

game changers | thought leaders | rule breakers | style makers

COLLECTIVE ^{BU} _{IT}

ISSUE 40

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**Rookie
Advantage**
with the
COO of Instagram

Zoned Out
our global sleep
guide

Chatbots
your future
employee?

Are you
living
your
why?

**Samantha
Harris** *Rising
Stronger*



ADDITIONAL DIRECTOR

the rule breaker

JOCELYN MOORHOUSE

From PITCHING a FILM to hiring staff and stretching the budget, every movie is essentially a successful START-UP. And as six of Australia's finest DIRECTORS will tell you, making it in 'the biz' is one hell of a HUSTLE.

WORDS MELANIE DIMMITT

CREATIVE TAKEOVER with Laurence Malkin, producer of *Death at a Funeral* and *A Few Less Men*, champion of the Australian film industry and host of Sydney's annual Night Before the AACTA Awards party.

"This December, we'll be celebrating the fourth annual Night Before the AACTA Awards party at Icebergs in collaboration with Collective Hub. To celebrate, I'm thrilled to spotlight six unique Australian voices in film in this issue.

Some of them require no introduction: Jocelyn Moorhouse has been making films since 1983 and she recently roared back into cinemas with *The Dressmaker*, which was one of my favourite Australian films in recent memory; Tony Ayres gathered us around the water cooler with *The Slap* mini-series and then turned that jug on its head with his provocative thriller *Cut Snake*; while Greg McLean directed arguably one of Australia's finest horror films in *Wolf Creek* and is thwarting all of those expectations in 2017 with his dramatic adventure story, *Jungle*. Then there are

the new visionaries: Jennifer Peedom literally scaled some of the highest mountains of moviemaking to bring us the powerful and thought-provoking doco *Sherpa*; Garth Davis went straight from the gripping TV drama *Top of the Lake* to one of the most moving cinematic journeys of our time, *Lion*; and then there's Rosemary Myers, whose feature film debut, *Girl Asleep*, immediately introduced audiences at home and abroad to a singular vision that is undeniably her own, and yet hugely universal.

What do they all have in common? An unyielding desire to do great work and tell the truth, as they know it, regardless of the challenges stacked up against them. They're creative, entrepreneurial and, most importantly, immensely human in their quest to explore the fragile nature of life itself."

"I'm back, you bastards!" are the first words uttered in *The Dressmaker*, sultrily exhaled by Kate Winslet's character who, having returned from working in the ateliers of Parisian haute couture to her Australian hometown of Dungatar, is poised to stylishly address some unfinished business. But these words (give or take the profanity) could have just as easily come from the film's director, Jocelyn Moorhouse. She returned to set for *The Dressmaker* 18 years after her oeuvre left off, having directed *A Thousand Acres* (1997), *How to Make an American Quilt* (1995), *Proof* (1991) and the "disaster" that was *Eucalyptus* (the most famous Australian film never made) which would have starred Russell Crowe and Nicole Kidman together for the first time.

While she never stopped producing and co-writing with her husband, fellow director P.J. Hogan, Jocelyn took leave from the lens to care for their four children, two of whom are severely autistic. Her encore would come by way of Rosalie Ham's novel, *The Dressmaker*.

"I read it and it made me so homesick," says Melbourne-born Jocelyn, who was based with her family in Los Angeles for 15 years. "I thought, 'Oh gosh, I'd love to go home and make this movie.'" What came next was 2015's sensation – grossing upwards of US\$23 million internationally – with a few dark-humoured surprises up its impeccably tailored sleeve.

Here, Jocelyn reveals her inner (and outer) rebel, the way in which she wrangled Kate Winslet and how a creative career is anything but linear.



I LOVE THAT [THE DRESSMAKER] DOESN'T FOLLOW THE RULES. IT MISBEHAVES.

And I think that's great. I don't want to do a predictable story, and that's what I loved about the book, and I was very proud of the fact that the movie wasn't going to behave either. It wasn't going to do what you expected, it was going to shock you. I mean there are so many predictable, well-behaved movies out there. Why not do one that misbehaves a little bit – and breaks the rules? I realise on the surface it's a kind of a crazy frolic but, scratch a few layers off and look deeper, and it's extremely poignant and a kind of universal story about overcoming bullying and being able to survive because of your own creativity. I thought that was a really beautiful message. Also it has a wonderful female protagonist. As a female film director, I love telling stories about women.

