



**SEEN & HEARD**

# Somersault

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

Although its story of a troubled young girl looking for intimacy through sex is familiar, Cate Shortland's first feature is distinguished by the quality of her screenplay and the atmospheric way in which she puts her wintry setting to work. From her film's opening credits, which sees 16-year-old hero Heidi taking in washing from a dark garden before heading back into the welcoming glow of her mother's house, Shortland demonstrates a keen eye for a visual metaphor.

Once Heidi is really out in the cold (having run away to a ski resort), Shortland emphasises her loneliness and dislocation not just by having her wander the countryside but also by watching her observe others. In an early scene, the handheld camera follows Heidi's line of vision to a pair of bundled-up babies asleep in the back of a condensation-heavy car; in others her isolation is underscored by the roar of the bar. Heidi's dreamy adolescent world is well represented by the heightened naturalism of Robert Humphreys' impressionistic photography and the slightly surreal set-ups, such as the autistic youth who appears and disappears behind a hedge as he bounces on a trampoline.

Most powerful, emotionally, are the scenes in which Heidi tests the boundaries – and price-tag – of her new sexuality. In one moment that hums with menace, she catches herself being observed by an unsmiling, middle-aged stranger sitting in a parked car. Although the blue sun-strip across the top of the windscreen obscures his eyes there is something predatory about the way he stares at her and we see Heidi move towards him, smiling invitingly, before his wife arrives and the tension melts.

Later, Roy, the stepfather of her friend Bianca, insists on driving Heidi home one night, then stops at a remote lake. Delicately ambiguous, Shortland's direction situates us completely with the vulnerable girl as she focuses on the snowflake air-freshener dangling from the mirror, wondering what he will do. In a movement both paternal and sexual, he tucks her hair behind her ear before denigrating her character and telling her to keep away from her new friend.

A good example of the complexity of feeling Shortland manages to pack into short exchanges, this scene also shows the director's predilection for symbolism. Here it's the story Roy tells Heidi about the drowned village under the lake; elsewhere it's the hooded coat and red gloves that pick Heidi out as a Freudian fairytale character against the white landscape. Such attempts to convey Heidi's girl-woman quality can tilt towards the fey – the scrapbook full of glittery unicorns and the nursery rhymes she claps while walking alone in the snow, for instance – but for the most part they evoke a rich emotional seam running beneath the bare landscape and spare screenplay.

Although the action focuses on Heidi, Shortland fleshes out her other characters, rounding out Bianca's family and making Heidi's love interest, Joe, into an intriguing character caught between the country and other less known possibilities. Both leads are excellent, with the doll-like Abbie Cornish portraying Heidi with the right mixture of naivety and spirited sensuality and

Sam Worthington making Joe much more than the macho local he might have been.

Shortland's theme is intimacy, so the story ends not with these two riding off into the blue, snowy landscape but with an emotional understanding reached between Heidi and those who have helped her: Joe, motel-owner Irene and her mum. Nothing is resolved but everything has changed: the sign of a very sophisticated coming-of-age tale.

**Liese Spencer, *Sight & Sound*, March 2005**

The script for the film that was to become *Somersault* was commenced seven years before filming. Writer/director Cate Shortland, travelling regularly between Sydney and Canberra, was inspired by the haunting beauty of Lake George, and decided that she wanted to make a film around a lake. At the time Cate was also working with emotionally disturbed children. There was one particular girl of whom she was fond and was to be the inspiration of the main character, Heidi. Shortland: 'It was a combination of landscape and disturbed children that was the inspiration. That's still there in the film.'

Shortland approached [producer] Anthony Anderson in 1996 to produce the ideas she had been working on, and they struck a deal. As Anderson explains, 'Cate said let's not shoot this film until both of us are happy with every scene in it. That was a fantastic invitation to me because my passion for script and story was going to be taken on board in a collaborative way. I thought that it was a much stronger story for a feature film than for a short film so I encouraged Cate to expand it and develop it.'

