

A photograph of two men standing in a forest. The man on the left is younger, wearing a grey beanie and a dark jacket. The man on the right is older, with a grey beard and a headband, wearing a dark jacket. The sun is low on the left, creating a lens flare and illuminating the scene. The ground is covered in ferns and other forest plants.

# THE ROOSTER

**Media Kit**

SCREEN AUSTRALIA and  
THE MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL PREMIERE FILM FUND  
present in association with VICSCREEN  
a Don't Crow! and Thousand Mile Productions film

# ROOSTER

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY: MARK LEONARD WINTER  
RUNNING TIME: 101 Mins

Shooting Format: Arri Mini Raw (Anamorphic) and Canon R5 6k  
Aspect Ratio: 2.39:1  
Finishing Format: 4k DCI Scope  
Finished Audio Format: 5.1 + VI

## Media Kit

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# INTRODUCTION

THE ROOSTER is a gripping story about friendship and how hope can come from unlikely places. Anchored by riveting performances from its two leads - rising talent Phoenix Raei (*Clickbait*, *Stateless*, *The Night Agent*), and Hugo Weaving (*Lord of the Rings*, *The Matrix*, *Love Me*) - it confronts themes around shame and masculinity with unexpected humour, whilst keeping the audience in suspense.

Written and directed by award-winning actor Mark Leonard Winter, who makes his feature filmmaking debut with THE ROOSTER. Produced by Logie-nominated actor Geraldine Hakewill (*Wanted*, *Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries*), and AACTA award-winning producer MahVeen Shahraki (*Ellie and Abbie*, *The Translator*) for Thousand Mile Productions, THE ROOSTER follows small-town cop Dan (Phoenix Raei). When the body of his oldest friend is found buried in a shallow grave, Dan seeks answers from a volatile hermit (Hugo Weaving), who was the last person to see his friend alive.

THE ROOSTER also features Rhys Mitchell (*Cake*, *Upper Middle Bogan*), John Waters (*Offspring*, *Mystery Road*), Robert Menzies (*Little Tornadoes*, *Glitch*) Tom Stokes (*The Railway Man*, *Warnie*), Jane Montgomery Griffiths (*Lord of the Rings: Rings of Power*, *Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries*) and Deirdre Rubenstein (*Force of Destiny*, *Superwog*).

Principal photography took place on Dja Dja Wurrung country in the region of the Hepburn Shire in Victoria, Australia during the winter of 2022. The area is home to director Mark and producer Geraldine, and many locals and local businesses were involved in the production, from locations, to crew, to casting, to on-screen talent.

**Executive Producers**

Susie Montague-Delaney, Patrick James, Michael Kantor

**Co-Producer**

David Kelly

**Producers**

Geraldine Hakewill and Mahveen Shahraki

**Director**

Mark Leonard Winter

**Writer**

Mark Leonard Winter

**Australian & Nz Distributor**

Bonsai Films

**International Sales**

The Yellow Affair



# PRINCIPAL CAST

**DAN** Phoenix Raei  
**THE HERMIT** Hugo Weaving

**CHIEF NORRIS** John Waters

**STEVE POULSON** Rhys Mitchell

**MR POULSON** Robert Menzies

**MRS POULSON** Deidre Rubenstein

**DETECTIVE GRANT** Tom Stokes

**DETECTIVE LOGAN** Jane Montgomery Griffiths





## FILM SYNOPSIS

### **One line synopsis**

When the body of his oldest friend is found buried in a shallow grave, Dan, a small-town cop, seeks answers from a volatile hermit who may have been the last person to see his friend alive.

### **Short synopsis**

When the body of his oldest friend is found buried in a shallow grave, Dan, a small-town cop, seeks answers from a volatile hermit who was the last person to see his friend alive. As Dan gets closer to the truth, he must confront his own personal demons and he discovers that hope can be found in unlikely places.



# FILM SYNOPSIS (CONT.)

## Long synopsis

Dan is an introverted cop who lives alone with his chickens and beloved rooster, patrolling the one-man satellite police station of a small town in rural Victoria.

Dan's life is changed forever when his childhood friend Steve, who suffers from a traumatic brain injury, changes his medication with devastating results. He exposes himself at a girls' netball practice and the townspeople are fed up. Dan chooses not to follow the police protocol of sectioning Steve to a psychiatric facility and instead returns Steve to his aging parents who are at the end of their tether.