WHAT REALLY NEEDS TO CHANGE IS THE STORYTELLER'S POINT OF VIEW.

I've often thought that I grew up – well, most generations of the Western world grew up – watching movies that are about men, or are

directed by men or written by men. If there are more women telling stories, and not just stories about women but stories about anything, you will get a female point of view, which is quite different... We really need to see it, and not just a female point of view, but also a minority's point of view. The more diverse our media can be – it's getting there, but I think it's still got a long way to go – the better our society will be, because it influences how we think about each other and about our world, and right now it's way too skewed towards a man's point of view.

MY MOTHER WAS A WONDERFUL WOMAN.

I credit her with putting the whole spark of visual storytelling and filmmaking into my mind from a very young age because she used to make little Super 8 home movies... Even though she died when I was in pre-production on [*The Dressmaker*], part of me felt I was making it for her because I knew she had felt very sad when, in her mind, her filmmaking daughter had to stop filmmaking... I just wish she could have lasted a bit longer and seen the film, but in my heart it was always, "I'm doing this for you, Mum. You believed in me all these years." Turns out a lot of other people did too, because it was a wonderful crew, and it was great, the whole thing was a joyous experience. >

I ALWAYS BELIEVE YOU SHOULD JUST, AT LEAST, ASK. WHAT CAN THEY DO? They could say no, or they actually might say yes. And in this case, [Kate Winslet] said yes! We couldn't believe it. But we did have to wait a long time, we had to be very patient. And I did send her a couple of passionate fan letters about what a brilliant actress I thought she was, and how I desperately needed her to be in this film. I would send them via her British agent, her American agent... anyway, she finally read the script, after about nine months, and immediately responded and said, "Yes, I want to do this, I love it. So let's figure out how to do it." And then she promptly got pregnant, so we had to wait another nine months.

IP.J. AND I MET AS FILM STUDENTS AT THE AUSTRALIAN FILM TELEVISION AND RADIO SCHOOL (AFTRS) BACK IN 1981. We were both extremely young and the first thing we knew about each other was that our greatest love in life was filmmaking. Even then we were helping each other on our short films, our student films, so it's been a huge part of our relationship for 30 years now.

RIGHT AFTER I FINISHED A THOUSAND ACRES OUR LITTLE GIRL, LILY, GOT DIAGNOSED WITH SEVERE AUTISM, WHICH IS AN EXTREMELY DISABLING NEUROLOGICAL CONDITION. Parents of autistic kids are very involved in their therapy, because often it's only the mum or the dad that the child pays attention to, so they have to start with, "Okay, what is this child interested in?" And it may be just bubbles and Mum. So you start with bubbles and Mum and you see what you can teach them through those things, and their world gets slightly bigger as the months go by. Lily was getting to the point of being able to start going to a special school when *Eucalyptus* came along. I thought, "Yay! I can go back to work!" But then it came crashing down around my ears and my little boy who I'd just given birth to, Jacky, he showed signs [of autism] too.

THE EUCALYPTUS DISASTER!

That was sad... I think I desperately wanted to make that movie, so much, because I hadn't made a movie in a few years, and I loved the material, I was willing to go along with a pretty unacceptable creative situation for much longer than I should have. There were a lot of people whose hearts were broken when it fell apart.

BOTH MY KIDS [WITH AUTISM] ARE IN A GOOD PLACE NOW AND AT EXCELLENT SCHOOLS, AND THAT'S WHEN I FINALLY REALISED I COULD GO BACK TO DIRECTING. And I'm thrilled, because I never stopped loving movies and I always watched them with my husband and my kids, and I was always helping P.J. on his movies. I even made little movies with my kids, just for fun. But now I'm back and really eager to catch up on lost time, directing-wise. So we'll see what happens. I've got a few pots on the stove... Text Publishing have actually commissioned me to write a book about what it's been like being a filmmaker and raising kids with autism, and the visual connection between the two. Because they're very visual people, my autistic darlings, very visual.

there are so many predictable, well-behaved movies out there. Why not do one that misbehaves a little bit – and breaks the rules?

the grounded dreamer

GARTH DAVIS

Saroo Munshi Khan was five years old when he found himself separated from his older brother at a train station and throttled across the continent to the slums of Kolkata. He would come to be adopted by a couple who lived in Tasmania and, two decades later, embark on a needle-in-a-haystack search for his birth home via Google Earth. It's a heartwrenchingly true story – and its film iteration, *Lion*, has landed first-time feature director Garth Davis squarely in the Oscars race.

