

NOTHING LIKE A NIGHT OUT WITH THE BOYS

DROWN

JJ SPICE FILMS IN ASSOCIATION WITH CUT 10 PICTURES AND HIGH CONCEPT MEDIA GROUP PRESENT
MATT LEVETT JACK MATTHEWS SAM ANDERSON AND HARRY COOK A DEAN FRANCIS FILM
WRITTEN BY STEPHEN DAVIS AND DEAN FRANCIS CASTING BY TIMOTHY MAY MUSIC BY IAN KITNEY COSTUME DESIGNER CHRISTOPHER BALDRY AND CHLOE LAWRENCE HARCHER
EDITED BY DEAN FRANCIS AND THOMAS GOODIN PRODUCTION DESIGNER CHRISTOPHER BALDRY DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DEAN FRANCIS CO-PRODUCED BY KAYNE TAYLOR ALEEYA MCGUID
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER DOMINIC McDONALD PRODUCED BY RAYMOND CHAN NICOLE HARCOURT ROSS JACOBS SHAUN MILLER LUCAS PLUNKET SIMON PLUNKET
PRODUCED BY STEPHEN DAVIS AND DEAN FRANCIS DIRECTED BY DEAN FRANCIS

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SYNOPSIS

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In the cloistered world of competitive surf-lifesaving, an Australian hero is de-throned as the champion by a younger, gay competitor. A booze-fuelled night out brings jealousy, homophobic fear and unrequited lust to a tragic and shocking climax.

MEDIUM SYNOPSIS

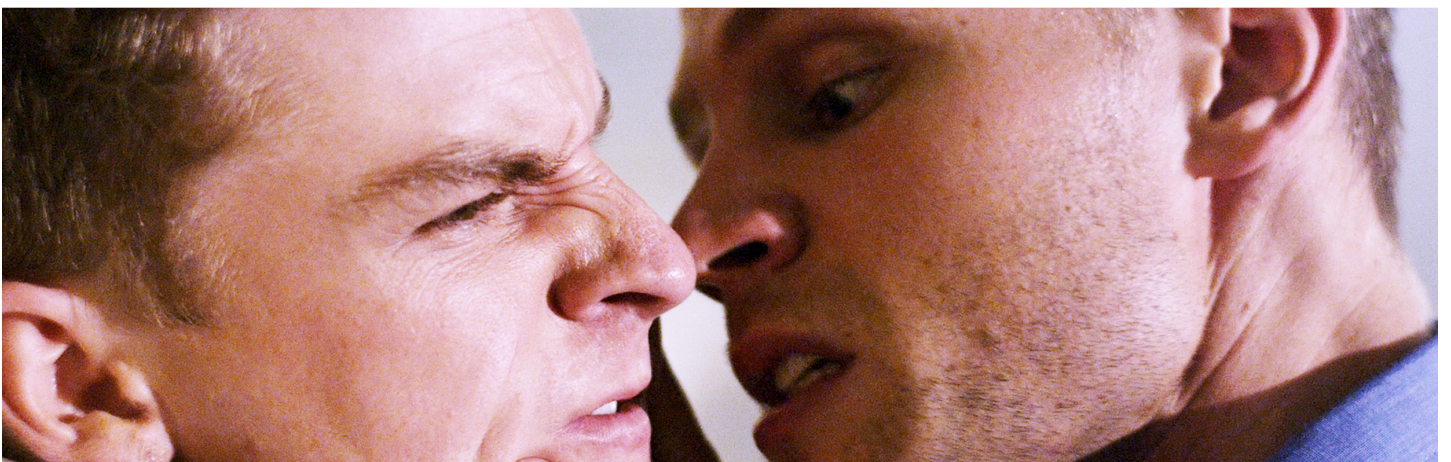
Len is a Surf Lifesaving champion, a legend in the cloistered surf club just like his father. But when the younger, faster, fitter Phil arrives at the club, Len's legendary status starts to crumble. Then Len sees Phil arriving in the company of another man; a man Phil gives a farewell kiss too. Phil is gay.

Over the summer season, Len starts to form unexpected, confusing feelings for Phil. It's something Len cannot accept and after the annual awards dinner, Len explodes. He finds Phil in the Club House locker room and violently attacks him.

But to Len's surprise, Phil remains loyal to the mateship pack and refuses to rat on Len about the beating in the Club House locker Room. Len stays in the Club and is free to compete in the annual Surf Lifesaving completion; a competition Len has won five times but Phil wins and Len's defeat is final.

Broken, Len refuses to die and with his best mate Meat he takes Phil on a victory bender through the seedy city in an attempt to secure an intoxicated oblivion.