The script was developed over various rounds of funding whilst Shortland and Anderson made the short films *Pentuphouse* and *Flowergirl* in 1998 and 99 respectively. The shorts were successful internationally, which made seeking funding for a feature that much easier for the team. Shortland: 'I don't really think of myself as a writer, so Anthony had to drag me kicking and screaming through the whole process. He kept getting us funding so I could write another draft and then he'd have to talk me into writing another draft. I became addicted to the writing. Once you get into it and start thinking like the characters, you can start to create a world. But starting to think like the characters is really hard. You have to cut yourself off from everything around you and be those people in a way.'

Shortland and Anderson applied for the Aurora script development scheme, which is funded by the New South Wales Film & Television Office. Under the scheme, over a six-month period mentors provide feedback at the beginning and again at the end, after a workshop with actors. Cate and Anthony were successful and joined the inaugural scheme and were mentored by renowned filmmakers including Alison Tilson (*Japanese Story*), Rob Festinger (*In the Bedroom*), Jane Campion (*The Piano*) and Chris Noonan (*Babe*). As a result the script took a great leap forward. Shortland: 'The script probably changed the most through Aurora. Heidi used to be quite passive and it was suggested that I make her more active in her own destruction. That made Heidi go out and seek what was to destroy her. So Aurora was quite phenomenal with how much it shifted everything.'

Jan Chapman was also a mentor on the inaugural Aurora scheme and was familiar with their short films, and already felt that Shortland had 'an extraordinarily strong visual confidence'. Chapman: 'I thought their script for *Somersault* was incredibly insightful about a young girl testing the boundaries,

who she was, in terms of sex and love and friendship. I thought it was particularly truthful. We've seen coming-of-age films before, but really this time I thought we were in the mind of an adolescent girl. It was a different approach. It was much more intimate in a very picturesque setting in the mountains of New South Wales.'

## Production notes

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### SOMERSAULT

*Director:* Cate Shortland  
©: Film Finance Corporation Australia Limited  
©/Presented in association with: New South Wales Film and Television Office  
©/In association with: The Premium Movie Partnership  
©/Production Company: Red Carpet Productions  
*Presented by:* Australian Film Finance Corporation  
*Presented in association with:* Showtime Australia  
*Developed with the assistance of:* Australian Film Commission  
*Produced in association with:* SBS Independent  
*Developed by:* Aurora  
*Executive Producer:* Jan Chapman  
*Producer:* Anthony Anderson  
*SBS Commissioning Editor:* Miranda Dear  
*Unit Manager:* Cameron Wintour  
*Unit Manager (Canberra):* Felix Reiten  
*Production Manager:* Libby Sharpe  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Sophie Dick  
*Production Accountant:* Ben Breen  
*Location Manager:* Annelies Norland  
*Post-production Supervisors:* Naomi Wenck, Colleen Clarke  
*1st Assistant Director:* John Martin  
*2nd Assistant Director:* Eddie Raymond  
*Script Supervisor:* Paul Kiely  
*Casting:* Nikki Barrett  
*Casting Assistant:* Antonia Halse  
*Script Editors:* Amanda Higgs, Denise Morgan  
*Written by:* Cate Shortland  
*Aurora Script Advisers:* Duncan Thompson, Alison Tilson, Rob Festinger, Jan Chapman, Geoff Stier, Sue Murray, Jason Resnick, Tony Safford, Chris Noonan, Jane Campion  
*Director of Photography:* Robert Humphreys  
*2nd Unit Director of Photography:* Carolyn Constantine  
*Additional Camera Operator (2nd Unit):* Ben Jasper  
*Focus Puller:* Kevin Scott  
*Focus Puller (2nd Unit):* Bonnie Elliott  
*Clapper Loader:* Nigel Tomkinson  
*Gaffer:* Geoff Maine  
*Key Grip:* Jason Trew  
*Stills Photographers:* Matt Nettheim, Elise Lockwood  
*Digital Optical Effects:* Robert Sandeman, Jon Dixon, Rebecca Dunn  
*Special Effects Supervisor:* Peter Stubbs, Filmtrix  
*Special Effects Co-ordinator:* Tim O'Brien  
*Editor:* Scott Gray  
*1st Assistant Editor:* Rodrigo Balart  
*Production Designer:* Melinda Doring  
*Art Director:* Janie Parker  
*Set Decorator:* Glen W. Johnson  
*Props Buyer:* Sharyn Fulton  
*Construction Manager:* Dave Philpott  
*Costume Designer:* Emily Seresin  
*Costume Supervisor:* Shareen Beringer

