



Q&A with Director Rhys Graham (*Galore*)

Writing and directing a film is almost like a marriage that you need to invest in for years. From the page to the screen, what were the main influences that helped you bring the story to life?

I think I became fixated on the idea of making a kind of film love song for that strange, shimmering time in your adolescent life when you first discover love and loss. I find a lot of so called 'coming of age' films seem to focus on that world from an adult perspective – characters reconciling with family, or adulthood, or morality – but I was totally uninterested in that kind of external judgement of the characters. I wanted the film, and therefore the audience's experience, to have the mess and complexity and joy and sensuality that life at that age is so brimming with. So, in terms of inspiration, I would look to songs or films or photographs or experiences that to me conveyed the kind of immediacy, energy and intimacy that I thought should fill *Galore*.

You were born and raised in Canberra. How important was it for you to be able to film *Galore* in the city you grew up in?

It became something I didn't question. That particular story and script emerged so much from a sense of place – from the way we all lived and the way kids continue to live in those fringe areas, bordering the bush and the suburbs – that it seemed unthinkable to film it anywhere else. There is a definite quality to the light and landscapes there that I think shaped the look of the film. And I wanted the characters to storm around between the bushland and the concrete skateparks and meandering streets of the suburbs. The car culture of the Murrumbidgee corridor was also essential to the story.

Does the film draw on any experiences you had as an adolescent or of those around you at the time?

The film is fictional, except for the backdrop of the 2003 bushfires, but I think there is no doubt there is a kind of emotional autobiography at the heart of the film. I had my most intense and formative experiences with death, with love and desire, and with friendship around the same age, and it was also the time I became obsessed with cinema, so it certainly colours the way I chose to tell the story and how I approached the characters.

How does the backdrop of the bushfires reflect in the narrative as the characters journey to their own self-destruction?

I never wanted the fires to be a deliberate metaphor for the narrative; what I really wanted to do was create the sense that you get growing up in places like Tuggeranong, of those summer bushfires that burn on the edge of town and which, every now and then, are catastrophic – like those of 2003. It has been part of lots of our experiences in growing up, whether here in Melbourne, or the Canberra where I grew up, or anywhere that suburban lives jostle with dense bushland.

The weird disconnection we have to the places we live in in the suburbs – that kind of floating life you live in the outer edges – seemed best expressed by a landscape that was alive in the corner of all of their eyes. I really like the idea that the characters are so immersed in their friendships, loves, desires and the crazy shit they want to get up to, that they are

only peripherally aware of what is going on until it forces them to look up. There is also no doubt that a disaster of that scale makes friends, family, love and life slide quickly into perspective and I think the film is told from the point of view of pushing those lives and loves into the foreground of experience, making Billie's journey kind of heroic when measured against the personal tragedy she experiences.

The film is led by powerful performances from the two young female leads. What was it like for you to direct these actresses?

They are both incredibly gifted actors so the simple answer is that directing them was pretty blissful. The work they did on set and in rehearsal was an embarrassment of riches for the rest of us on the crew... there was so much scope and depth and complexity to what both Ashleigh and Lily brought to their roles that it far exceeded any of our hopes or expectations. I don't want to sound like I'm talking it up because I genuinely think the sophistication of their work is staggering and I won't be surprised if they both reach the heights of success in every sense. I think the thing I'm most excited about with the film is people seeing what the cast (including Toby, Aiki and Maya, who are also amazing) have brought to the film. It was pretty humbling for the rest of us to watch them all work together as an ensemble.

You've had a long association with MIFF, having participated in the 2006 [Accelerator](#) program, a professional development platform for emerging filmmakers. Can you share how this experience has influenced your career?

I think industry development like Accelerator is great because it exists alongside intensive film watching during the festival. I don't get filmmakers who don't love and devour films from everywhere; it makes no sense to me. So, being able to sit in a room for a week with people at a similar level of development and listen to visiting filmmakers talk about their craft, alongside watching their films, is a great way to focus ideas and get your mind bent. It was also great in that, for me, the relationships that came out of those few days have been durable and longlasting.

Not only have you directed the Premiere Fund film *Galore*, you also directed one of the chapters in [Tim Winton's The Turning](#), world premiering for the MIFF Centrepiece Gala this year. Which of Tim Winton's stories did you have the opportunity to direct and how was the experience?

I directed an adaptation of the story *Small Mercies* for *Tim Winton's The Turning* which, in many ways, has thematic echoes with *Galore*, despite being a much more confined and muscular story about a man dealing with the grief of his wife's suicide and the return of past desires. We got to work with most of the same crew as for *Galore* and, as people will see from the diversity of films in the project, we were given enormous freedom to create a very personal response to the story. It is an amazing piece of writing, so being able to adapt it for this project was a huge pleasure. Any chance to flick on a camera is the best so to work on a project like the one Robert Connolly has assembled in *Tim Winton's The Turning* was brilliant.

Which films in the MIFF 2013 program, besides your own projects, are you most excited to see on the big screen?

Jia Zhang-ke and Claire Denis are two of my favourite filmmakers so I'm dying to see their new films [[A Touch of Sin](#) and [Bastards](#)], and I'm keen to see [Fruitvale Station](#), which I think will have a powerful new resonance in the wake of the Trayvon Martin case. I am a music geek so I'm also hanging to see the [doco on Kathleen Hanna](#) who I love, and the [doco on The Descendents](#), an old favourite band of mine. The [new Ashgar Farhadi](#)... The [new Jem Cohen](#)... The [new Bahman Ghobadi](#)... I'm in trouble. I'm filling up a couple of passes so I'm hanging out to get drunk on films for a couple of weeks!

The [MIFF Premiere Fund](#)-supported *Galore* is screening on the following dates:

- **Thursday 1 August, 9pm at the Forum Theatre**
- **Friday 9 August, 6.30pm at Hoyts**
- **Sunday 11 August, 4pm at Greater Union**