



Synopsis

A man living in solitary seeks emotional refuge in the organising and documenting of family moments using low-grade impersonators. When his fake sister becomes inspired to follow his method, their relationship struggles between the forged and genuine.





Vision Statement

I never imagined when writing our script, less than a year later I would be calling action on a cold beach in Ukraine, while a grown man with a blonde wig who spoke no English tossed a frisbee.

A Family, an absurdist black comedy, is a story about Emerson, a man living in solitary who seeks emotional refuge in the organising and documenting of family moments using low-grade impersonators. When his fake sister becomes inspired to follow his method, their relationship struggles between the forged and the genuine.

A Family was originally inspired by the US website Craigslist, where people place ads attempting to recruit others into strange situations behind closed doors. In 2014, we explored the themes of loneliness and desperation that would lead someone to place such an ad in the short film called *The Family*. We touched on something strange and unsettling, but knew that the short film had only scraped the surface of this exciting world. We were still fascinated by the idea of someone going to extreme lengths for a sense of connection and family. We wanted to delve deeper and examine what could cause a person to go so far, so we started writing *A Family* as a feature film.

The exchanges and interactions between characters are seemingly illogical and absurd; a result of people using others as an emotional sanctuary to fill their own voids. I was especially interested in someone who paid people to act out situations that most of us take for granted. Having a family is a major social institution and, if we're lucky, part of being human.

As we got deeper into the script, the idea that the film could be made in Australia became more distant. I imagined a landscape where the characters and their location were unidentifiable, their world and their way of communicating foreign to us.

In September 2017 with \$10,000, Tom Swinburn and I set out to make *A Family* in Kyiv, Ukraine as a micro-budget feature. The foreign landscape and atmosphere of the country was a perfect backdrop for a film that showed a unique look at a lonely man's desperate search for an emotional connection.

The film was entirely shot on location in Kyiv, in the Ukrainian language. Coming from Australia and making this film over three months with a skeleton crew and in a language I could not speak or understand with minimal budget was difficult, but ultimately exciting and rewarding.

Being an outsider in Ukraine was a blessing; we were foreigners making a foreign film about foreign people in a foreign place. This gave me the extra insight to find things that usually hide between comfort and familiarity. We weren't looking for an authentic representation of Ukrainian life; we wanted to showcase the bizarre and the unfamiliar.

- Jayden Stevens - Writer / Producer / Director





Jayden Stevens

Writer / Producer / Director

Jayden Stevens is a director and photographer from the Gold Coast. He is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, where his short film *Between Trees* won the school's Brian Robinson Memorial script award.

Between Trees screened at the Palm Springs International Film Festival and the Melbourne International Film Festival, where Jayden participated in the Accelerator program for emerging directors.

His following short film *The Family* premiered at the Adelaide Film Festival.

A Family will be his first feature film.



