



**YOU BEAUTIES: NEW AUSTRALIAN CINEMA**

# You Won't Be Alone

When writer and director Goran Stolevski took home the 2018 Sundance Festival prize for his short film *Would You Look at Her*, it immediately attracted the attention of producers Kristina Ceyton and Samantha Jennings, partners in Sydney-based Causeway Films. The pair, who actively seek out filmmakers with unique voices and work with them to launch their careers internationally, were intrigued to learn of an Australian filmmaker who made a Macedonian film. After screening the acclaimed short, Ceyton and Jennings immediately reached out to Stolevski to ask if he had any scripts they could read.

'It was obvious Goran has an authentic directorial voice,' says Ceyton. 'He sent summaries of about ten films including *You Won't Be Alone*. Literally the next day, we both said, "We're making this movie."' According to Jennings, Causeway's priority is to identify original Australian voices outside of the mainstream film industry. 'When we find someone as creatively evolved as Goran, it's thrilling,' she adds. 'His short had beautiful performances. It had a sensibility and sensuality that we loved. *You Won't Be Alone* containing a complete and original world. It uses genre elements in an entirely new way, one that is lyrical and poetic. We had never read anything like it.'

Stolevski estimates he has made about 25 short films in his career, but nothing at this scale. 'I thought I'd write something that messes with the traditional structure and story and see what comes out of it. I had never written a genre film before. My work is mostly relationship-based. I knew that if I were going to do a genre picture, it would have to be horror, but I would only take the conventions that served my vision and sensibility.'

'My first thought was that I wanted to delve into the everyday life of ordinary people,' he continues. 'And I love the notion of an idiosyncratic arthouse filmmaker taking on a genre diametrically opposite to their entire body of work, embracing many of its conventions, trampling just as many, and delivering an arresting, profoundly unique film.'

The initial pitch for *You Won't Be Alone* described the film as a supernatural film set in the 1800s in Macedonia. As time went by and the story developed, it became more of a fable that explores deeper themes of connection and motherhood, with a feminist slant. 'It is a story with a lot of emotion and passion told in a very unique way,' says Jennings. 'It's a distinct combination very relevant in the world today.'

Born and raised in Macedonia until the age of 12, Stolevski began researching the folktales of his homeland. 'I wanted to be transported somewhere that I could capture a way of life that has almost disappeared,' he explains. 'The part of history that enthralls me is not the rulers and the warriors. It is the ordinary people, their day-to-day reality, the way they felt about living and dying and love, and what they thought constituted happiness and beauty.'

'I found a lot in my research about women being burned for being witches. They were often accused of taking over the bodies of other human beings and animals. If you take that premise very literally, what an amazing insight into the world. I thought if my protagonist were isolated from other humans,

through her eyes the audience could see the commonplace as extraordinary and strange.'

Stolevski's first feature film draws inspiration from an unlikely combination of sources that range from James Rebanks' *The Shepherd's Life*, which recounts a traditional way of life that is virtually unchanged after 5,000 years; Taiwanese auteur Hou Hsiao-Hsien's 2015 subversive take on *wuxia* (martial arts), *The Assassin*; and a Romanian film called *Aferim!*, a tale set in the Roma community that reminded him of a classic American Western. As all these ingredients coalesced, Stolevski added one more.

He was reading Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, which moved him to try and employ stream-of-consciousness in a cinematic way rather than a novelistic way. The result is a curious, insightful voiceover that represents the protagonist's unique point of view. 'Goran is a beautiful writer with a very rigorous vision,' says Ceyton. 'He created an inner monologue in which the ultimate outcast is trying to make sense of a normal world.'

*You Won't Be Alone* more than delivers on the promise of the screenplay that grabbed their attention three years ago, Ceyton and Jennings agree. 'It will sweep you away on this incredible journey that asks what it means to become human from the outside in,' says Ceyton. 'It's beautiful and melancholy, sad and life-affirming all at the same time. And perhaps it will move people to change in some way, which is why we make movies in the first place.'