Arriving back at the beach where Phil won his victory the day before, Len sets upon Phil. And in a series of humiliating acts, Len finally comes face to face with a fundamental question, can he accept the truth about his sexuality and identity or will he succumb to complete oblivion.





LONG SYNOPSIS

Len is a Surf Lifesaving champion. His father was a Surf Lifesaving Champion. Len and his family are legends of the Surf Lifesaving Club. Everyone loves him. The Club Captain respects him. The Canteen Staff adores him. And his closest friend, Meat thinks he's the best mate ever.

But when Phil arrives at the club, Len's legendary status starts to crumble. After saving a boy from drowning on his first day, Phil immediately gains the respect of the Club and Len finds himself quickly falling outside of the group. Fighting against this isolation, Len turns his attention toward Phil. He tries to befriend him, he tries to understand him and he tries to win back his status in the Club.

But Len's fight to retain the crown has an unexpected result. Len starts to explore his own sense of masculinity for the first time in his life. He starts to question his, the Club and the mateship myth. This exploration climaxes when Len encounters a suicidal woman heading toward her oblivion in the ocean. And for the first time in his life, Len contradicts the fundamental value of the Surf Lifesaving Club. Len lets the woman drown.

Philosophically devastated by this act, Len returns to the beach a changed man. But his change becomes even more profound when as he trudges back to the clubhouse, Len sees Phil arriving in the company of another man; a man Phil gives a farewell kiss too. Phil is gay.

Len doesn't out Phil. Instead he's curious. Is this the real truth of men? Is this the new Champion?

Over the summer season, Len starts to form feelings for Phil. It's unexpected. It's confusing. It's dangerous. It's something Len cannot ultimately accept and after the annual awards dinner, Len explodes. He finds Phil in the Club House locker room and violently attacks him.

Fully expecting an immediate expulsion from the Club, Len thinks his decent is final. All the elements of his masculine identity have gone. He is no longer a mate. He is no longer a surf life saver. He is no longer a man. But to Len's surprise, Phil remains loyal to the mateship pack and refuses to rat on Len about the beating in the Club House locker Room. Len never expected Phil to be a mate.

The result of Phil's blind loyalty is Len stays in the Club and is free to compete in the annual Surf Lifesaving completion; a competition Len has won five times and one he must win again to retain his crown and elevate him back to the status of Club King. But Len doesn't win. Phil wins and Len's defeat is final.

Broken, Len refuses to die and with his best mate Meat he takes Phil on a victory bender through the seedy inner city in an attempt to secure an intoxicated oblivion. But after being evicted from a series of clubs, Len, Phil and Meat end up at the only club that will accept them; a gay club. Here, Len's decent toward truth escalates and after a deeply intimate act with one of the patrons, Len realises that there is only one way to get back his false sense of self. He has to destroy Phil once and for all.

Arriving back at the beach where Phil won his victory the day before, Len sets upon Phil. And in a series of humiliating acts, Len finally comes face to face with a fundamental question, can he accept the truth about his sexuality and identity or should he swim to his death, like the woman he let drown.

BIOGRAPHIES PRINCIPAL CREATIVES

DEAN FRANCIS

Writer, Director, Producer, Editor, Director of Photography

Dean Francis is a multi-award winning director, producer and cinematographer. Francis' first feature as director, the supernatural thriller ROAD TRAIN (aka ROAD KILL) was released in 50 countries and garnered critical acclaim on its 2010 Australian theatrical release including the Special Jury Prize at the Melbourne Underground Film Festival. Francis has directed and shot over a dozen short films which have screened at more than a hundred international film festival and been honoured with awards for direction, cinematography and acting. The short VERMIN, which tells the story of an exterminator obsessed with a feral cat-boy, was nominated at the Australian Directors Guild Awards and premiered at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival. BOYS GRAMMAR attracted national media attention for its graphic depiction of homophobic sexual violence and generated over a million YouTube views. Dean holds a Master of Arts in Directing from the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) where he won Best Directed Drama Award and where he has also lectured. Dean is the owner of jj splice films which has a diverse development slate of projects in film, television and web.