The next day Steve is found dead; buried in a shallow grave in the bush.

Steve's death is ruled a suicide and detectives question Dan's decision making. Rattled and mentally unfit to continue work, Dan hands in his gun and begins drinking, haunted by Steve and the responsibility he feels for his death. When his pet rooster is killed by a fox, Dan lets go of the fragile tether he has on his sanity. He retreats to camp out in the forest, seeking answers and isolation.

After a chance encounter with an eccentric old Hermit living deep amongst the trees, Dan suspects that this man may have been the last person to see his friend alive. When he discovers Steve's quad bike keys in the Hermit's shack, Dan's suspicions deepen.

As Dan gets closer to the truth of Steve's last few hours, a deep bond is formed between the two men who have both found themselves unable to exist in society. Over games of table tennis, Dan and the Hermit gradually open up to each other, and Dan begins to find purpose in caring for the Hermit as his health deteriorates.

However, upon Dan's re-entry into the world, lie upon lie is exposed. Dan is shaken to the core when he discovers that this old man with whom he has found a kinship with may be responsible for a terrible act of violence.





## FROM THE WRITER & DIRECTOR

### MARK LEONARD WINTER

In the winter of 2019 the lights dimmed for me. Dealing with the fall out of some devastating personal events and finding myself isolated at my house in the country, I suddenly couldn't see a place for myself in this world. I had lost hope. I was struck that in this time of crisis when I was most in need of help I felt unworthy of it. Talking to someone about my problems felt impossible and I felt completely alone. There are so many people who feel this, and it is particularly difficult, culturally, for men to acknowledge and communicate feelings of dread and despair. This personal nightmare feels like a distant memory now but many in my circle have not been so fortunate.

So, how can I as an artist create something of meaning from this experience? And is it possible to make a work about mental health that any audience in their right mind would want to watch? It is a huge journey getting a film into the world and you are constantly asking yourself, 'Is this of worth?'

It was a shock to me that when people would ask what I was working on and I explained what the film was about, they would often open up about their experiences with their own battles. These were mostly men who would not usually feel comfortable to talk about this, but I guess that is what art has the capacity to do; open a conversation. Their stories of struggle kept me working and helped to remind me that there is something of worth in this endeavour.

This film is a creative offering exploring what it feels like to be caught in that frightening, surreal, quiet place. I wanted to write and make something that could not only look suicide and depression square in the eye but also find the humour, ridiculousness and absurdity so inherent in that struggle. Depicting a rich friendship developing between these men and the profound impact it has on their lives was important to me. I also wanted to look at a different kind of masculinity. We are very accustomed in Australia to seeing films exploring a maleness that is often toxic. Drugs, crime and an appetite for unpleasantness are common to our onscreen 'heroes'. Whilst I enjoy those films I actually don't know too many men like that. The men in this film I know a lot of. I hope this film depicts a different, and no less legitimate, side to masculinity. I want this film to acknowledge that sometimes just making it through another day is an extraordinary act of courage.



# FROM THE PRODUCERS

## GERALDINE HAKEWILL & MAHVEEN SHAHRAKI

**Geraldine:** I decided to produce *THE ROOSTER* sitting around our kitchen table after my husband Mark said to me “Hey, I’ve written something, do you want to read it?” At this stage it was just an outline; fragments of scenes, images and scraps of beautifully written dialogue. I was immediately captivated. I knew it would be cinematic, and I knew that his skill set was itching to evolve into making feature films, as was mine. This first outline had entirely different characters and plot to where we have ended up, but the setting - a house in the forest - and the themes - isolation, shame, hope in unlikely places - were present from the beginning. As was the character of *The Hermit*.

Mark had Hugo Weaving in mind from the get-go, and luckily for us, Hugo is a dear friend and was incredibly generous in encouraging Mark to write and direct. Hugo read many iterations of the work and was the first person who came on board the project.

I then approached MahVeen, who had very successfully produced *Ellie and Abbie* for my friend Monica Zanetti, and thankfully she loved it as much as I did. Suddenly we had a creative team, and momentum!



