

CAUSEWAY FILMS

NO COINCIDENCE MEDIA

THE MOOGAI

A Causeway Films and No Coincidence Media short film
based on a feature film in development



**An Aboriginal psychological horror, THE MOOGAI is the story
of a family terrorised by a child-stealing spirit**

Starring Shari Sebbens and Meyne Wyatt

Written & Directed by Jon Bell
Produced by Kristina Ceyton, Samantha Jennings,
Taylor Goddard and Mitchell Stanley
Director of Photography – Sean Ryan
Editor – Simon Njoo
Production Designer – Bethany Ryan
Sound Designer – Sam Petty
Costume Designer – Caitlin Murray
Makeup & Hair Artist – Carol Cameron
Prosthetics Designer – Larry Van Duynhoven
VFX Supervisor – Leo Baker

Developed & Financed with the assistance of Screen Australia
Australian Broadcaster sale to NITV

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Country of Production: Australia
Completion Date: April 1, 2020
Finished Format: DCP Colour
Ratio: 2.39:1
Sound: 5.1 and 2.0
Language: English
Running Time: 15 mins

WINNER – Midnight Shorts Jury Award – SXSW Online 2021
WINNER – Erwin Rado Award for Best Australian Short Film – MIFF 2020
WINNER – Best Horror Short Film, LA Shorts Fest 2021
NOMINATED – AACTA Awards 2020 – Best Short Film



SYNOPSIS

A young Aboriginal couple have just had their first child, but what should be one of the happiest times in their lives turns to terror when Sarah starts seeing a malevolent spirit she believes is trying to take her baby. Her husband Fergus desperately wants to believe her, but as she becomes more unstable he is increasingly concerned for the safety of their child. Is Sarah really being visited by a child-stealing spirit or is she the biggest threat to their family's safety?

THE MOOGAI explores post-natal depression, transgenerational trauma and Australia's stolen generation. But it is also a story of the value of children and the power of family.

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

I believe that horror stories come down to one simple line "Come into my parlour, said the spider to the fly." They are all about that dynamic. Spider, fly. Predator, prey. The most thrilling parts of a horror movie, to me, are usually when the fly gets caught in the spider's web. We share the terrifying experience of watching the fly struggle, knowing the spider is out there somewhere but not seeing it. This is the core relationship in this story. The Moogai is the spider and Jacob is the fly. Sarah is the only thing that stands between them.

The other aspect of the horror genre that I particularly wanted to explore in this film is the absence of hope due to the absence of knowledge. It is not just about fear of the unknown, but about absence of knowledge (and more importantly, the inability to gain it). Because the absence of knowledge is the absence of power. This lack of knowledge is scarier than the bliss of ignorance, because you are acutely aware that you are missing something. It's this absence that compels characters in horror films to "go into the basement" - they just have to know what's down there, they have to gain knowledge in order to gain power. But the destructive force can never truly be known. To me, this absence of knowledge becomes an absence of hope. What makes us uncomfortable is that we struggle to gain knowledge and hope in our everyday life, but horror tells us that we have to live without them. The Moogai is trying to push Sarah to a hopeless place, so it can gain power over her.

The stolen generation is such a massive wound in the psyche of Australia, but it is often thought of as something in the past. And it's often presented as something in the past. This story takes the inheritance of that trauma into the present, with a couple's new baby. Someone or something is trying to take that new born baby, to destroy the sacred human bond of mother and child. We've really tried to delve into the horrors of breaking that sacred human bond and explore the effects of transgenerational trauma that still echo through to our lives today. To find a cinematic way to show the terror of having something hunt you down so it can take your child, and your future.

PRODUCERS' STATEMENT

THE MOOGAI is a psychological horror written and directed by Jon Bell, weaving together themes of transgenerational trauma over child removal and post-natal depression into a supernatural story aimed at keeping not only an Australian audience on the edge of their seats but an international one too.

THE MOOGAI draws on a successful tradition of elegantly executed emotional horrors, such as ROSEMARY'S BABY (Roman Polanski), THE ORPHANAGE (J. A. Bayona), more recently GET OUT or Causeway's own THE BABADOOK, it is a director-driven genre film that speaks to contemporary issues. THE MOOGAI will introduce the world to an Indigenous spirit that is a manifestation of the atrocities inflicted upon Aboriginal people and communities with the removal of their children and the inter-generational effects of that trauma. We're excited to have created a unique, concise psychological horror story that incorporates elements of Indigenous mythology rarely seen in this genre, in the hopes of provoking market attention and audience desire to see the feature film made.

While Jon has been working with Causeway Films and No Coincidence Media to develop a feature version of THE MOOGAI, we believe the short film is a self-contained piece that can stand alone and garner festival recognition. Causeway Films has gained international credibility for producing elevated films in this genre and brought together an exciting creative team to execute Jon's vision.

KEY CREATIVE BIOS

JON BELL – WRITER/DIRECTOR

Indigenous Filmmaker Jon Bell created and wrote the drama series THE GODS OF WHEAT STREET and Every Cloud Productions produced the series for ABC. His other television credits include writing for REDFERN NOW, CLEVERMAN, READY FOR THIS and THE WARRIORS. He has also written and acted in the sketch comedy series BLACK COMEDY and AUSSIE RANGERS for ABC, as well as writing and directing previous short films THE CHUCK IN, AND JUSTICE FOR ONE, and TWO BIG BOYS.