Garth earned his stripes – along with Emmy and BAFTA nominations – on the television series *Top of the Lake*, before plunging head-first into his film debut, *Lion*, where he encouraged actors Dev Patel (*Slumdog Millionaire*), Nicole Kidman and the then-five-year-old Sunny Pawar to be equally brave. "I have a reputation for making people climb mountains to get the shot," he says. "I loved *Lion* because it moved me so much as a story, and it was also immensely challenging – it was both epic and expansive, but deeply intimate."

Currently working on his next feature, *Mary Magdalene* (which he promises will be challenging, "but maybe not in ways you may think"), Garth steers well clear of the easy road.

I WAS LUCKY TO BE AT ART COLLEGE PRE-COMPUTERS.

They were the good old days of visceral image-making, fine art, photography, performance art – but all that changed. The computer took over the art and design industry in a way that saw the closure of the film lab, the print-making lab, and suddenly everyone was sitting at a computer trying to be creative. I really didn't cope. So I started to play with film and video as a new medium, to try and keep my creativity physically expressive... and then one day I edited something together [that] I had shot and [I] felt emotion, and that was it. The alchemy of film had got me.

THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF [LION] WAS HAVING A FIVE-YEAR-OLD CENTRE OF FRAME FOR THE FIRST 40 MINUTES...

he has to hold the movie, and there is nothing more sobering. In combination with this, we were shooting in really complicated locations in India so, in terms of filmmaking difficulty, it was up there. Then the deeper challenges were ensuring the story had deep rhymes, and pathos... so there was some deeply intimate and considered work done in the Australian half, that I adore. I always feel like [I've bitten off more than I can chew], even now. But that means you're in the best place... only the best work comes from this place.

I NEEDED TO IMMERSE MYSELF IN THE WORLD OF THIS STORY

both in terms of the places it took place, and the people whom it is based on. This way I can emotionally understand the story and, from this, make proper decisions.

WE WORKED CLOSELY WITH SCHOOLS AND PARENTS IN SEVERAL LARGE INDIAN CITIES

in their search for the right boys for the roles. Each child who was considered to have acting potential was tested, and these tests were sent back to Australia. I just kept coming back to Sunny. I would put a camera lens on him and he just felt like the boy I had been feeling. I needed a boy who in his natural state could give me 80 per cent of the performance, someone with a look behind his eyes, a history, a quality that's beautiful to look at, and Sunny had that in spades.

ULTIMATELY, THE STORY ATTRACTED THE ACTORS – THEY ALL LOVED IT SO MUCH.

They also felt safe and excited with where I was taking it. They all wanted to do it. In terms of Nicole Kidman, well, the universe led us together. The more time I spent with the real Sue Brierley [Saroo's adoptive mother], the more I thought of Nicole... and then serendipitously, she had read the script and was reaching out to me. So it was destined.

IT SEEMS I AM PULLED TOWARD REAL LIFE STORIES, AND I'M SURE I ALWAYS WILL BE...

but this is not a conscious decision. [At the] end of the day I love exploring the human condition, and anything that takes me in that beautifully complicated landscape will keep me forever inspired. >

I love exploring the human condition, and anything that takes me in that beautifully complicated landscape will keep me forever inspired.

the boundary pusher

GREG MCLEAN

Greg scared the bejeezus out of us in 2005 with his first feature, *Wolf Creek*, a blood-soaked romp through the Australian outback that brought to life a twisted national icon in serial-killer Mick Taylor. The film would become the highest grossing R-rated Australian feature of all time, raking in more than AU\$6 million at the domestic box office and around AU\$30 million internationally. A second *Wolf Creek* film and six-part television series have since emerged (with a third film and potentially a second instalment of the series on the way), while the former theatre and opera director – who trained as a fine artist and, early in his career, worked with Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin at Opera Australia – has added to the body count with several other screamers including *Rogue* (2007) and 2016's *The Darkness* and *The Belko Experiment*. Currently in post-production, his latest project, adventure-thriller *Jungle*, starring Daniel Radcliffe, sees a departure from the straight-horror genre with which his name has become deeply entwined.