**Mahveen:** It took almost two years to get to day one of the shoot, and it was quite the roller coaster. Because of Hugo's availability we had to kick-start production much sooner than we had anticipated and so we relied solely on private investment, crowd-funding and the unwavering support of the MIFF Premiere Fund to finance the shoot. This was only possible because of the personal connections Mark and Geraldine had to the local area and the access we had to all the locations that Mark had written specifically for. The local community rallied around the production and supported us so generously.

We filmed in early winter, 2022, during another peak Covid season in Victoria. Our cast and crew of no more than 30 at a time worked and lived in a relative bubble for 22 shoot days, through wind, rain and even snow! We had no Covid-cases, but we had producers cooking meals, neighbours hauling port-a-loos, and parents running rushes to the "edit suite" (a conference room at the hotel) at lunch time, and doing endless washing up. We huddled around outdoor heaters in between takes and drew pictures while we ate breakfast to decorate our shed walls (the unit base). We watched roosters being hypnotised, dogs learning to speak, and ran from horned cows who were a bit too enthusiastic to join the film crew.

**Geraldine:** Although it was a short shoot, we shot so much great material that the first assembly of the film was well over 3 hours long. The edit was tough, trying to excavate down to the heart of the story and work out exactly what this film wanted to feel like. On the strength of a rough cut, we managed to find support for our post production and enhancement through VIC Screen and Screen Australia.

What we have ended up with is much closer to what Mark wrote all those years ago - a chamber piece that focuses on some exceptional performances. It is absurd, moving, hauntingly beautiful and vulnerable. And there are lines that I still laugh at every time I hear them, even after the 200th viewing. It is everything that we hoped it would be and we are so excited to share it with the world.



## THE CAST & CHARACTERS

### DAN

PLAYED BY PHOENIX RAEI

*Dan is a quiet man haunted by ghosts. His father was a policeman and Dan followed in his footsteps, but the uniform has never really fit. His real passion is literature and poetry. Dan and his partner recently split after failing to conceive for many years, leaving Dan lost in an unsettling isolation.*



Phoenix is an actor, writer, director who in 2019, was the recipient of the Casting Guild of Australia, Rising Star Award before going on to star in the acclaimed series *Stateless* (Cate Blanchett, Yvonne Strahovski and Jai Courtney) as charismatic detainee and leader Javad, and in Netflix's two runaway hits *The Night Agent* (Series regular Dale) and *Clickbait* (Series regular Detective Roshan Amiri)

Phoenix's other TV credits include, critically acclaimed ABC series *The Heights* (series regular Ash) and guest roles on multiple award winning series, *Love Me* (Binge), *Romper Stomper*, *Wentworth* and *Mustangs*.

His breakthrough role came in Kriv Stenders' *Australia Day* (2017) starring next to Bryan Brown,

Daniel Webber and Sean Keenan. Phoenix was praised by audiences for his performance as Yaghoub Ghaznavi, a small-time drug dealer who feels the pressure from his family to take action when his brother is violently assaulted.

He later starred in the feature film, *Below* (2019) which premiered at the Melbourne International Film Festival alongside Anthony LaPaglia and Ryan Corr.

Phoenix is currently filming the third season of *Tehran* (Apple TV) alongside Hugh Laurie.

He is a co-founder of Once Upon A Time Films alongside his partner Kate Lister.

## THE HERMIT

### PLAYED BY HUGO WEAVING AO

*The Hermit has always messed things up. His real name is Tim but as a child he wrote it backwards as Mit, which stuck. Eccentric and fast-talking, Mit is a compelling and entertaining character whose seemingly mad views on life contain some profound truths.*



Hugo Weaving has had an enormously varied and successful career in film, theatre, and television. He has won numerous awards, including three Australian Film Institute awards for Best Actor in a Leading Role for his work in, Jocelyn Moorhouse's *Proof* (1991), *The Interview* (1998), which he also won Best Actor at The Montreal World Film Festival, and *Little Fish* (2005).

In 2011 he was an inaugural AACTA award winner for his performance in *Oranges and Sunshine* and in 2015 he won his second AACTA award for *The Dressmaker*. In the following two years he took home the AACTAs for his work in *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), and *Jasper Jones* in 2017.