COMPANY BIOS

CAUSEWAY FILMS

CAUSEWAY FILMS is an Australian production company, founded by producers Kristina Ceyton and Samantha Jennings, focused on the development and production of entertaining, socially relevant stories that allow original voices to achieve international success. Causeway's first feature film, award-winning psychological thriller THE BABADOOK by writer/director Jennifer Kent premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival to great critical and cultural success. The film went on to win many Best Film and Screenplay Awards, including three Australian Academy Awards (AACTAs), the 2014 New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best First Film, and receiving a British Independent Film Awards Nomination.

In 2018, Causeway launched two features, Jennifer Kent's highly anticipated second feature, period drama THE NIGHTINGALE, co-produced with Made Up Stories' Bruna Papandrea and Steve Hutensky. THE NIGHTINGALE had its World Premiere at the prestigious Venice Film

Festival, where it won two awards. Feature film CARGO, starring Martin Freeman, was released as Australia's first Netflix Original feature film in mid 2018 after premiering at Tribeca, and received five AACTA award nominations including Best Film.

With a passion for discovering and fostering exceptional new talent, Causeway's latest film, the Cambodian-shot feature debut by Rodd Rathjen, BUOYANCY, had its World Premiere at the 2019 Berlin Film Festival where it won the Ecumenical Jury Prize, and its Australian Premiere at the Melbourne International Film Festival. The film went on to win Best Indie Film at the 2019 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA), Best Youth Feature Film at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards, the Silver Gateway Award at the 2019 Mumbai Film Festival, the Grand Jury Prize at the 2019 Political Film Festival Porto-Vecchio, and was the Australian submission for Best International Feature Film at the 2020 Academy Awards®.

Taylor Goddard joined Causeway Films in 2015 as a Producers Assistant before moving into the role of Manager, Development and Production in 2017. In supporting the development and production of Causeway Films slate of feature film and high-end television projects, Taylor worked as Producers Assistant and Post Production Supervisor on CARGO, Post Production Coordinator on THE NIGHTINGALE and Production and Development Executive on BUOYANCY. She is also Associate Producer on Causeway's upcoming features YOU WON'T BE ALONE starring Noomi Rapace, and BLAZE by Del Kathryn Barton and starring Simon Baker. THE MOOGAI is her first credit as Producer.

NO COINCIDENCE MEDIA

No Coincidence Media is an Independent media company that produces and develops raw, cutting edge and signature television, documentary and short drama. The company is responsible for series such as COLOUR THEORY with Richard Bell 1 & 2 on NITV and SBS, hosted by political activist Richard Bell, who travels to the ancestral homelands of twelve artists across Australia, looking at how country and culture inspire their modern form of art.

SERVANT OR SLAVE, written by Mitch Stanley and Hetti Perkins, directed by award winning writer and director Steven McGregor, attracted the highest ever rating on National Indigenous Television to date, awarded the audience award at Melbourne International, Antenna Documentary and Harlem International Film Festivals in 2017. Short films such as CLOSED DOORS, directed by Hunter Page-Lochard and Carter Simpkin, and BETWEEN TWO LINES directed by Jack Steele (Sydney Film Festival 2019), are currently travelling the international festival circuit before broadcasting on the ABC in 2020.

Producer Mitch Stanley and Development Executive Toni Stowers aim to reshape Australian television by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers, directors and actors through storytelling, strengthening the country's diverse identity, and entertaining a wider audience through filmmaking.

CAST

SHARI SEBBENS – SARAH

Shari is a Bardi, Jabirr Jabirr woman born and raised on Larrakia country. After completing a certificate 3 course in Aboriginal Theatre at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, she was accepted into NIDA's prestigious three-year acting course. Shari has always had a passion for Indigenous theatre and film and creating new Australian works. Shari won the GRAHAM KENNEDY AWARD FOR MOST OUTSTANDING NEW TALENT at the 2012 Logies for her role in REDFERN NOW. She has also starred in TV series such as THE HEIGHTS and THE GODS OF WHEAT STREET, and in films including TOP END WEDDING, AUSTRALIA DAY, THOR: RAGNAROK, THE SAPPHIRES and THE DARKSIDE. In 2019 she was named Sydney Theatre Company's new Richard Wherrett Fellow, a prestigious career pathway opportunity for emerging and developing directors, and at the 2019 Sydney Theatre Awards took home the award for Best Female Actor in a Support Role in a Mainstage Production for her performance in CITY OF GOLD next to Meyne Wyatt.

MEYNE WYATT – FERGUS

After graduating from Australia's National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) in 2010, Meyne appeared in several theatre productions including the Griffin Theatre Company's SILENT DISCO, for which he was named Best Newcomer at the 2011 Sydney Theatre Awards; the Sydney Theatre Company production of BLOODLAND and Belvoir's BURIED CITY (2012). Meyne's work in television includes the ABC series REDFERN NOW which saw him nominated for Most Outstanding Newcomer at the 2014 Logie Awards and Best Lead Actor in a Television Drama at the AACTA Awards in the same year. More recent television credits include the ABC comedy series BLACK COMEDY (2016), the HBO supernatural mystery drama series THE LEFTOVERS (2017), SBS's AACTA award-winning series MYSTERY ROAD (2018), the ABC series LES NORTON and the Foxtel series WENTWORTH (2019). Meyne's film roles include the musical comedy THE SAPPHIRES (2012) alongside Jessica Mauboy, Deborah Mailman and Miranda Tapsell; STRANGERLAND opposite Nicole Kidman and Hugo Weaving which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2015 and the film adaptation of Tim Winton's THE TURNING (2013). 2019 saw Meyne perform in the critically acclaimed play CITY OF GOLD which he also wrote and for which he was awarded Best Male Actor in a Leading Role in a Mainstage production in the 2019 Sydney Theatre Awards. The play debuted at Brisbane's Queensland Theatre to incredible reviews and was followed by a sell-out season at the Griffin Theatre in Sydney.