STEPHEN DAVIS

Writer, Producer, Original Stage Play

Stephen Davis is an AFI-nominated and multi-award winning writer with five feature credits (CITY LOOP, BLURRED, MONKEY PUZZLE, THE REEF and DROWN). His work has played at the Toronto, Tokyo, Sydney and Cannes film festivals and resulted in multi-millions at the box office. He is a bestselling playwright with six published works for Playlab Press (A VERY BLACK COMEDY INDEED, JUICE, BLURRED, AND TRANZITIONS, RITES OF PASSAGE TRILOGY, WET DOGS) and one with Hawker Brownlow (BURNT). He has hours of award-winning produced theatre work (DROWN, LA BOITE, SCAR, JUICE, BLURRED, CRUSHED, BURNT, TURTLE ISLAND, WET DOGS and television work (SPY SHOP, NEIGHBOURS, SPIRITED, BLINK BILL, CRASH PALACE, BUZZ BUMBLE). He has worked in Sydney and Los Angeles in key development positions for 20th Century Fox and April Films. Stephen also researched and adapted for screen a number of novels including THE ARCHITECT by John Scott and IF WISHES WERE HORSES by WP Kinsella (FIELD OF DREAMS). He has developed and created television shows for Channel 9, ABC, SBS Foxtel and Fox in Los Angeles.

BIOGRAPHIES

LEAD CAST

MATT LEVETT

Len

Matt Levett graduated from the Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) in 2009. While at WAAPA he was awarded both the Sally Burton prize for Most Outstanding Performance in a Classical Text, and the Lesley Anderson award. Matt's television credits include the critically acclaimed DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND alongside Simon Burke, Toni Collette and Don Hany, the role of 'Andrew Swanson' in A PLACE TO CALL HOME (Series 1 and 2), WINNERS & LOSERS, DANCE ACADEMY, RESCUE SPECIAL OPS, BED OF ROSES, HOME & AWAY, TWO TWISTED AND ALL SAINTS. His short film credits include THIS FERAL LIFE, SHOWBOY and BOYS GRAMMAR.

HARRY COOK

Meat

Harry Cook has been working consistently in Film, Television and Theatre for the past 5 years. In 2009 Harry starred in critically acclaimed feature film ACCIDENTS HAPPEN playing Geena Davis' on screen son Larry Conway. Later that year he starred as one of the leads in cult Australian thriller CAUGHT INSIDE alongside Peter Phelps and Ben Oxenbould. From there Harry went back to the stage where he played the lead role of Tom in Lee Lewis' production of CITIZENSHIP by Mark Ravenhill which had it's Australian world premiere in Sydney. Harry has also worked on ABC series MY PLACE, Channel 9's PANIC AT ROCK ISLAND directed by Tony Tilse. In 2012 Harry played the lead role in RUSSETS which was the winner of the International Playwright Competition in Cambridge England. From there Harry returned to Australia to play "Meat" in DROWN and the following year he worked alongside Sam Neill and Bryan Brown in ABC series OLD SCHOOL.

JACK MATTHEWS

Phil

Originally from a small town in New Zealand, Jack Matthews is forging a successful career in Australia. Jack has always had a keen interest in books and learning and always brings a studious approach in developing his craft. A passion for characters and story telling has lead him to a career in acting. After establishing himself in the Sydney industry, in 2013, Jack was cast in the role of 'Damon Dundus' in the Feature Film "1500 Steps". Then in the Feature Film DROWN.

SAM ANDERSON

Tom

Sam graduated from NIDA with a Bachelor of Dramatic Art in 2005, and has been developing a strong list of acting credits in film, television and theatre ever since. After appearing in short films HOLD and PLAY CRACK THE SKY, Sam was cast in the acclaimed film adaptation of Li Cunxin's novel MAO'S LAST DANCER, directed by Bruce Beresford. Sam resides between New York and Sydney.



BIOGRAPHIES

SUPPORTING CAST



HEATHER MITCHELL

Helen

Heather Mitchell is one of Australia's most respected actresses across film, television and theatre. She has an impressive list of television credits including the Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks US miniseries *THE PACIFIC*, and *POWER GAMES* for which she received a 2014 AACTA Award nomination for Best Guest or Supporting Actress in a Television Drama. Heather's feature credits include Fred Schepisi's *THE EYE OF THE STORM* with Geoffrey Rush and Judy Davis, Leon Ford's *GRIFF THE INVISIBLE* with Ryan Kwanten, *THE WEDDING PARTY*, *THREE BLIND MICE*, Greg McLean's *ROGUE*, Cherie Nowlan's *THANK GOD HE MET LIZZIE*, *MURIEL'S WEDDING*, *PROOF*, *IRRESISTIBLE* alongside Susan Sarandon, *BLACK & WHITE*, *CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION* and *ROMULUS, MY FATHER* directed by Richard Roxburgh. She received a Best Lead Actress award at the 2011 and 2012 New York City International Film Festival.

