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in association with
VIC SCREEN

an
ARENAMEDIA
Production

SWEET AS



CAST

SHANTAE BARNES-COWAN

MARK COLES SMITH

NGAIRE PIGRAM

CARLOS SANSON JR

PEDREA JACKSON

MIKAYLA LEVY

ANDREW WALLACE

and

TASMA WALTON



CREW

DIRECTED BY
JUB CLERC

SCREENPLAY BY
JUB CLERC AND STEVE RODGERS

PRODUCED BY
LIZ KEARNEY

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
KATIE MILWRIGHT ACS

FILM EDITOR
KATIE FLAXMAN

PRODUCTION DESIGNER
EMMA FLETCHER

COSTUME DESIGNER
LIEN SEE LEONG

HAIR & MAKE-UP DESIGNER
KATE ANDERSON

SOUND DESIGNER
DAVID WILLIAMS

CASTING DIRECTOR
JANE NORRIS CGA

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
ROBERT CONNOLLY & ROBERT PATTERSON

INTRODUCTION

SWEET AS is the debut feature film from Indigenous writer/ director Jub Clerc, inspired by her own journey of becoming a filmmaker.

Starring Tasma Walton (MYSTERY ROAD, CLEVERMAN), Mark Coles Smith (LAST CAB TO DARWIN, MYSTERY ROAD SEASON 3), Chilean-Cuban-Australian actor Carlos Sanson Jr (BUMP) and a magnetic Shantae Barnes-Cowan (TOTAL CONTROL, FIREBITE) in the lead, it is an effervescent story of growth, acceptance and the journey towards finding oneself. With postcard-perfect shots of remote Western Australia and a road-trip-worthy soundtrack of all-Indigenous artists, SWEET AS is a joyous, cinematic, life-affirming ride.



SYNOPSES

ONE LINER OPTION 1

Some journeys last a lifetime.

ONE LINER OPTION 2

When all hope is lost, sometimes all it takes is to jump on a minibus with five complete strangers and trust the journey.

ONE PARAGRAPH OPTION 1

In remote Pilbara country in Western Australia, troubled 16 year old Indigenous girl, Murra, finds herself abandoned after an explosive incident with her drug fuelled mother. On the cusp of being lost in the 'Child Protection' system, an unusual lifeline is thrown her way by her uncle Ian, the local cop, in the form of a unique Photo Safari. Before Murra knows it, she is careening down a dusty highway with a minibus full of 'at risk' teens and two charismatic team leaders.

Will this be the lifeline Murra needs or a catalyst for her demise? An uplifting coming-of-age road movie about unconventional friendships, first crushes and finding who you are on the road less travelled.

ONE PARAGRAPH OPTION 2

With problems on the home front, 16-year-old Murra is on the verge of lashing out. That is, until her policeman uncle averts her self-destructive behaviour with a lifeline: a "photo-safari for at-risk kids". Murra isn't entirely convinced, but she soon joins cantankerous Kylie, highly-strung Sean, happy-go-lucky Elvis, and camp counsellors Fernando and Mitch on a transformative bus trip through the Pilbara. On the trail, the teens learn about friendship, first crushes and their true selves, as well as the forces of 'reality' that puncture the bubble of youth.

JUB CLERC TALKS SWEET AS

Liz Kearney (producer of SWEET AS) and I had been talking about our next project ever since we did our chapter of THE TURNING called ABBREVIATION. So, one night she called me and asked "What about that awesome road trip you went on as a teen?". It completely made sense and was such an obvious choice for my first feature film because it was this time in my life and this experience that was the catalyst in my own journey of becoming a filmmaker and storyteller.

So we set to writing a story that was inspired by my own experience as an 'at risk' teen. Something I didn't even know I was until I started to research the reason behind this trip in the first place. You see, back in the 80's when I went on this photo safari, there was no counselling, it was just 8 kids (4 girls and 4 boys) who got to jump in this space age looking Unimog and take photos through the Western Australian outback. But maybe that was all the counselling I needed and the fact that we couldn't instantly judge our works with a digital camera, we got to explore without self sabotage. Creative freedom and an endless horizon where possibilities didn't have a time limit.

Bringing all our cast and crew along for the full Pilbara experience (where I was born and bred) was a great honour as a Kimberley Nyul Nyul/Yawuru woman. The community opened their hearts and doors to our production and helped immensely with the constraints a remote town with limited resources can provide for a feature film production. Much of that was due to the cheeky name dropping of my spectacular mother, Sylvia Clarke. She was a much loved and respected elder who gave so much to her community and we were blessed to be the lucky recipients of her joyous personality.

