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Mairi Cameron on her feature debut, the Gold Coast Film Festival-opener and Stan Original 'The Second'

17 April, 2018 by **Jackie Keast**

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(L-R) Director Mairi Cameron, writer-producer Stephen Lance and star Rachael Blake on the set of 'The Second.'

Director Mairi Cameron feels grateful her feature debut *The Second* has the potential to reach a wider audience than “a little Australian film” of its ilk typically might.

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A psychological thriller which explores the friendship between two women, starring Rachael Blake, Susie Porter and Vince Colosimo, *The Second* will open the Gold Coast Film Festival tonight. Later this year, it will go on to receive a national theatrical release via Mindblowing World before being released on Stan shortly after.

Marketed as the first ‘Stan Original’ feature, *The Second’s* production was fully financed for \$1 million by Screen Queensland **as part of a joint initiative with the streaming platform.**

That initiative saw Cameron, together with writer-producer Stephen Lance and producer Leanne Tonkes, go through a series of development workshops with SQ, Stan and Tangerine Entertainment’s Amy Hobby and Anne Hubbell, taking the film from concept to script.

At the 2016 Cannes Film Festival the trio were announced to have been selected by SQ from the three other teams who participated to enter production.

The hope is for *The Second* to stay in cinemas while on Stan, and Cameron believes there is the potential for the cinema and SVOD audiences – who she predicts will be different demographics – to bolster each other through word-of-mouth. She feels lucky to have her film at the forefront of a new kind of distribution model and to receive multiple audiences, noting it's too often that the “most stunning” Australian films struggle to get seen.

“I was really excited when, at the first day of the workshop, the Stan representative talked about *Sleeping Beauty* – the Australian film with Rachael Blake – being one of the most watched films on Stan,” Cameron tells IF.

“I thought: ‘This is looking good for me for the first time ever’, because it’s always been like ‘Oh no, female-centric,’ ‘Oh no, arthouse’ – [those were] terrible dirty words.”

The Second follows a writer (Blake) struggling to finish her second novel after the whirlwind success of her debut – an erotic memoir. Her publisher (Colosimo) whisks her off to an isolated house in the countryside in the hopes of helping her focus on her writing. However, when



Rachael Blake and Susie Porter in 'The Second'.

an estranged childhood friend (Porter) shows unexpectedly, relationships quickly become strained.

The idea is one Cameron says she had in her bottom drawer for a long time, which she brought to Lance and Tonkes. It was a pragmatic concept – three main characters, one location – that could work at low budget.

“It came out of a harsh lesson that I had when I went off to Cannes with my grad film [*Milk*]... suddenly a whole lot of doors opened and pitched a couple of ideas that were way too big for first features. So this idea was one that I’d developed deliberately as a first film, as a low budget idea.”

What kept Cameron coming back to the concept was also the chance to explore a friendship between two complicated, dark women in a way that avoided tropes or demonising them.

Blake starred in Lance's directorial feature debut, *My Mistress*, and the writer told Cameron she was the actress he saw in his mind when he was writing the lead.

"And I've always loved Rachael Blake since I saw her in *Lantana*. So for me, when she said yes, I was like 'Okay, I can see this; now I know what this film is', and the rest of the cast followed around her."

The film was shot over 21 days in the north of Brisbane last year, predominantly at Dalby's Jimbour House, where the crew and creative team lived throughout. Cameron says the experience was physically exhausting – she was sick for almost the entire shoot – but a special experience with a contained energy.

Cameron is the co-ordinator of the film department at the SAE Institute, where Lance is also a lecturer, and she says one of the satisfying elements of the shoot was being able to bring students on to work in assistant roles.

"I had a couple of students in assisting with costuming, production, with camera, with AD-ing. That was really lovely... they're both working in the industry now. It's that little launching pad you need; you just need that one thing on the CV."

As for tonight's premiere, Cameron is excited to have the film screen for the first time in front of a Queensland crowd as it means a lot of the local cast and crew are able to attend.

"The Gold Coast is a really good festival. It's been slowly growing over the past few years and I'm really proud to be a part of it."

The Gold Coast Film Festival runs April 17 – 29. 'The Second' screens tonight at the Arts Theatre, HOTA, Home of the Arts with a Q&A afterwards, and again April 22, 1pm BCC Coolangatta.



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