Meet Greg McLean, a veritable master of change – and quite the thrifty filmmaker when faced with a tight budget.

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, MY MUM USED TO WATCH WHAT SHE CALLED 'SHINY' SHOWS, and what she meant by that was things that were a little bit dark, little bit creepy, a little bit on the dark side. So she would watch Alfred Hitchcock films and old Hammer [Film Productions] horror films, things like that. And when I was young I used to stay up and watch these movies, so they were my first kind of intro into seeing movies and TV shows that were a bit on the dark side of things. They piqued my interest in all things horror and scary.

THE FIRST WOLF CREEK ACTUALLY CAME AFTER YEARS OF DEVELOPING STORIES and trying to find a way to make a movie that would launch my career. For five or six years I'd been working on this idea, among many other ideas, about a thriller set in the outback that involves a crazy killer. Then I finally stumbled on the real life story of Ivan Milat, 'the backpacker killer', and then the Bradley Murdoch/Joanne Lees case [in which Joanne, a young UK tourist travelling with her boyfriend Peter Falconio through central Australia, was attacked by a man later identified as Bradley John Murdoch]. Once I kind of connected the two things up, the thriller-horror story with the real story, it kind of took on a bit of a life of its own.

BEFORE I DIRECTED THE FIRST WOLF CREEK I'D BEEN DOING COMMERCIALS, and I'd been doing short films, so I kind of knew the ins-and-outs of how to stretch money and how to be inventive. For me the absolute biggest thing about working with a lower budget is that, as a director, you have to be 100 times more planned, because you don't have time to work it out later. You have to know, before you get onto the set, every single shot. Every single decision that you think you need to have made, you need to have made before you get there. Because the thing that costs money is time, and what you don't have when you have a low-budget is time, so you have to arrive with a film fully made in your head, completely, before you even attempt a low-budget film.

THE BENEFIT OF A LOW BUDGET IS THERE ARE LESS PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE DOING UNTIL YOU FINISH.

Obviously the higher the budget you've got, the more people are invested in the material and the content. Whereas if you're doing something low-budget, you almost have a responsibility to be radical because you can get away with so much more. The first movie was really experimenting, and genuinely trying out, how much can you push it before the audience will walk out of the cinema? What are the limits of people watching stuff, what can you show? I'm still amazed anyone has actually sat through [*Wolf Creek*] because I find it completely horrific. But I was genuinely trying to play with it, and saying, 'What if you did this? And what if you don't turn the camera away?'

IT WAS A VERY CLICHÉD STORYLINE. You know, three attractive people going into the woods and a bad guy chasing them. I mean, who gives a sh*t? It's the execution that makes it interesting.

I SEE FILM AS A GLOBAL BUSINESS, YOU'VE GOT TO BE ABLE TO GO ANYWHERE AND WORK ANYWHERE... We're very privileged to have such a great passionate bunch of film professionals in Australia. LA is LA, it's the heart of the global film industry and it has extraordinary things, it's great to go and be able to work there but, coming back and shooting here, I'm always just amazed at the crew we have here and the talent and just the enthusiasm for making great things.



WOLF CREEK IS LOOSELY BASED ON TRUE EVENTS, BUT JUNGLE IS BASED ON AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY ABOUT AN EVENT THAT TRULY HAPPENED IN REAL LIFE. It's an adaptation of the book *Jungle* by a guy called Yossi Ghinsberg. In 1981, he and some friends were hiking in the Amazon jungle in Bolivia, and he met a jungle guide called Karl, and this character invited him on a three-week adventure into the jungle. He accepted, and the three guys went into the jungle with him. Only two came out alive... So it's a true survival story and an incredible adventure. Even though I've made a couple of horror films that people have liked, I'm also aiming to do all kinds of different things.

