



The Works on board for Rachel Ward's feature debut Beautiful Kate

5 September, 2008 | By Wendy Mitchell

The Works International has taken on world sales for Rachel Ward's *Beautiful Kate*.

Ward's feature directorial debut is based on the novel of the same name by Newton Thornburg.

Beautiful Kate is a story of dark family secrets in the Australian outback - told in parallel strands of past and present to reveal the sexual awakenings of three siblings growing up in isolation. It recently wrapped shooting in southern Australia.

The film stars Bryan Brown (here in Toronto with *Dean Spanley*), Rachel Griffiths, Ben Mendelsohn, Sophie Lowe, Scott O'Donnell and Maeve Dermoday.

Brown also produced with Leah Churchill-Brown (*Suburban Mayhem*). The project's backers include Screen Australia, South Australian Film Corporation, NSW Film & TV Office and Showtime Australia's Premium Movie Partnership. Roadshow will release in Australia and New Zealand.

Ward, also an actress best known for *The Thorn Birds* and *Against All Odds*, has previously made shorts including *The Big House*, *Blindman's Bluff* and *Martha's New Coat*.

Joy Wong, head of The Works International, said: 'We are thrilled to be representing this powerful, passionate piece from Rachel Ward and to be working with her on her feature length debut.'

The Works International's sales slate also includes another Aussie project, *My Year Without Sex*, plus *Man On Wire*, *Somers Town*, *The Market* and *Good Dick*.

Print

Beautiful Kate

16 June, 2009 | By Frank Hatherley



Dir/scr. Rachel Ward. Aust. 2009. 101 mins

Actress Rachel Ward's debut feature is a handsome and intense love story, a gothic tale of buried guilt and family dysfunction set in Australia's outback. With lashings of sex played out amidst long-buried secrets, *Beautiful Kate* is awash with Ward's own spiky, brittle dialogue, delivered with relish by her cast.

It's a big step forward for Ward, whose previous short films - especially *The Big House* (2002) and *Martha's New Coat* (2003) - have won local awards and notched up TV sales. The presence of husband Bryan Brown as co-producer and actor is a bonus, as is Rachel Griffiths, returning to Australian movies in a surprisingly minor, though highly effective, role. The strong language, sex scenes and morally questionable relationships will naturally limit audiences when *Beautiful Kate* opens in Australia on August 6 (following a world premiere at Sydney Film Festival), but a buzz will surely grow for the younger players, especially newcomer Sophie Lowe as the eponymous Kate; international interest seems assured.

Much of the movie's considerable dramatic tension comes from the steady revelation of past misdeeds, horrors and fiercely guarded secrets.

The screenplay is based on an American novel written by Newton Thornburg in 1982 and set on a once-thriving farm absorbed into the Chicago sprawl. Ward successfully re-imagines the Kendall family's remote farm - once rich and green, now arid and broke - in the spectacular Flinders Ranges of South Australia. Cinematographer Commis, also

making his feature debut, makes the most of this scenic elegance with some classy framing and crafted night-work.

Writer Ned Kendall (Mendolsohn) drives "halfway across the continent" to be with his dying father Bruce (Brown). With wannabe-actress Toni (Dermody) in tow, he is greeted by his long-suffering sister Sally (Griffiths) at the isolated, drought-ravaged farm where they grew up in thrall to their bullying patriarch. Three members of the family are already dead – the shadowy mother, never seen in flashbacks; Ned's elder brother Cliff (O'Donnell); and his twin sister, the beautiful Kate (Lowe). Much of the movie's considerable dramatic tension comes from the steady revelation of past misdeeds, horrors and fiercely guarded secrets.

Ward follows two parallel stories – Ned's present-day rage at Bruce's bad-tempered dying; and scenes that show the unhealthy family dynamic of adolescent Ned, Cliff and restless, experimenting Kate. It's a tricky intermingling of youthful zest, middle-aged angst and dying despair: and Ward brings it off with a dry wit and a gothic lyricism – much moonlit love-making, owls and weirdly focussed dreamscapes.

Mendelsohn is bleakly arrogant as the haunted, damaged writer, a potentially unsympathetic role. Brown, though perhaps too young and healthy-looking, clearly shows the selfish cruelty that has warped his family. Griffiths brings compassion and wisdom to her few scenes. Maeve Dermody, as the ditzy fish out of water, and the dazzling, contained Sophie Lowe bring much-needed lightness to the gathering tragedy.

Ward has chosen some excellent country songs for her soundtrack – the emotional climax comes at a dance - and the original guitar-based incidental music by Tex Perkins and Murray Paterson is discreet and moving.

Production companies

New Town Films

New Doll Productions

Screen Australia

Showtime Australia

NSW Film and Television Office

South Australian Film Corporation

International sales

The Works International

+ 44 (0) 207 612 1080

Producers

Bryan Brown

Leah Churchill-Brown

Based on the novel *Beautiful Kate* by Newton Thornburg

Cinematography

Andrew Commis

Production Designer

Ian Jobson

Editor

Veronika Jenet

Main cast

Ben Mendelsohn

Bryan Brown

Rachel Griffiths

Sophie Lowe

Maeve Dermody

Scott O'Donnell