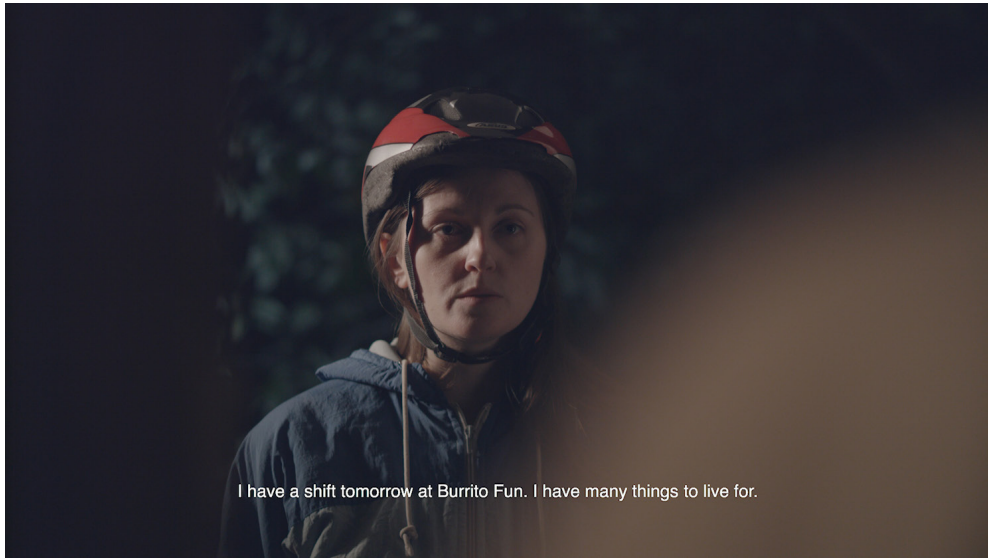
Thomas Swinburn

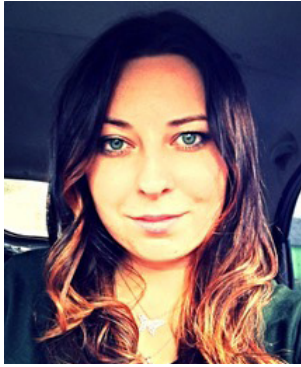
Writer / Producer / Cinematographer

Tom Swinburn studied filmmaking at Ithaca College, and completed a post graduate degree in film at the Victorian College of the Arts where his short film *A View from Below* was awarded the most bold and innovative production.

He has since shot five independent feature films in Melbourne, Canada, and Indonesia.

Tom wrote the screenplay for short film *The Family*, which premiered at the 2015 Adelaide Film Festival.





Olga Mykhalets – Producer

Olga Mykhalets is a native of Ukraine and has studied management in film production and photography in Roehampton University, London. While living in London she worked as a production manager for the BBC and IMG Media.

Olga currently works in the advertising agency Postmen, in Kyiv, producing commercials for local market with clients such as Electrolux, Mitsubishi, IMAX, Bukovel Ski Resort, and Borjomi, and has also won several Effie Awards.

A Family is her first feature film.



Clea Frost – Producer

A graduate of VCA's School of Film and Television, Clea has worked in Australia and the U.S. as a producer, writer, script editor and development executive.

From 2008-13 she was the Executive Director of the Los Angeles-based screenwriting non-profit, the CineStory Foundation. In 2013 Clea returned to her hometown to become Manager, Script Development at Film Victoria.

Since leaving Film Victoria, Clea has worked as a writer, script editor and story consultant in games, television and features. *A Family* is her first feature as a producer.



Ariel Shaw - Editor

Ariel Shaw studied a bachelor of film and television at the Victorian College of the Arts, specialising in editing. As an editor her work includes *Grey Bull*, which won awards at Sydney and Melbourne International Film Festivals and best Australian short film at Flickerfest, and *Slum Sociable*, an ASE award-winning music video.

Ariel recently edited her first feature, *That's Not Me*, which premiered internationally in Santa Barbara and nationally at Sydney Film Festival, with an Australia-wide cinema release at Palace Cinemas.

Ariel works as an assistant editor on narrative TV shows.





Cast

Emerson	Pavlo Lehenkyi
Ericka	Liudmyla Zamydra
Christina	Tetiana Kosianchuk
Brother	Maksym Derbenyov
Mother	Larysa Hraminska
Father	Mykola Bozhko
Uncle	Volodymyr Burkowskyi
Teenage Boy	Bahtiyar Ibrahimov
Gary	Ruslan Yaroshenko

Crew

Directed by	Jayden Stevens
Produced by	Olga Mykhalets, Clea Frost Thomas Swinburn, Jayden Stevens
Cinematography by	Thomas Swinburn
Edited by	Ariel Shaw
Costume Design by	Ervin C. Worthy
Sound Design by	Brooke Trezise, Livia Ruzsic
Sound Mix by	Keith Thomas
Colour Grade by	Chris Tomkins
Executive Producer	Shaun Miller



Technical Specifications

Country of Production Ukraine / Australia

Year of Production 2019

Running Time 92 minutes @ 24fps

Format DCP

Ratio 1.85:1

Language Ukrainian