EACH TIME WE MAKE A WOLF CREEK STORY, IT REALLY HAS TO FLIP IT ON ITS HEAD. I think people are always going to be fascinated with the character of Mick, and he'll always be at the centre of whatever we do, but in terms of the actual storytelling and the style of the story, that will change completely in order to keep it interesting for ourselves, as creators, and also for the audience. So they feel like they're experiencing a new way into the *Wolf Creek* world. >

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the adaptor

JENNIFER PEEDOM

I wasn't at all a mountaineer to start with, I'm still not really," says Jennifer Peedom, who has spent the past decade filming on the world's highest peak. Last year she brought *Sherpa* to the screen, a documentary feature offering a rare glimpse at Mount Everest through the eyes of those serving as high-altitude porters and guides (one in particular, Phurba Tashi, has summited Everest 21 times) who, until now, have disappeared "on the cutting-room floor".

After kicking off her career behind the camera on ABC filmmaking series *Race Around Oz*, Jennifer ascended to the rank of managing director of *Inside Film* (IF) and publisher of the magazine for which she was named their NSW Young Business Woman of the Year in 2003 (that business degree from Universidad del Salvador in Buenos Aires didn't go to waste). Three years later, she flung herself into filmmaking full-time.

Currently in production on another doco feature, *Mountain*, the buzz around Jennifer's BAFTA-nominated *Sherpa* continues to reverberate across the globe. "I thought it was time that somebody showed how Everest expeditions really worked," says Jennifer. But she could never have foreseen that, mid-shoot, an avalanche would sweep through Everest's Khumbu Icefall, killing 16 Nepalese guides.

It was April 18, 2014 – a day that would come to be known as the mountain's deadliest, and would see Jen performing a drastic plot pivot on her feet. Here's her story.

I HAVE AN ETHOS OF NEVER SAYING NO TO AN OPPORTUNITY. I was living in Tamarama, [Sydney,] in a group house with a bunch of crazy Kiwis as neighbours, running IF magazine at the time. And because I had done *Race [Around Oz]* I knew how to camera operate – and I was pretty fit and healthy and doing a bit of rockclimbing – so they said, "Why don't you come and camera operate on one of these adventure races with us?" And through that, I wound up in that world... and realised that I loved the Himalayas, and also that my body worked really well at altitude.

I PITCHED A STORY TO DATELINE TO DO THE STORY ABOUT SHERPAS IN 2003, ACTUALLY. That was my first time to Everest – that was the first time I met Phurba Tashi. And I subsequently went on three different expeditions with him and a number of those sherpas... I'd been most of the way up Everest with them. I'd also seen, over the years, the dynamic between the foreigners and the sherpas, from that very first *Dateline* piece that I did all of those years ago, when the sherpas were too shy to say anything, really.

BEING FEMALE MEANT THAT THE WORK THAT WAS COMING OUT OF THOSE TRIPS WAS INTERESTING BECAUSE IT CAME FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE. And people seemed to like the take that I brought to it, because it was different to maybe what a male point of view would bring to those situations. I think that's certainly the case with *Sherpa*, it's a different angle on things.

WE'D BEEN UP IN THE NIGHT FILMING THE SHERPAS GETTING READY, GETTING THEIR CRAMPONS ON AND PREPARING AND PRAYING TO GO THROUGH THE ICEFALL IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. So I hadn't been in bed for long – it was about three in the morning when I went back to bed and about six when I was woken up by the sun and I heard a loud rumble. You do hear rumbles a lot around Everest Base Camp. But this one really did seem to come from the direction of the icefall, and it wasn't long after that one of the kitchen's sherpa staff came to my attention and let me know what had happened. I leapt up and woke up the camera crew... and just started filming.

WE KNEW THAT THIS WAS AN ACCIDENT THAT INVOLVED SHERPAS AND WE WERE THERE TO TELL THE STORY. We were there to highlight the disproportionate risk that sherpas take in taking foreigners up Everest, and here was that exemplified. But we didn't know to the extent, how bad it was, and so we just kind of quickly tried to figure out whether or not any of our sherpas had been affected, which thankfully, they hadn't. They'd been just above it, about 50 metres above the avalanche when it broke off. And then it was all pretty surreal, really. We all just went off in different directions, kind of instinctively, filming what we could.

