



Bad Girl | Q&A with Director Fin Edquist

One of six **MIFF Premiere Fund** films for 2016, *Bad Girl* will have its world premiere at this year's festival. Written and directed by *Blinky Bill: The Movie* and *House Husbands* screenwriter Fin Edquist, the film – a pulse-pounding thriller – stars Samara Weaving (*Mystery Road*, MIFF 2013) and Sara West (*The Daughter*, MIFF 2015) and features a moody score from long-time Nick Cave collaborator Warren Ellis.

We sat down with Fin and asked him a few questions:

How did *Bad Girl* get started, developed and then financed?

The project was 10 years in the making, evolving out of an idea (film producer) Steve Kearney and I had for a surrogacy-gone-bad thriller. Film Victoria funded several drafts of the project, during which time the surrogacy element was replaced with a cleaner adoption backstory.

At this time the protagonist was the father, Peter, his home and family under attack. After several drafts we had a strong, polished screenplay... and yet we couldn't shake the "meh" factor, the feeling that we'd seen films like this before. Sales agents and distributors must've felt the same way because the project stalled. To kickstart it, we decided to make a five-minute teaser to shop around Cannes. Several higher profile male actors had expressed interest in playing the lead but weren't about to make a teaser for free. With time and money at a premium, I reasoned we'd be able to get some young female actors to shoot a couple of the Amy/Chloe scenes in the film.



And that's when I had the Eureka moment. As we were filming the girls I realised that this was the story: their fight for family and identity. They had their whole lives ahead of them – it was so much rawer and more compelling. I wrote another draft with the girls at the centre of the story, (with dad and mum in support roles) and immediately the screenplay garnered interest. The financing came together relatively quickly after that.

In 2014 Western Australian producer Tenille Kennedy was attached to the project and was instrumental in unlocking Screen West money (we shot in Perth). Arclight, Curious and some private investors also got involved at around this time too.

Bad Girl revolves around two strong female roles. What decisions led to casting Samara Weaving and Sara West?

Sara played Amy in the teaser and gave such a strong performance that I was adamant she appear in the film (assuming we got it made before she became too old to play a teenager). We had an exhaustive casting process for the role of Chloe. Sara was often called in to play against the actors auditioning for her. Funnily enough, she never played against Samara until we started rehearsing in WA. Samara was one of the last actors we auditioned, but she was worth the wait: her sense and humour and danger were immediately apparent and we signed her up pretty quickly after seeing her.



Themes of identity, belonging and family are explored in an unusual way – tell us about the thought processes behind the script and its development.

Refocussing the story around the girls really sharpened up the themes of identity and family. At the same time I was going through ructions in my own family and these questions – what is family? Who decides who's in and who's out? – were at the forefront of my mind.

The film explores the complexities of mental health and violent behaviour. What decisions did you make around playing up to genre conventions, and wanting to tackle the issues in a genuine way?

It's definitely a balance. The challenge with any genre film like this is to prevent the plot from dominating completely so that you can make the audience give a damn about the characters. The people in this film do some fairly extreme things and I was worried it might run off the rails into satire/farce.

To counter this, I endeavoured to make both girls empathetic, which meant dealing with their problems in an emotionally honest way, being cognisant of their fears and desires, and refraining from judging them. I was loathe to use the label of any particular mental illness: it felt reductive, limiting my choices as a writer and the actors' choices. At the same time the film is a thriller and I want to entertain the audience: but hopefully by the time things really start getting intense, we understand where all the rage is coming from.



The score comes from Warren Ellis – who must be one of the most in-demand film composers of the moment, as well as being an ex-Melburnian. How did you attract Warren to the project?

Warren and producer Bruno Charlesworth had music industry connections, plus a connection as Australians living in Paris. Bruno got the script to Warren, who responded to the material. I met Warren at his holiday house in Phillip Island, we hit it off and Warren came on board the project. He was terrific to work with: there was a great collaborative back and forth between us.