ANTHONY PHELAN

Mal

Anthony Phelan has enjoyed a varied career across film television and theatre. Recent screen projects include *THE KETTERING INCIDENT*, *UNBROKEN*, directed by Angelina Jolie and *GALLIPOLI*, produced by Southern Star which re-enacted 10 months in the Australian forces' WW1 campaign in Turkey and will screen in 2015. Anthony has over 100 theatre credits, including *THE WILD DUCK* for which he was awarded the 2011 Helpmann Award for Best Male Actor in a Supporting Role in a Play and the 2011 Sydney Theatre Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role of a Mainstage Production. Other theatre credits include *UNCLE VANYA* (including New York and Washington DC tours) for Sydney Theatre Company and *KING LEAR* for The Bell Shakespeare Company.

MAYA STANGE

The Woman Who Drowned

Maya attended John Curtin Performing Arts High School in Perth and got her first break when she was sixteen in the film *LOVE IN LIMBO*, opposite Russell Crowe. She has worked in theatre, film and television ever since. Her Australian film credits include *GALORE* directed by Rhys Graham, *GARAGE DAYS* and *IN A SAVAGE LAND* both of which earned her AFI nominations. Maya has worked with Mark Ruffalo on the New York independent film *XX/XY* and Isabella Rossellini in the Showtime pilot *FILTHY GORGEOUS*.

BILL YOUNG

Mal

Bill Young's feature film work has included Baz Luhrmann's *THE GREAT GATSBY*, *SUPERMAN RETURNS*, *JAPANESE STORY*, *CHOPPER*, *THE MATRIX*, *YOU CAN'T STOP THE MURDERS*, *THE NUGGET*, and *THE ROAD TO NHILL*, together with the award winning short *TWO LAPS*. His television work includes ABC TV's *DEVILS DUST*, *A MODEL DAUGHTER*, *THE CUT*, *THE HOLLOWMEN* and *THE PRIME MINISTER IS MISSING*, the Spielberg/Hanks mini-series *THE PACIFIC*, as well as the Logie award winning dramatised doco *THE BRIDGE* playing the role of Jack Lang. He is also fondly remembered as the bumbling boyfriend of Betty in the long running and highly successful sit com *HEY DAD* for which he also wrote. Bill Young also directs film, theatre and television. His feature film *THE ROLY POLY MAN* (1994) won the Vincent Price Award at XVth Fantafestival.





DIRECTORS STATEMENT

In the summer of 2012 I was totally enthralled by Stephen Davis' play DROWN. It has been based on an experience Stephen had at a Surf Life Saving club years ago and performed by the Queensland Theatre Company in 2001 to a tremendously controversial reception. Stephen had asked if I was interested in directing DROWN on stage in Sydney but I thought it would be a much better film.

The play was sad and shocking but full of truth. And there was something undeniably erotic in the destructive relationship between Len and Phil (who in the play is mute and virtually unconscious due to his drunken state). I saw it as an opportunity to explore male identity and sexuality through the lens of an "Australian hero" and to deconstruct Australia's culturally fundamental notion of mate-ship.

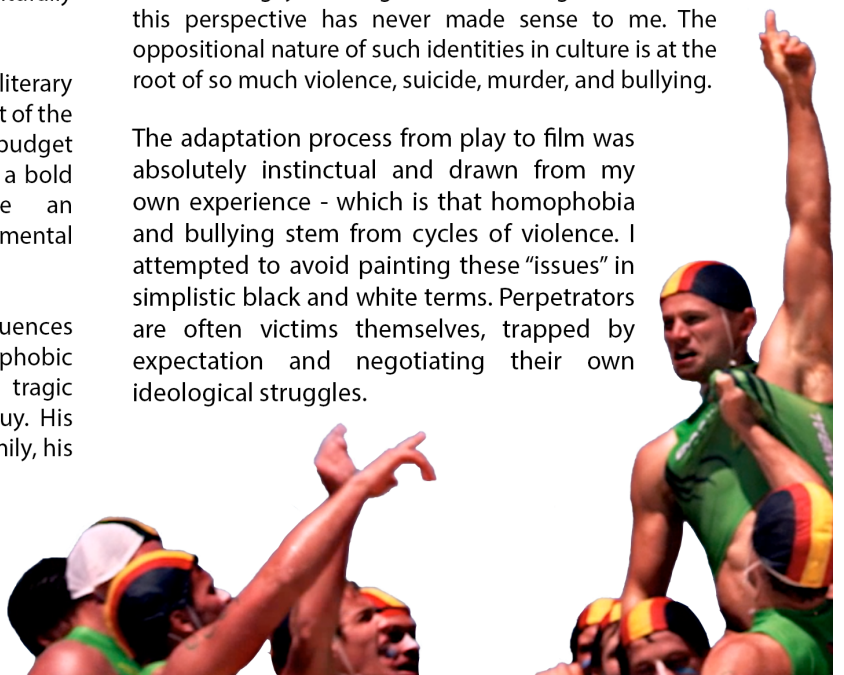
I was inspired by the opportunity to create a literary piece of filmmaking which could maintain the grit of the original text while hopefully side-stepping low-budget cinema-verite stylistic cliches. I set out to create a bold cinematic language and explore create an unconventional narrative stance using an experimental production methodology.