AT TIMES WE WONDERED WHETHER OR NOT THAT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO, and oscillated between thinking, 'Well, that's what we're here to do,' and, 'Oh my god, should I be doing this? Should I not?' [We] gathered what we could but it was very sad. I think the saddest thing for me was seeing our sherpa team eventually come back down, and just how distressed they were. That's one of the reasons I didn't film them that night. It just didn't feel right. They were so... just scared, actually. Really scared and spooked, and very sad. It was a really hard day.

I HONESTLY DIDN'T KNOW THAT I HAD A FILM UNTIL WE GOT BACK TO THE CUTTING ROOM. A couple of weeks in, we really nussed it out. I certainly know that Universal were very worried. It probably seems strange, but for me it was never really a climbing film, it was about the sherpas' cultural and spiritual life, and how this intersects with this big Everest industry. You can never bank on the summit anyway, but when it became apparent that the summit might not happen, I think Universal did get very nervous. We needed to essentially re-pitch the film when we got back, to convince them we did still have a story.

WE REALLY DELIBERATELY DOVE INTO THE SHADES OF GREY. We didn't want to say there's goodies or baddies here necessarily, it's about saying, be mindful of your pursuit – the impact it may have on other people. It's about being a little bit more responsible when it comes to that kind of tourism and understanding, if you have a desire to do something, what impact that desire might have on people who have less than you. >

it was all pretty surreal, really. we all just went off in different directions, kind of instinctively, filming what we could... I honestly didn't know that I had a film until we got back to the cutting room.

the risk taker

TONY AYRES

Everyone has a story that kind of defines them in some way," says Tony Ayres, the producer, director and screenwriter behind television series *Barracuda*, *Glitch*, *The Slap* and *Nowhere Boys*. An alumnus of the Victorian College of Arts (VCA) and Sydney's AFTRS, the *Cut Snake* (2014) director is one of the founding partners at Matchbox Pictures – a company formed by five producers.

"My particular story was very dramatic," says Portuguese Macau-born Tony, who migrated to Perth, Western Australia, in the '60s when his mother, a Chinese nightclub singer, married an Australian sailor. Tony's mum committed suicide when he was 11 and, when a heart attack ended the life of his stepfather three years later, Tony was placed in the care of his history teacher.

"It was a story about coming to Australia with high hopes, and then trying to find a life here, and dealing with the obstacles that come when you're a migrant," says Tony of his second feature film, *The Home Song Stories* (2007), for which he drew upon his tumultuous biography. "It was both a personal story and a story that I felt other people could relate to."

Known for delivering content with international clout that is a little (or a lot) left-of-centre (and for its 2016 Emmy win for *Nowhere Boys*), Tony's Matchbox Pictures was fully acquired by NBCUniversal in 2014.

Tony, who still serves as a screenwriter, producer and director at Matchbox, is changing the faces on our screens. Here, he tells how going against the grain has spelt success.

THERE ARE FIVE PRODUCERS WHO FORMED MATCHBOX. We're all independent producers and we felt like we were all struggling for the same boom-bust cycle – it was boom time when you're in production, and then you'd go into development and you'd go into debt, basically, developing the next project. And then you'd pay off that debt when you're in production again. It didn't seem like a sustainable business model, so we kind of wanted to know what would happen if we joined forces with some other producers, and that's where the idea for Matchbox Pictures came [from].

NBCUNIVERSAL NOW COMPLETELY OWNS THE COMPANY. So what it means is all of our shows have NBCU as a backer, as a distributor, because they're a distribution company. And the company is in a financially secure position, which is great, given how uncertain our industry is. We still control what we make – we still determine what we make. But in that determination, we always have an eye for what will work internationally, because that's what NBCU needs – they need shows that they can sell internationally – so that's always a factor. But to be honest, that was always a factor even before Matchbox started, because Australian shows need to travel.

I THINK WE ARE ABSOLUTELY A RISK-TAKING COMPANY. The thing that surprised us when NBCU bought us was that we're all a bunch of fairly adventurous independent producers making pretty risky and out-there work. We necessarily moved into the mainstream, but our choices are still fairly bold. *Wanted* for Channel Seven is an unashamedly commercial TV show, but the point of difference is it has two female leads, and it isn't a rom-com. *Glitch* is ABC's first supernatural show... We try to be as bold and provocative as we can be, because I think we feel that that's the kind of work that gets noticed these days.