Weaving's career has been expansive. He has taken on some beloved and iconic roles. Roles in *The Adventures Of Priscilla, Queen Of The Desert*, as Agent Smith in *The Matrix* trilogy, as Elrond in *The Lord Of The Rings* and *The Hobbit Trilogies*, and as 'V' in *V For Vendetta*.

His other films include *Last Ride*, *Captain America*, *Cloud Atlas*, *Mystery Road*, *The Mule*, *Strangerland*, *Hearts And Bones*, *Measure For Measure* and most recently *Lone Wolf*. He has also voiced characters in several highly successful films including *Babe*, *Happy Feet* and *Transformers*. Hugo's television credits include *Patrick Melrose*, *Rake*, *Seven Types Of Ambiguity* and most recently in the series *Love Me* season 1 & 2 for Binge and the Apple Tv series *Slow Horses*.

His many theatre appearances include *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, *Arturo Ui*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Macbeth*, *Endgame*, *Waiting For Godot*, *The Visit* for the Royal National Theatre London and mostrecently *Wonnangatta* for Sydney Theatre Company.



A photograph showing two men in a forest setting. One man, wearing a dark jacket and a beanie, is leaning over a green ping pong table, ready to hit a ball. The other man, also in a dark jacket, stands on the opposite side of the table. The background is a dense forest with trees and foliage.

# THE CREATIVES

## MARK LEONARD WINTER DIRECTOR AND WRITER

Mark is a double Helpmann Award winning actor, writer, and director. He trained at the VCA and shortly after graduation he started the theatre collective 'The Black Lung' with fellow theatre makers including Simon Stone (*The Daughter*, *The Dig*) and Thomas M. Wright (*Acute Misfortune*), creating numerous independent works. He co-wrote and starred in Malthouse Theatre's multi-award-winning smash-hit, *Thyestes* directed by Simon Stone.

His feature film credits include *The Dressmaker*, *Balibo* and most recently lead roles in *Disclosure*, *Measure For Measure* opposite Hugo Weaving and *Escape From Pretoria* opposite Daniel Radcliffe.

Mark worked with Jane Campion on *Top of the Lake: China Girl* and was one of the leads in *Pine Gap* for Netflix/ABC. Most recently he appeared in *Halifax: Retribution* for Channel 9, *Eden* for Stan, *The Newsreader* and *Fires* for the ABC, and Baz Luhrmann's Elvis project.

He is a 2017 recipient of the highly prestigious Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship awarded for outstanding talent and exceptional artistic courage: one of the few actors to have been given this honour.

Mark was one of the creators and directors of the entirely improvised show *The Blind Date Project*, directing *Seinfeld* star Jason Alexander in the L.A. season, alongside co-creator and actor Bojana Novakovic. He has also directed a music video for Helpmann Award Winner Esther Hannaford and was one of the directors and co-writers/lead actors in the award-winning web series *The Greatest Love of All*.



## **GERALDINE HAKEWILL**

### **PRODUCER**

Geraldine is a Logie-nominated actress, musician and producer who stars in *Wanted* (Channel 7/Netflix), *Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries* (Channel 7/ Acorn) and *Wakefield* (ABC/BBC Studios) as well as having numerous feature film and theatre credits to her name. As a producer she produced the award- winning music video *3 Moons* for ARIA winning band Boy & Bear, as well as her own music video to accompany her single *Fire*, directed by Rhett Wade-Ferrell (Kylie Minogue, Flight Facilities), starring Hunter Page-Lochard and shot by cinematographer Danny Ruhlmann ACS (*Little Fish*, *Sense8*).

Geraldine created and executive produced the hybrid dance-fashion film *Shadow/Self*, directed by Laura Scrivano (*The Letdown*, *Extinction*) and produced by Alex White (*Babyteeth*) which won Best Film at VAMFF. She was the Associate Producer and lead actor of the short film *Young Labor*, directed by Leon Ford and produced by Academy Award nominee, Drew Bailey. Geraldine is one half of the production company 'Clever Rabbit Productions' alongside AACTA winning writer/director Monica Zanetti (*Ellie & Abbie (and Ellie's Dead Aunt)*, *While The Men Are Away*).

## **MAHVEEN SHAHRAKI**

### **PRODUCER**

MahVeen is an award-winning producer. Originally from Iran, MahVeen soon found her home within the Australian film industry with her strong eye for identifying compelling stories and marketplace, linking gifted individuals to launch original work.