The Pilbara is a stunning example of Goliath mining juggernauts clashing against colossal natural gorges and endless sweeping plains. The hues of country spilling out from the land into the sunrise was a glorious backdrop for the emotional journey our cast undertook. The rugged Pilbara landscape and the constant juxtaposition between Industry and Nature has never really been captured on screen.

Our cast came to the fore with so much generosity and curiosity. Shantae Barnes Cowan was effervescent to work with as our protagonist. Her enquiring mind and gentle sensitivity brought Murra to life effortlessly. We surrounded her with an agile and raucous cast that meddled together like the most delicious ganache.

I love giving a platform to my mob in any way I can so when it came to finding music for our film I went looking for Indigenous artists for the soundtrack. Like any good road trip, we knew we needed a great soundtrack - but this film didn't make it easy. We churned through hundreds of songs and went down some fantastic avenues to find many 'off the grid' rocking tunes that the film seemed to thrive on.

I love every single track on our film and how we complimented it with the atmos by incorporating industrial and natural sounds to heighten Murra's emotion and physical exploration. I particularly loved incorporating my rhye/totem, the jinda-bidirbiddir/willy wagtail into the soundscape. Its playful chittering to its shrill rhythmic alarm fit perfectly with the moments Murra was in danger or at peace. Culturally for me, this was important as jinda-bidirbiddir are indeed an omen for danger but as my rhye they have always been my guide.

This story felt right for so many reasons but mainly it was an opportunity for me to explore the classic coming of age movie through a black lens (pardon the pun). We wanted to make a film with a protagonist we don't see very often – one with an intrinsically Australian voice. To tell this story through the eyes of a young First Nations girl on the cusp of becoming a young woman whilst navigating the landmine of being a POC in our country.

We wanted to portray this distinct voice in a landscape that hasn't been portrayed on screen before and using the transformative power of travel and of country we hoped to amplify a feeling of hope. A youthful hope that, like the 6 seasons, rage and stir wild in you till they settle and blanket you in a calming stillness, blossoming and bringing new life, a new world.

Ultimately for me, SWEET AS was an opportunity to reach out to the kids and families that are a part of my lived experience. Those that continue to slip through the cracks, those that don't even realise the cracks are about to open up right in front of them and those who have conquered the demons. As the mother of a spirited and glorious teen on the cusp, and watching my remarkable family and friends being let down by multiple systems, including systemic racism, intergenerational trauma, socio-economic disparities and a continued stolen generation (to name just a few), I wanted to create something that could possibly add a realistic glimmer of hope. My wish is that something in this film resonates and helps them when decision making becomes overwhelming. My complete love and respect to them all.

Galiya Mabu xx

BIOGRAPHIES

SHANTAE BARNES-COWAN as Murra

Shantae Barnes-Cowan is an Indigenous actor based in Adelaide (Whyalla), South Australia.

In 2019, Shantae made her screen debut in the television drama series, TOTAL CONTROL. Working alongside screen icon Deb Mailman who said, "Shantae played her character, JC with so much honesty and authenticity." Since this break-out- role, Shantae has worked on a number of productions as she calves out an outstanding reputation in film and television. Shantae plays Peggy in the ABC mini-series period drama, OPERATION BUFFALO.

2021 was Shantae's break-out year in which she starred as a lead in her first feature film - Shantae played Maxi, a tough and fierce warrior in a Zombie wasteland in WYRMWOOD: APOCALYPSE. Her most recent role is as Shanika the lead in the international AMC+ series, FIREBITE.

Shantae was a 2019 Casting Guild of Australia 'Rising Star'. In 2020 Shantae was the recipient of an Australia Day Youth Citizen of the Year Award. She was the recipient of a NAIDOC Week Award (2018) for her involvement in the local community. Shantae was selected as South Australian Ambassador for the Indigenous Literacy Foundation and was also a nominee for the Gladys Ephlick Award.

MARK COLES SMITH as Ian

Mark is a proud Nyikina man. With a gift for storytelling, he works across several performing arts' genres, as an actor, writer, producer and sound designer. He will next be seen portraying the iconic role of Detective Jay Swann in MYSTERY ROAD: ORIGIN for the ABC and in SAVAGE RIVER from director Jocelyn Moorhouse, also for the ABC. Additionally, 2022 will see Mark co-produce, co-write and present a documentary focusing on Indigenous suicide entitled KEEPING HOPE.

