

Q1. After more than a decade in the making, your first feature film *The Butterfly Tree* has finally come to fruition. Having written and directed the film yourself, can you tell us a little about your personal connection to *The Butterfly Tree*?

A decade seems like such a long time but I am reminded of that quote; 'life is what happens when you are busy making other plans' and in my case LIFE was 7 pregnancies, 4 births, 3 children, working, keeping my passions alive and the OTHER PLANS was making this film happen.

This story itself was inspired by a special person whom I lost to breast cancer. I had already started writing the script when she was diagnosed. Whilst getting to know her and falling in love with her, on an emotional / spiritual level, I was also physically losing her in exactly the same increments. In this intense period of time I got to know this fabulous woman who was also human with her own fragility and failings and I witnessed a family sacrifice their own wants and needs for the sake of someone they dearly loved. This became the heart of the *THE BUTTERFLY TREE* where Fin learns to put the needs of those he loves before his own and relinquishes his 'goddess' Evelyn to his father

Q2. Melissa George delivers an outstanding performance as the film's lead protagonist Evelyn - a vivacious, alluring and complex character. How did you come to cast Melissa and what was it like working on set with such an experienced and talented actress?

From the first scene which came to me as a vision I saw a Faye Dunaway style goddess. And after seeing Melissa in *THE SLAP* I knew that she not only had the ephemeral beauty to play Evelyn but also the depth and fragility. And when I first met Melissa I thought to myself – Wow! She actually is a GODDESS. Melissa came with an extraordinary force of contrasts – she was gutsy, vulnerable, super smart, super sexy, bold and generous, highly feminine and independent. She also reminded me of those famous Bob Dylan lyrics "And she aches just like a woman. But she breaks just like a little girl.", which of course is very much Evelyn. In terms of working with Melissa on set - of course, she is much more experienced than I - so I did what I could to support her explore her truths and I learnt to listen, negotiate and hold the space for her within the story.

Q3. Indeed, the cast is rather high-profile for a film from a feature debut director, including not only Melissa George but also Ed Oxenbould, Ewen Leslie and Sophie Lowe. How did you come to cast such experience actors and how did you make the stars align to get them all at once? And how did the budget stretch that far?

All the cast, I believe, primarily, responded to the script. I think they were intrigued by the characters and the world of the story and the magical realism aesthetic that existed on the page. As for stars aligning – I always think it's a fucking miracle when any film gets made – and I congratulate every single filmmaking team that ever pulls such a crazy stunt off. The number of elements that have to align is dumbfounding. And if you thought about it too much – you'd probably freeze up with fear at the enormity of it (particularly on very little money and very little time). I can't speak for others – but all I know is that if I keep my desire alive and every day take that next small step, and then the next and the next and have faith that the universe will look after the rest – then usually it does. That makes it all sound very easy and straight forward – right? But wait... there's more - I have found there is also a 'tipping point' before the universe starts responding and that is you have to push and work at it really fucking hard to the point of almost giving up enough to be ok to 'let go' - and then the stars start aligning. It's like a spiritual reward system – but you have to work exceptionally hard at it.

How did the budget stretch that far? – they didn't do it for the money – they did it because in their hearts they are artists and I think it was about making something that excited and challenged them. No-one did it for the money – the money just wasn't there. Everyone I feel did it because they collaboratively wanted to create something they felt was special in some way. And I tried to create a space where people felt they could all creatively give as much as they wanted.

Q4. *The Butterfly Tree* has a strong visual aesthetic that's present throughout the entire film. A vibrant colour pallet, playful cinematography and stylised hair and make-up all highlight the film's attention to detail and exciting art direction. What would you describe your strongest influences were when planning *The Butterfly Tree's* visual direction?

Strongest influences in creating the visual aesthetic. Nature and the lushness and colour of the tropics. My garden. Artists include – Samantha Everton, Marilyn Minter, Gregory Crewdson, Pierre et Gilles, Patrick Rochon, Pedro Almodovar, Michel Gondry and Jean-Pierre Jeunet.

Q5. Now that you've completed this ambitious film, what are you planning for your next screen adventure?

Another feature. *The Breathing Sea*, which is an honest exploration of the ever-evolving nature of love and the complexity of long term relationships. It is an intimate portrayal of one woman's lifetime journey from wartime passion to marital stagnation – and the decision to resolve the lingering secrets of her past. Told as an unfolding mystery, *The Breathing Sea* reveals the story of a love triangle between MARTA, the German immigrant wife of JACK, an Australian soldier, and EARL a sensitive teenage loner.