I chose to focus on the fear Len has of the consequences of same-sex attraction in a closed, homophobic environment. I wanted to build on Len as tragic character who is straight but in love with a guy. His obstacle is not his sexuality but his world, his family, his surf club, his mates, his culture.

As it occurred to me that Len's relationship with Phil could blossom into a tragic love story all these questions arose - whose point of view do we take? How far can you take sexual violence in an Australian film? What is a gay movie? As a passion project with limited commercial attachments it was possible to not answer these questions but to deepen them through a collaborative process with the cast.

Phil straddles the chasm between the rigid straight world of the surf club and the equally rigid world of gay culture. He doesn't want to be defined by his identity and he's in love with two adversaries - Tom and Len - who are both equally enslaved by the narrowly defined expectations of their own cultures. We all seem to have to choose - gay or straight. The enduring limitations of this perspective has never made sense to me. The oppositional nature of such identities in culture is at the root of so much violence, suicide, murder, and bullying.

The adaptation process from play to film was absolutely instinctual and drawn from my own experience - which is that homophobia and bullying stem from cycles of violence. I attempted to avoid painting these "issues" in simplistic black and white terms. Perpetrators are often victims themselves, trapped by expectation and negotiating their own ideological struggles.



I wanted sexuality in the film world to be as palpable for the audience as it is for the characters. I tried to portray the fine line between sexual intimacy and violent intimacy that exists in so many male relationships. I felt that the story needed to be partly “sensed” as opposed to explicitly heard or seen and it was envisioned that improvisation on set could create the telling “moments between”. The challenge in editorial became balancing narrative clarity with abstraction and visual poetry.

Reading DROWN had brought me back to my upbringing where it was common to be called a “faggot” by your high school football coach if you fumbled the ball. My all-boys school taught me that it’s in the interests of “masculinity” to define itself in opposition to homosexuality because of the clearly homoerotic nature of most competitive sports. Taking a “queer eye” to Australian sport for instance reveals its potential for comparison to soft porn - the intimacy of the scantily dressed men, piling on one another, smacking each other’s butts, even occasionally digitally penetrating each other on the field in the case of Rugby League. It’s simultaneously intimate and violent - and it certainly draws a crowd. Much like Mardi Gras. The public celebration of male beauty, the joy of sweaty bodies in a confined space, the camaraderie of ritual are common to both the “gay world” and the “straight world”.

Yet any comparison between these two incredibly similar expressions of masculinity persistently threatens to destabilise society - as evidenced by the enormous controversy around gay sportsmen and soldiers.

The locker room in Drown became a particularly interesting cinematic space because it exposes vulnerability for both gay and straight alike and forces the men in question to fortify themselves against homoeroticism. When Len realises that Phil views the space in potentially sexual terms he is forced to defend it - and violence becomes a language he uses to express his attraction to Phil. So begins the spiral of self-loathing that culminates in his destruction.



Tragically, Meat is the only character who is in a position to save Len and yet he’s keenly aware that giving voice to Len’s struggle would amount to the worst kind of betrayal - calling his mate’s masculinity into question is pretty much the worst thing an Australian male can do. As Len’s violence against Phil intensifies Meat must make a choice. Yet when he finally confronts Len he does so within the conventions of the culture - by wielding Len’s identity crisis like a weapon against him.

Anyone who visits Sydney realises the extent to which Australians are absolutely obsessed with the beach - drawn to the sparkling waves and oblivious to their danger. Hundreds die each year in the ocean, many thousands more fatally wither in the carcinogenic rays of a Southern sun but the appeal of both is so deeply instilled in the culture. The Surf Clubs sometimes institutionalise the dark side of the beach - and remind us of the cultural imperative to fit in and be “one of the boys”.

If I ever worried that themes in DROWN had become non-issues in this enlightened and accepting millennium, such concerns were put to rest during the course of filming. While shooting at suburban surf clubs our crew were subject to homophobic abuse, with most surf clubs outright refusing to have anything at all to do with production or making legal threats. News of our film spread like wildfire through the clubs and it felt we were striking a nerve. As we filmed at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade members of the gay community were being bashed by police. At the Mardi Gras Harbour Party I was aggressively strip-searched by cops in public, my crew just standing around almost unable to believe it.