MahVeen has produced and delivered outstanding national content with international impact including *Ellie & Abbie (and Ellie's Dead Aunt)* which featured as a program highlight in Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) and the New Zealand International Film Festival. *Ellie and Abbie* is the first Australian film to open the 2020 Mardi Gras Film Festival in its 27-year history and went on to win the coveted Audience Award, as well as the 2021 AACTA Award for Best Indie Film.

As Executive Producer, MahVeen has delivered the international title *The Translator* a Georges Films production, The movie has been selected for TIFF industry selects, cementing its status as an international title of great merit. Being represented by Charades International sales *The Translator* premiered at Tallinn, and its exceptional reception resulted in numerous showings at various global film festivals.

MahVeen was selected as a 2020 'One To Watch' Producer by Screen Producers Australia for her creative passion, commercial knowledge, and ability to deliver quality international products.

## **CRAIG BARDEN ACS**

### **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Award-winning DOP, Craig Barden ACS has shot more than 30 film and television productions throughout his career, including *Wentworth*, *Five Bedrooms*, *City Homicide*, *Halifax F.P.*, *Flying Doctors*, *CrashBurn*, *Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries*, the feature film *Wog Boy 2*, and most recently *High Country* for Foxtel. Craig is a passionate advocate for inclusion, diversity and opportunity amongst his film crews and he has been instrumental in the discovery, training, and mentorship of some of the best camera crews working in Victoria and internationally.

## **BEN BANGAY**

### **PRODUCTION DESIGN**

Ben has been working as a production designer in film and television for more than 20 years. His credits include *Winners and Losers*, *Home and Away*, *All Saints*, *Playing for Keeps*, *Secret Bridesmaids' Business*, and *The Ex-PM*. Most recently he designed Stan series *Bad Behaviour* and ABC teen drama *Turn Up The Volume*. Ben also received a 2021 AACTA nomination for Best Production Design in Television for his work on *Ms Fisher's Modern Murder Mysteries*. Film credits include *Line Of Fire* and *Abalone*.



## **CAMERON FORD**

### **EDITOR AND CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

Cameron is a multi-award-winning filmmaker with 18 years' experience in the industry. His work as a director, producer, cinematographer, and editor has screened at more than 80 festivals around the world and on network television in Australia, New Zealand, and the USA.

He is best known as the director/cinematographer/editor of Australia's most- watched online series *The Katering Show* (2015-2016), and for his feature documentary *The Bikes of Wrath* (2018) which he directed/produced/edited.

Since its world premiere in 2018, *The Bikes of Wrath* has received over a dozen awards at film festivals around the world; most notably winning the coveted People's Choice Award at the 2018 BANFF Mountain Film and Book Festival, beating out blockbuster films *The Dawn Wall* and Oscar winner *Free Solo*. *The Bikes of Wrath* aired on national television in Australia (ABC Sunday night primetime) and is currently available on all international Qantas and British Airways flights.

## **STEFAN GREGORY**

### **COMPOSER**

Stefan is an internationally acclaimed composer working in theatre, film, dance, and opera. As well as having a degree in pure mathematics, he was a member of ARIA award-nominated rock band, Faker, and is a recipient of the Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship.

His most recent film composition was the score for *The Dig* (Netflix) directed by Simon Stone and starring Ralph Fiennes and Carey Mulligan.

Stefan has worked with some of the world's most acclaimed contemporary theatre directors including Neil Armfield, Simon Stone, Kip Williams, Annie- Louise Sarks, John Crowley, Makenzie Leigh, Gideon Orbarzanek, Angelica Mesiti, Patrick Nolan and Benedict Andrews. His work has been performed all over the globe, including the Salzburg Festival, Theater Basel, The Young Vic, The Barbican Centre, the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, Park Avenue Armory, New Victory Theatre and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York.



# KEY CREDITS

**Written & Directed by**

Mark Leonard Winter

**Producers**

Geraldine Hakewill & MahVeen Shahraki

**Co-Producer**

David Kelly

**Director of Photography**

Craig Barden

**Production Designer**

Ben Bangay

**Costume Designer**

Ellen Stanistreet

**Hair & Make-Up Designer**

Brooke Pearson

**Editor**

Cameron Ford

**Music Composed By**

Stefan Gregory