*Make-up/Hair Supervisor:* Angela Conte  
*Make-up/Hair Artists:* Helene Glover, Sheldon Wade, Kellie Griffin  
*Title Design:* +Plus, Andy Canny, Donna McCrum  
*Colour Grader:* Olivier Fontenay  
*Music Composed by:* Decoder Ring  
*Decoder Ringer (Are:):* Matt Fitzgerald, Tom Schutzinger, Pete Kelly, Ben Ely, Ken Davis  
*Music Supervisor:* Norman Parkhill, Mana Music  
*Band Manager/Score Co-ordinator:* Liz O'Grady  
*Choreographer:* Kate Champion  
*Sound Designer:* Sam Petty  
*Sound Recordist:* Mark Blackwell  
*Boom Operator:* Ben Smith  
*Re-recording Mixers:* Peter Smith, Sam Petty  
*Dialogue Editor:* Yulia Akerholt  
*Sound Effects Editor:* Mark Franken  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Rob Simper  
*Dolby Sound Consultant:* Bruce Emery  
*Dialogue Coach:* Victoria Mielewska  
*Unit Publicist:* Fiona Nix

### Cast

Abbie Cornish (*Heidi*)  
Sam Worthington (*Joe*)  
Lynette Curran (*Irene*)  
Nathaniel Dean (*Stuart*)  
Erik Thomson (*Richard*)  
Leah Purcell (*Diane*)  
Hollie Andrew (*Bianca*)  
Paul Gleeson (*Roy*)  
Damian de Montemas (*Adam, Nicole's lover*)  
Olivia Pigeot (*Nicole, Heidi's mother*)  
Alex Babic (*Brian the barman*)  
Elizabeth Muntar (*bus ticket vendor*)  
Justin Martin (*Guy*)  
Ben Tate (*Sean*)  
Joshua Phillips (*Josh*)  
Bruce Ross (*staring man*)  
John Sheerin (*Pat*)  
Anne Louise Lambert (*Martha*)  
Archer Lyttle (*Pete*)  
Blake Pittman (*Karl*)  
Erica Englert (*Rachel*)  
Stephanie Overs (*Clare*)  
Caroline Lowe (*Chinese restaurant waitress*)  
Diana Glenn (*Sally*)  
Toby Schmitz (*John*)  
Henry Nixon (*Nick*)

Australia 2004©  
106 mins

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### SEEN & HEARD: DARING FEMALE COMING-OF-AGE FILMS

**Skate Kitchen** Tue 1 Mar 20:40; Sun 13 Mar 20:45  
**Divines** Wed 2 Mar 20:50; Tue 15 Mar 20:50  
**Jinn** Sat 5 Mar 17:45; Tue 8 Mar 21:00  
**37 Seconds (37 sekanzu)** Sat 5 Mar 20:30; Sat 12 Mar 20:45  
**Water Lilies (Naissance des pieuvres)**  
Sun 6 Mar 18:45; Mon 14 Mar 20:50  
**Marie Antoinette**  
Tue 8 Mar 18:10 (+ intro by Hannah Strong, Little White Lies Digital Editor and author of *Sofia Coppola: Forever Young*); Sun 13 Mar 18:00  
**Somersault** Fri 11 Mar 20:50; Mon 14 Mar 18:10

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