For Jennings, what is special about the film is that it tackles huge themes about humanity and belonging and motherhood, but in the everyday. It is a reminder that everyone must fight to find their place in the world.

'Yes, the scope of the film is enormous,' she says, 'but it remains a personal story that reminds us to take delight in every little moment, because it is so easy to lose that sense of wonder.' Although it has been years since Stolevski first heard Nevena's voice in his head and recorded her stray phrasings in a notebook, his personal attachment to her remains intense. 'I want the viewers to feel like they are under Nevena's skin. And not just Nevena, but also Maria – and watch how that shifts their way of looking at even ordinary things. Two people try to overcome the same horrific suffering and retain a faith in other humans. One of them manages, but one of them tragically doesn't. Why?'

And finally, he says, he wants audiences to feel Nevena's seismic yearning, her endless sense of wonder and curiosity, her hunger for human connection, the overwhelming comfort she finally finds in such a connection and her horror when she stands to lose it. 'Perhaps that will lead them to look at life and nature from a new perspective and be reminded of how much strangeness and unassuming beauty goes into the miracle of being human.'

## **Production notes**

### **Gem**

A transformative night out with a stranger alleviates Morgan's gender-questioning isolation in this shapeshifting, personal short inspired by the French New Wave.

## GEM

*Director:* Jim Muntisov

*With:*

Joseph Limn

James Mitchelhill

Australia 2022

14 mins

## YOU WON'T BE ALONE

*Directed by:* Goran Stolevski

*a Causeway Films production*

*in association with:* Balkanic Media

*Presented by:* Focus Features

*In association with:* Screen Australia, Film Victoria, Head Gear Films

*Executive Producers:* Stephen Kelliher, Phil Hunt, Compton Ross, Noomi Rapace

*Produced by:* Kristina Ceyton, Samantha Jennings

*Co-produced by:* Jonathan English, Nataša Ivić

*Written by:* Goran Stolevski

*Director of Photography:* Matthew Chuang

*Editor:* Luca Cappelli

*Visual Effects Supervisor:* Marty Pepper

*Production Designer:* Bethany Ryan

*Costume Designer:* Sladjana Perić-Santrač

*Hair and Make-up Designer:* Dušica Vuksanović

*Prosthetics Designer:* Larry Van Duynhoven

*Composer:* Mark Bradshaw

*Music Supervisor:* Andrew Kotátko

*Sound Designer:* Emma Bortignon

## Cast

Sara Klimoska (*Nevena*)

Anamaria Marinca (*Maria*)

Alice Englert (*Biliana*)

Félix Maritaud (*Yovan*)

Carloto Cotta (*Boris*)

Noomi Rapace (*Bosilka*)

Australia 2022

109 mins

## YOU BEAUTIES: NEW AUSTRALIAN CINEMA

**So-Called Australia: Blak Art on Film + Terror Nullius**

Fri 3 Feb 18:10; Tue 21 Feb 20:30

**Sissy + Pink Reef**

Sat 11 Feb 20:30; Mon 20 Feb 17:50

**Friends and Strangers + Lime Parfait**

Thu 16 Feb 18:10; Fri 24 Feb 18:15

**You Won't Be Alone + Gem**

Fri 17 Feb 20:25; Sat 25 Feb 17:30

**Shadow + Call History**

Wed 22 Feb 18:20

**Sweet As + Finding Jedda**

Sun 26 Feb 18:30; Mon 27 Feb 20:50

With thanks to



## NEW RELEASES

**Enys Men**

Continues from Fri 13 Jan

**EO**

From Fri 3 Feb

**Blue Jean**

From Fri 10 Feb; Fri 10 Feb 18:10 (+ Q&A with director-screenwriter Georgia Oakley and producer Hélène Sifre)

**Creature**

From Fri 24 Feb; Fri 24 Feb 18:10 (+ intro and Q&A with director Asif Kapadia and other members of the filmmaking team)

**Broker**

From Fri 24 Feb

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