Regularly recognised for his compelling talent, Mark won a Helpmann Award for Best Male Actor in a Play for his work on Leah Purcell's acclaimed adaptation of THE DROVER'S WIFE. He previously received a Best Supporting Actor AACTA nomination and a Best Supporting Actor win at the Film Critics' Circle of Australia awards for his work in the feature film LAST CAB TO DARWIN. For PAWNO, he received an AACTA nomination for Best Supporting Actor. Mark was the recipient of the Casting Guild of Australia's inaugural Sirius Award for New Talent of the Future.

Stage work includes playing Puck in A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM at Adelaide Festival, directed by Neil Armfield. Other credits include immersive theatre piece BLACK TIES with Ilbijerri Theatre Company and Te Rehia Theatre and BLISS for the Malthouse and Belvoir.

Television credits include OLD SCHOOL, opposite Bryan Brown and Sam Neill, a lead guest in the hit American comedy MODERN FAMILY, PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK, HALIFAX, LES NORTON, Mad Kids' series KGB, DOCTOR DOCTOR, US series HUNTERS for the SyFy Network, GODS OF WHEAT STREET, HARD ROCK MEDICAL, a co-production between SBS TV and Canada's TV Ontario, MISS FISHER'S MURDER MYSTERIES and many more. Mark also makes regular appearances on SHAUN MICALLEF'S MAD AS HELL for the ABC.

NGAIRE PIGRAM *as Grace*

Ngaire Pigram is a singer, dancer, actor, writer and director from Broome, Western Australia. Ngaire's work focuses on change and challenging boundaries through storytelling.

Ngaire is in FIREBITE for See Saw Pictures and AMC+. Her recent screenworks include ABC's THE HEIGHTS and MYSTERY ROAD 2, for which she was nominated for Best Supporting Actress in the 2020 AACTA Awards. She was touring in the role of Auntie Theresa in Opera Australia's tour of BRAN NUE DAE, when it was cancelled due to Covid-19.

After completing her Cert IV in Aboriginal Theatre at WAAPA in Broome, Ngaire was successfully accepted in the three-year diploma program the following year, moving to Perth to pursue further studies in Acting in 2004. Ngaire soon transitioned to working on short films, one of her first playing the lead in Beck Cole's PLAINS EMPTY, which went to Sundance in 2005.

In 2009, Ngaire danced in Jimmy Chi's musical BRAN NUE DAE; adapted to screen and directed by Rachel Perkins. Later that year, Ngaire played the female lead in Sundance selection MAD BASTARDS. She then went on to play Kaye in Tony Briggs' THE SAPPHIRES for Belvoir in 2011, which further toured to the Barbican in London.

Ngaire's writing/directing debut came through a Screenwest initiative in 2013, entitled DARK WHISPERS. The story follows a mother finding peace in tragedy and grief. Ngaire's sister Naomi earned a WOW award for her leading performance in the project. Between 2015-2018 Ngaire returned to the theatre performing in Marrugeku's CUT THE SKY - *"Five Songs For the Future"* - an Indigenous perspective on climate change.

Ngaire is a proud Yawuru/Wajarri woman.

TASMA WALTON as Mitch

Tasma Walton is an award-winning actress with an extensive career in film, theatre and television.

Tasma has appeared in numerous films and her most recent features include HOW TO PLEASE A WOMAN, LOOKING FOR GRACE, BLESSED, DREAMLAND and Ivan Sen's critically acclaimed MYSTERY ROAD. In television, Tasma became a household name for the role of Dash McKinley in several seasons of BLUE HEELERS. Other television projects include MYSTERY ROAD (Series 1 & 2) from the feature of the same name, CLEVERMAN (Series 1 & 2), RAKE (Series 4 & 5), LITTLE OBERON, IT'S A DATE, CITY HOMICIDE, MCLEOD'S DAUGHTERS, THE SECRET LIFE OF US and many more.

In theatre, Tasma most recently performed in Belvoir's production of WINYANBOGA YURRINGA. Prior theatrical productions include Dinner and Live Acts On Stage (Black Swan Theatre Company), MEN OF HONOUR (Ensemble Theatre), THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO (Phoenix Theatre) and Vagina Monologues (Valhalla Theatre). Tasma's work in the film and television series MYSTERY ROAD saw her nominated for AACTA, FCCA and AFCA Awards and she won the Logie Award for Best New Talent for her work in BLUE HEELERS.

