



**7^e FESTIVAL
INTERNATIONAL
DU FILM
DE LA ROCHE-SUR-YON**

**ABORDER LE FILM
EN ANGLAIS**

GIRL ASLEEP - Rosemary Myers



Girl Asleep director Rosemary Myers jumps from theatre to film

I know this was originally a piece of theatre; what made you want to adapt it for the screen?

When we made the play we always knew we were going to make the film. The play is a standalone play, but it was a great chance to test the story out really thoroughly and learn about the storytelling before we shot the film.

(...)

What was the process of adaptation; what changed and what were the biggest challenges?

It was a new medium I didn't know at all, so personally one of my biggest fears was that I'd be letting the process down because people would be expecting things from me and I wouldn't know what those things were (laughs). That was where Andrew Commis was great because he did provide a lot of mentorship in that way. And also because Andy and Karryn [de Cinque] are a bit maverick in how they think about film, and that's kind of how we are in the theatre. After we finished the play, Matt and I worked on adapting the theatre script into a screenplay with Louise Gough, our script editor. It was about turning dialogue into image[s] that spoke, because film allows you that capacity, and that continued all the way through the process. We'd shoot scenes and say, well, we don't really need the dialogue in that scene because the picture's telling us everything. That was the first part of the process. The second part was that I spent a long time, probably about six weeks, looking at visual references, storyboarding the film. Then of course there was casting. Because in the play, we had adult actors playing young people but in the film we obviously have fourteen year-olds playing fourteen year-olds. Hearing the script embodied by people of the right age was great. In the theatre, you can be so playful. You're asking the audience to take a major ride with you, because you're essentially in one room and going, we're really going to have to imagine this world – and the audience does. But film is a little bit different in that you're really going into the school, or into the home. The theatre can be more grotesque in terms of how you perform, but we kept a lot of the spirit of our theatrical language in the film. It's just recalibrated for that different medium and you can control the gaze a lot more intensely. With our theatre, anyway, we really do take the challenge of playing ideas out in action, whereas a lot of theatre plays ideas out in exposition; two characters unpacking an idea through dialogue.

Did the third act, in which your main character dives down the rabbit hole into a fantastical world, change much from the stage version?

We refined the storytelling more than anything technical. There were a few differences. We were very naïve going into the film. The first thing that Matt and I started to write were these scenes that took place in a forest at nighttime, thinking that we'd find a beautiful forest, and somebody said: that's crazy, it's going to chew up your budget, lighting-wise and getting to location, trying to shoot nights in a forest. Then we came up with the idea with Andy to shoot that largely on a set, which already made the environment a bit more natural to us, because we're very used to working on sets obviously. And the dramaturgy was more refined, which was the great benefit of staging the play. When you're making new writing, you never quite know what you've got until you see it running a little bit and see people responding to it.

What was the shoot like?

The very first day of shooting was the best day of my life. It was so exciting. We really wanted to make this film. I was dreaming before the funding announcement of us being unsuccessful, and I don't think I've ever done that before around any project. It's really a long-held dream to make a film. All our team felt that way. I guess the biggest challenge was time. But we were so well planned with our storyboards. A big thing that was said to me a lot: this film is very ambitious; you're making a period film in 22 days on this particular budget, and the best place to get this film wrong is on paper. So we did go in with immaculate planning and everything storyboarded.

This is interesting for an Aussie film in that it's stylized, non-naturalistic, which is rare for a debut Aussie film. It's got a real visual signature.

Oh that's good. One thing I think Katrina and Amanda picked up on in our work is that our biggest references are actually screen references when we're making our plays. And that's because the screen is the major art medium of our time really. We're inevitably referring to things like [Michel] Gondry or Hal Hartley or John Hughes or Wes Anderson or David Lynch.

The only local analogies I can think of are those 90's movies like Strictly Ballroom and Muriel's Wedding, where characters are almost larger than life.

That's something we were very wary of going into the film, because we didn't want to make them so grotesque. It's a fine line on film, but I think the actors hit that [on the head]. The structure of the film is quite convenient in that regard, in that the protagonist of the film plays for real and then everyone else [reflects] her experience of the world around her. So they are slightly amped up but still believable. They're clowns. I mean, I love shows like Modern Family, which is essentially clowning, because at the heart of it is a lot of truth.

What's it been like touring the film to festivals like Berlin?

It's been amazing, because I think it's very Aussie, the film. But I think people relate to it. So it's had a lot of resonance, and sometimes even in places where English is the second language, the visual humour gets a lot of laughter. Berlin was awesome, because a lot of people saw the film and a lot of people wanted to meet with us and said, what's next? So that was really exciting. We're hoping to adapt another one of our plays, one of our favourites and also written by Matthew Whittet, into another film.

Harry Windsor - March 8, 2016 - The Hollywood Reporter

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