Since we wrapped, our government has shut down Sydney’s nightlife in an attempt to curb rampant male violence - guys like Len out seeking drunk oblivion. Our national hero the Olympic swimmer Ian Thorpe has come out as gay after reports of a struggle with drugs and mental illness. And gay teenagers continue to kill themselves at an alarming rate.

When we’re forced to betray our very sense of self by adopting behaviours that deep down we feel uncomfortable about then we will by necessity find a way to fight back, hit out, self destruct. When the slightest sign of non-normative sexual behaviour sends a man into a spiral of confusion, violence and ultimately self-destruction we need to fundamentally re-assess the limitations of masculine identity.

- Dean Francis, December 2014

PRESS



PREVIEW

DROWN: MASCULINITY IN CRISIS

With his sophomore effort, *DROWN*, Australian writer/director, DEAN FRANCIS (*Road Train*), weaves a shocking and powerful tale of male sexuality and violence. BY ERIN FREE

When writer/director, Dean Francis, was gifted the opportunity to stage a later production of Stephen Davis' play, *Drown* – which had enjoyed a controversial debut courtesy of The Queensland Theatre Company – he knew that he wanted to take its bristling, confrontational story way outside the confines of the theatre's four walls. "I had such a strong emotional reaction that I knew instantly that I had to make a film from the material," Francis tells FilmInk. "I responded to so much about it." There was indeed a lot to respond to, and Francis – who had helmed the 2010 outback horror flick, *Road Train*, as well as a number of highly regarded shorts – grabbed the project with both hands. Intense, sweatily immediate, and uncompromising in its approach to both narrative and dialogue, Stephen Davis' play follows three surf lifesavers on a big night out whose lives take a tragic turn as a result of bigotry, homophobia, extreme bullying, and brutal violence. "In the play, male violence and sexuality are inextricably linked, and one is often an expression of the other," Francis says. "I found that fascinating. The play critiques the mythologised notion of mateship, suggesting that it rationalises bullying, homophobia, racism, and xenophobia – many of the social problems that characterise the Australian male identity."

After working with Davis on the film's script, Francis threw *Drown* into the now-heaving crowdfunding arena, and built up the kind of budget that meant he had to carry the bulk of the film's weight on his shoulders. "Directing it was the easiest part," Francis laughs. "I'd directed a feature before, but I'd never produced, shot, or edited one, so it was a steep learning curve. I was lucky enough to have an intense personal connection with the material, so I had to listen deeply to my instincts and rediscover the story at every stage. It freed me from my usual obsessive preparation process, allowing me to create a space to discover moments with the cast, as opposed to re-enacting a predefined mental image of the film."

It was material that Francis was familiar with. His 2005 short, *Boys Grammar*, had also dealt with the often horrific results of testosterone-driven confusion and violence. "That was viewed over a million times on YouTube," Francis says of the private school-set drama. "The crazy amount of media coverage for this six-minute short persuaded me that we had struck a nerve, and that the community was up for a discussion on the nature of masculinity, male sexuality, and violence." Familiarity with the subject matter, however, didn't make the shooting of *Drown* any easier. "The violence was the hardest," says Francis. "No one knew what to say



