It's a massive plug for Barnett, as everyone in the audience went home with a copy of her debut album, Sometimes I Sit and Think and Sometimes I Just Sit, which is released on March 20. It also continues Barnett's onslaught on the US last year she performed on The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon and she's also about to appear at the South by South West festival this week in Austin, Texas.

Barnett is following in the footsteps of other independent artists who are making it big, such as Chet Faker. Barnett will release this album on her own label, Milk! Records, which she set up when she released her debut EP in 2012.

Keddie welcomes own Offspring

BRISBANE: Actor Asher Keddie has reportedly produced her first offspring. The sweetheart of Australian TV and her artist husband Vincent Fantauzzo, are believed to have welcomed their first child, according to several tabloid magazines.

Keddie (pictured) is one of the most popular actors on Australian TV. She particularly endeared herself to Australian audiences as Dr Nina Proudman on Offspring, which earned the 2013 Gold Logie. Glossy mag Woman's Day reports the 40-year-old gave birth but did not say whether it was a boy or a girl. Keddie only announced she was expecting her first in 2013 last November. It's Fantauzzo's second child.

He has a four-year-old son from a previous relationship.

Six reasons we love ageing action heroes

By JEANANNE CRAIG

LONDON: Step aside Chris Hemsworth and Tom Hardy, there's a new breed of hero in town.

Older action stars are enjoying their moment, as Hollywood veterans Liam Neeson, 62, and Sylvester Stallone, 72, take on new high-octane roles. The 54-year-old Penn plays an ex-special forces operative in The Gunman, and Neeson, 62, stars as a hitman in Run All Night. And while their knees might be a bit creakier than their younger counterparts, here are six reasons why we love the ageing action hero.

1 They give us hope. Try telling Liam Neeson's CIA agent Bryan Mills in Taken that he'd better off hanging up his gun and heading to a tea dance, or Sr Stallone's Expendables heroes, that they should leave the overthrowing of a Latin American dictator to someone a bit younger. These action heroes have proved that your golden years don't have to mean slippers and crosswords; they can be action-packed and full of excitement (though we might stop short of rescuing people from burning buildings, or hunting down kidnappers when we reach their age ...)

2 They know how to deliver a line. Can you imagine a 20-something actor uttering Harrison Ford's "Get off my planet!" in Air Force One, or John Wayne's "Fill your hands you son of a bitch" in True Grit? And only a weatherbeaten, gravelly voiced veteran could utter Neeson's infamous "I will look for you, I will find you, and I will kill you" line from Taken. We believe these heroes when they issue threats, because they're old and experienced enough to have a few dozen villains already buried under their hats.

3 They have great backstories. Every "backstory", we mean "remember the time I slipped a disc on a wet pavement in Blackpool?". We mean the heroes of backstory. Sean Penn is in The Gunman, where he's haunted by his special forces past, or Liam Neeson's in A Walk Among The Tombstones, where he plays a reformed alcoholic who lost his job in the NYPD as a result of a tragic (and booze-fueled) accident. Beat that for a yarn, Hunger Games whirlswinner.

4 They look tougher. Every wrinkle tells a story, so they say. Who wants to see a gym-honed hunk with beautifully moisturised skin and fluttering eyelashes fighting the baddies? We like our heroes weather-beaten, greying around the temples and not worried about smudging their fake tan. And if you happens to be a hint of a paunch, so be it. Every action hero deserves to refuel with a few doughnuts and a six-pack of beer.

5 They don't need fancy gadgets. When you've been an action hero as long as these guys have, you don't need newfangled technology to do your dirty work for you. No talking robots, shiny gadgets or complicated thingamajigs for this lot – a battered old mobile phone and a bog-standard revolver will suffice – or in the case of muscle-clad Penn in The Gunman, big guns, in more than one sense of the word.

6 They could be trailblazers. Dame Helen Mirren, 69, has bemoaned the "complete desert" of roles for actresses before Barnett broke into song. Depreston has appeared on the performing her song Depreston.

LOS ANGELES: Cult US teen author Veronica Roth has come a long way in only a few years. And it seems her next step – at least, in a literary sense – will be into space. The 26-year-old (pictured, below left) published her debut novel Divergent in 2011, launching a dystopian trilogy that has turned into a blockbuster movie franchise – the stuff of dreams for any young writer.

Insurgent – the second instalment in the series that hits theatres in the US this week – will be followed in 2016 and 2017 by two more movies made from Allegiant, the final book in the trilogy.

"By whole life, I've wanted to be a writer and write books, and maybe I thought someday I'll get a book published, and that was kind of as far as my dreams went," Roth said. "The movie stuff ... I didn't even really think about it's been really exciting and gratifying to see it come to life," added the author, who has had to get used to being the idol of masses of teenage fans.

Roth – who welcomes comparisons between Divergent and similarly dystopian young adult fiction (to-film) blockbuster franchise The Hunger Games – is in the middle of the media circus surrounding the release of Insurgent.

The story follows the fearless Tris, played by Shailene Woodley, who in the first movie learned she was "divergent" – not fitting into any of the five factions into which post-apocalyptic Chicago has been divided. Those groupings are Daulless (the brave), Erudite (the clever), Amity (the peaceful), Abnegation (the selfless) and Candor (the honest). There are also the Factionless – those not welcome in any factions.

In Insurgent, Tris – helped by her love interest Four (played by Brittan's Theo James) – must confront her inner demons as she fights the evil Jeanine (Kate Winslet), de determined to wipe out the divergents.

The parallels with The Hunger Games franchise are many: a strong central female character, a dystopian future setting divided into groups ruled by an evil central figure, a funky love interest and quirky sidekicks.

The first Hunger Games book was published in 2008, three years before Divergent. Some might suggest Roth is following a formula, but she is far from offended by the comparisons.

"I love The Hunger Games, books and movies," she said. "The best part about it was that those books created a space in the market for stories like mine ... I feel very fortunate that I wrote that story when that space was here. But she added: "It's a tough comparison, because I have a lot of admiration for those books. So it's a lot to live up to."

As the insurgent launch rolls on, and the Allegiant one gears up for the coming years, the young writer is already working on her post-Divergent world.

"It's set in space ... Star Wars meets The Book of Eli," Roth said.

She is planning two books, and is hoping for publication in 2017.