CARLOS SANSON JR as Fernando

Carlos is renowned for this role as the male lead, *Santiago*, that is now entering the third season of Australia's #1 Stan television series, BUMP.

He spent early 2020 and late 2019 based in Atlanta whilst filming on The CW series, LEGACIES.

Prior to that Carlos was in Los Angeles to film a supporting lead role in Netflix's MALIBU RESCUE 2, which was the number #1 movie on Netflix upon premiering in the first week of August 2019.

He graduated with a Diploma of Arts (Acting) from Screenwise in 2018.

PEPKEA JACKSON as Elvis

Pedrea Jackson comes from 3 clan groups in the Barkly region of the Northern Territory and is a proud Jingili, Mudburra, Waramungu Man.

Pedrea received rave reviews as the lead role in the AACTA award winning short-form series ROBBIE HOOD, for SBS and Ludo Studio, directed by Dylan River (FINKE: THERE AND BACK, SWEET COUNTRY) and written by Kodie Bedford (MYSTERY ROAD, GRACE BESIDE ME).

Pedrea plays the role of Lawson Tiler on the new ABC / Netflix series MAVERIX and has joined the cast of the ABC Me TV series CRAZY FUN PARK.

MIKAYLA LEVY as Kylie

Mikayla is an actress from Perth, Western Australia. She began her acting career by starring in short films by Mitch Hunt, Lensflip and most recently she played the lead in Dolly Llama Productions' first feature film RAMPAGE ELECTRA set for release in 2023.

Mikayla's passion for the screen began at the age of 12 when she started acting classes at Filmbites Screen Academy because a friend recommended it to her.

Mikayla completed her Diploma of Screen and Media in 2021, and outside of acting, she is an avid animal lover.

ANDREW WALLACE as Sean

Andrew is an actor from Perth Western Australia who began his pursuit of acting at age 10 through school musicals. It from this introduction where he began transferring his skills to Film Acting.

Whilst currently still in High School, Andrew is a passionate student of Filmbites Screen Academy. He always puts all his heart into making every character even more unique than the last.

SWEET AS is his first film role.

JUB CLERC - WRITER & DIRECTOR

Jub is a Nyul Nyul/Yawuru woman from the Kimberley in WA.

Graduating from WAAPA'S 3 year acting course, Jub spent many years in theatre before moving into film and television, working on award winning productions including THE CIRCUIT 1 & 2, BRAN NUE DAE, MAD BASTARDS, SATELLITE BOY, JANDAMARRA'S WAR, JASPER JONES and MYSTERY ROAD - SEASON 2.

Jub has written and/or directed short films, documentaries and tv series including STORYTIME, MUSIC MEN, MIN MIN LIGHT and STRUGGLING SONGLINES. In 2014, she directed and adapted ABBREVIATION a chapter from Tim Winton's THE TURNING and in 2020 she directed 2 episodes of The Heights - Season 2.

Jub 's debut play 'The Fever and the Fret' premiered at Yirra Yaakin Theatre Co, and won the 2017 'Kate Challis Award'. Its French translation is in partnership with Maison Antoine Vitez and The Australian Embassy in Paris.

Jub credits the experience of the Photo Safari as the inspiration for her life's journey as a filmmaker. It is fitting that her first feature film should be inspired by this remarkable story.



THE LOCATION

SWEET AS is a road trip through the extraordinary landscape of the Pilbara, a vast area in the north west of Western Australia.

The journey begins in Port Hedland, a mining town almost 2000kms north of WA's capital city Perth and weaves its way through the stunning Millstream Chichester National Park and on to the majestic Karijini National Park, along the way showcasing some of Australia's most remarkable natural wonders.

SWEET AS is the only feature film to have shot in Karijini National Park – an iconic area known for its spectacular gorges, dramatic waterfalls and colours ranging from pindan red-orange to jade green water. Jub took a small crew on a filmmaking adventure, descending down vertical rock canyons to film the gorges from the inside, capturing a breathtaking world of swimming holes, ancient rock formations and towering waterfalls. Jub and the crew filmed at Karijini with the permission of the Traditional Owners of the area – the Banjima people - and were fortunate to be led through Karijini by Elder Maitland Parker.