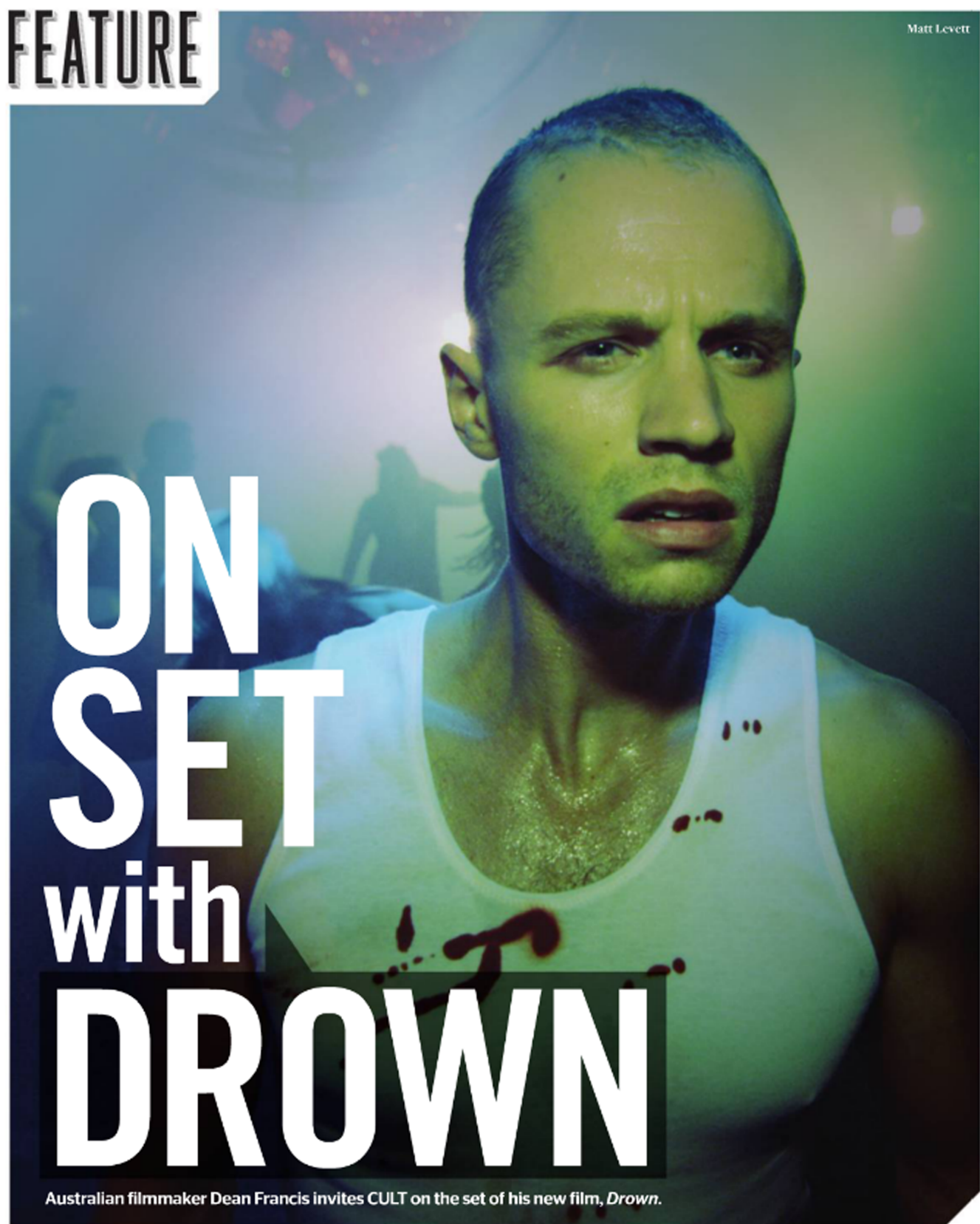
after watching the horrors unfold. It was all played out in extremely long takes, and the psychological violence is just as intense as the physical. The cast did well to withstand the emotional aftershocks. Sometimes they suffered emotional breakdowns on set, always in the most primitive filmmaking conditions. But they showed up each day, deeply committed to the importance of what the story was saying, and the potential of the film to impact its audience."

And that impact is exactly what Dean Francis wanted to create with *Drown*. "The main reason that I started a career as a filmmaker was to convey my singular perspective to audiences, and to create debate, hopefully with a view to making a small positive change," the director says. "*Road Train* didn't have too much to say aside from recycling horror tropes, so it felt like it was time to return to a more personal form of storytelling. *Drown* was the right story for me to tell at the right time."

Drown will be released next year. ■

FEATURE

Matt Levett



ON SET with DROWN

Australian filmmaker Dean Francis invites CULT on the set of his new film, *Drown*.

(From Cult)

April 2013 **CULT** 37



Dean Francis: "Jack Matthews plays Phil, a young 25-year-old who has been bullied in a homophobic attack by a gay guy who is in love with him. Now they are in a gay club together. It's going to get messy. Phil's not sure how to behave. First, he's nervous, but watching his back, it's electric."



"I'm terrified of open water, but they managed to get a shot like this, so it was worth it."

- Harry Cook

Drown is currently in post-production, and is scheduled for release in early 2014. Head to www.drownthemovie.com, www.facebook.com/drownthemovie, and twitter.com/drownthemovie.