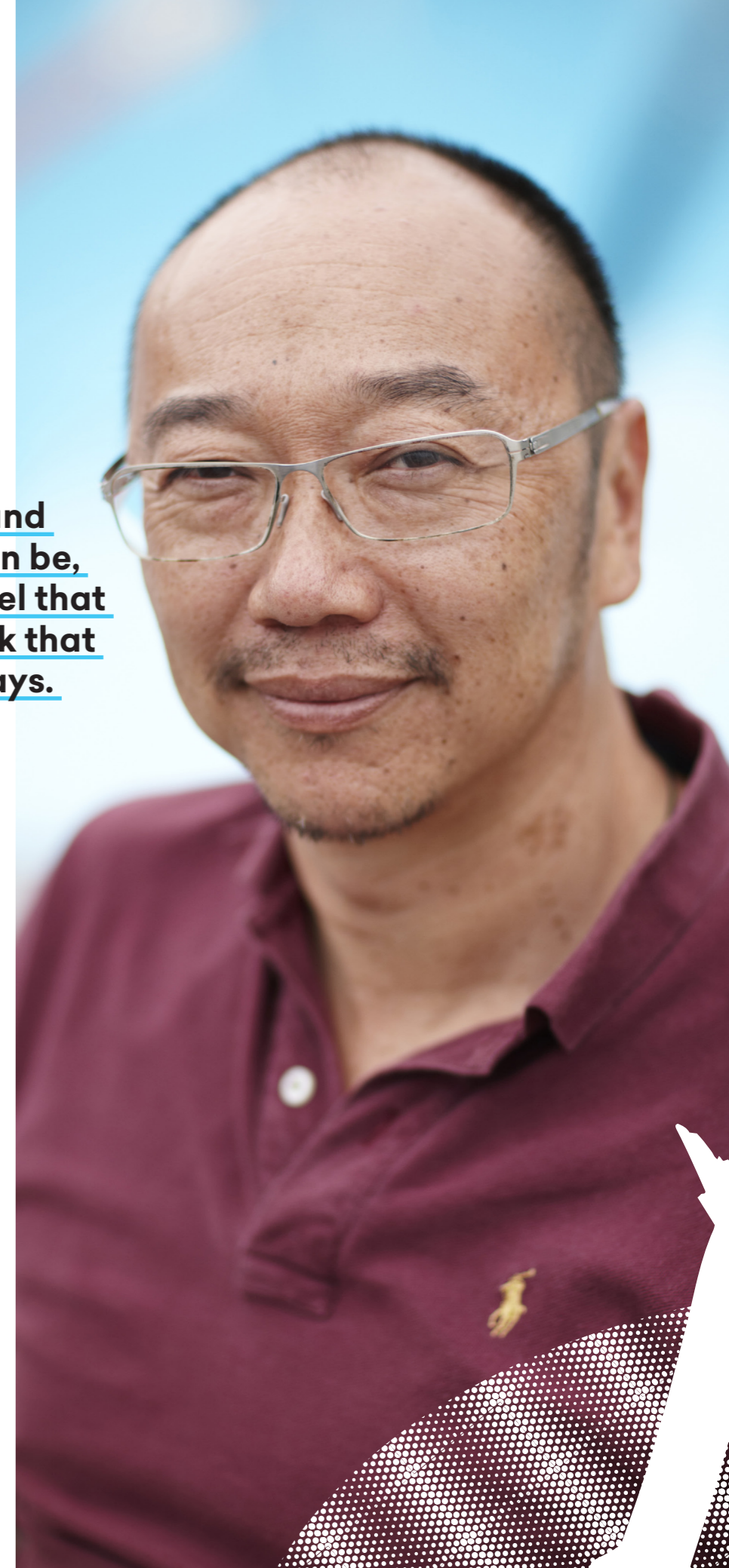
THE BIG CHALLENGE FOR US IN AUSTRALIA IS THAT EXPECTATIONS ARE RISING much higher than budgets are rising, and now we have to create work that competes at an international level. I think we have great crews, really great cinematographers and designers. That helps us. We have very fast crews. So we make work at a high level, very quickly... And for a small market we have a phenomenal number of internationally recognised and known actors and directors and writers and cinematographers and designers... I think we're a pretty high-achieving nation.

DIVERSITY IS A BIG ISSUE FOR US AS A COMPANY. We're making *The Family Law*, which is Australia's first all-Chinese comedy series. We're making *Ali's Wedding*, which is an all-Muslim rom-com. We've done Christos Tsiolkas' work [*The Slap*, *Barracuda*], which always has questions of race, class and sexuality. Even shows like [the upcoming series] *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, where in the original novel, the cast was particularly white Caucasian – without changing the story too much, we tried to change the cultural background of some of our characters so that it more accurately reflects the Australia that we know and recognise.

we try to be as bold and provocative as we can be, because I think we feel that that's the kind of work that gets noticed these days.

I ACTUALLY STARTED OUT WANTING TO BE A WRITER – like an author – and I used to write short stories. Then I ended up going to art school. I wasn't one of those teenage film nerds. Like, you know, those filmmakers who were making Super 8 movies. That wasn't me. I kind of came to film a little bit later, after working out that, well, words and pictures equals film. And I ended up going to film school. I went to VCA in Melbourne and then went to AFTRS in Sydney and did year-long courses at both. That was where I started my film career, but it wasn't until my late twenties.

I'M MOST COMPELLED BY A SCRIPT WHEN IT MAKES ME BOTH THINK AND FEEL. A lot of the scripts you get are around genre tropes or things that you've seen before, or rehashes of stories that you've seen before, or basically have nothing to say. And I don't respond to that. It doesn't particularly interest me. What I do respond to is an original and truthful and provocative statement about the world. >



ROSEMARY MYERS

the experimenter



Eliciting comparisons to Wes Anderson and Spike Jonze with your first film is no small feat – but this theatre veteran didn't set out to play small. Originally intended for the stage, Rosemary Myers' *Girl Asleep* has been winning its way around the international film festival circuit following its Adelaide Film Festival premiere in October 2015.

Born of a creative partnership between Rosemary – who spent 14 years with the Arena Theatre Company in Melbourne before stepping into the role of artistic director at Adelaide's Windmill Theatre Co – and writer-actor Matthew Whittet, *Girl Asleep* captures that icky spot between adolescence and adulthood (made all the more awkward by its mustard-tinted '70s milieu).

The film was developed during the first HIVE Lab (a program run by the Adelaide Film Festival that fosters filmmaking by those from various sectors in the arts) and has since seen overseas sales in the US, UK, France and Scandinavia.

"When we made the film, it was kind of a bit of an experiment for us," says Rosemary, who is currently in the throes of a follow-up film. "But the life it's had since then – that has been really quite incredible."

The best thing about being new to the biz? You're unaware of your limitations – as Rosemary would soon find while cunningly crafting what critics are calling Australia's answer to hit *Napoleon Dynamite*.

GIRL ASLEEP WAS THE PLAY we were working [on] at the time [of HIVE Lab], and we just went, "This could be a great film. Let's pitch it..." I don't think we ever kind of questioned [whether] we were ready, we just thought, we love telling stories, and we'd love to tell a story in a new medium... A lot of our work's been influenced by film, and we were quite interested to take our theatrical DNA into film.

WE WERE VERY AMBITIOUS IN TERMS OF THE TIMEFRAME THAT WE HAD TO MAKE THE FILM, AND THE BUDGET WE HAD. And a few people did say to us along the way, "If you knew what you were doing you wouldn't be trying to make this film for this budget." [But] we just felt optimistic. And we were used to making things in the theatre in an inventive way. Because in the theatre you have to solve everything in live time and space, so we're used to problem-solving.

JO [DYER], OUR PRODUCER, SAID, "YOU CAN'T HAVE A HORSE RIDING THROUGH A FOREST SCENE, THAT COULD TAKE UP OUR WHOLE BUDGET!"

And we said, "Don't worry, we've got a plastic horse in our storeroom." It's just our natural, lateral and inventive way of doing things because we come from the theatre. And I think that really contributed to a lot of the film, and us not being too locked in to ideas about what a film could or couldn't be.

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THEATRE IS LIKE FILM, IT REALLY IS A KIND OF BUG THAT GETS IN YOUR SYSTEM AND TAKES OVER YOUR LIFE. It's quite an obsession.

I think all of us consider ourselves, first and foremost, storytellers, rather than bound by a medium. ■