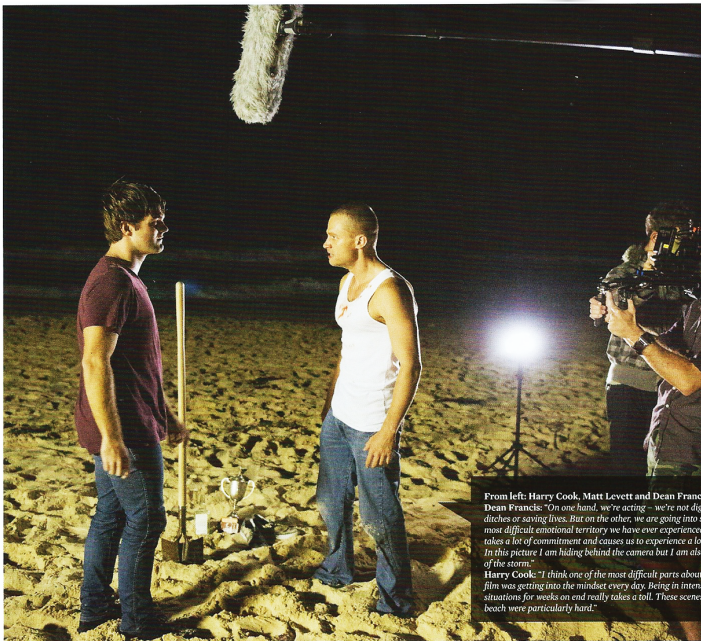
Harry Cook: "I'm terrified of open water, but they managed to get a shot like this, so it was worth it." Dean Francis: "He's really true. Harry Cook is terrified of open water. He once had a close encounter with a shark when he was a kid. It took a long time to persuade him out of the shallow for this but his terror added a great deal to the scene. This was one of many hard call shots on the beach. It always feels so difficult to have to make up an idea to get there on time for the camera but when you capture a scene like this you feel a wonderful sense of joy about the natural environment."



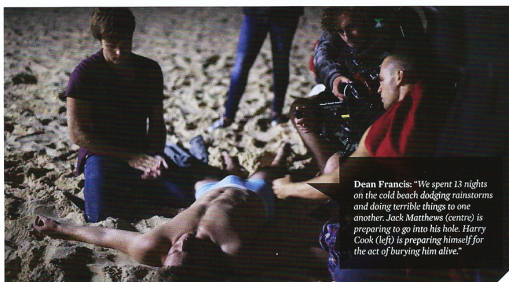
Dean Francis: "This is Phil (Jack Matthews) falling in love with Tom (Sam Ankrum), his first boyfriend. The film's this scene on the cliff face off Marlin Peak. It's a beautiful spot where my boyfriend and I sometimes go to drink champagne and occasionally make out - how very innocent of us. It's also reported that gay men were thrown to their deaths here in homophobic attacks that were dubbed as an accident in the 1990s. I think that makes it a sort of gay landmark, the perfect spot for this scene."



Dean Francis: "I admire Matt Levett so much for committing to one of the weirdest, unappealing on-screen roles. His character drives to the film but he happens to be pretty awesome. I've thought of her. When I suggested that the film is with a series of 'sexual encounters' she didn't bat an eye. What she came up with was truly interesting and in the context of the film, deeply moving."



From left: Harry Cook, Matt Levett and Dean Francis. "On one hand, we're acting - we're not digging ditches or saving lives. But on the other, we're going into some of the most difficult emotional territory we have ever experienced, taking a lot of commitment and courage as to experience a lot. In this picture I am hiding behind the camera but I am also of the storm." Harry Cook: "I think one of the most difficult parts about film was getting into the mindset every day. Being in intense situations for weeks on end really takes a toll. These scenes were particularly hard."



Dean Francis: "We spent 13 nights on the cold beach dodging rainstorms and doing terrible things to one another. Jack Matthews (centre) is preparing to go into his hole. Harry Cook (left) is preparing himself for the act of burying him alive."



ENTERTAINMENT

DEAN FRANCIS: The director and producer behind a bold new film that will take an uncompromising look at homophobia and bullying.

Dean Francis is an award-winning director and producer. His 2010 debut feature film, *Road Train*, sold in over 40 countries and was released theatrically in Australia. He has directed over a dozen acclaimed short films that have had more than a hundred international film festival screenings, including the controversial 2005 film *Boys Grammar*, about a teenage student raped in a prestigious private school, and his 2006 short film *Vermin*, which was nominated for an Australian Directors Guild Award.

But it's Francis's latest project that makes him a person to watch in 2013. He is directing the film adaptation of Stephen Davis's relentless play *Drown*, which had a successful run at Queensland Theatre Company in 2001. Shooting at the moment, the film follows three surf-lifeguards on a big night out in Bondi, when a potent cocktail of jealousy, homophobia and unrequited lust comes to the fore with tragic consequences.

"*Drown* is about being trapped into certain behaviours by what the world expects of us," Francis says. "It's about what men do to each other to hold onto their power. It's about the fear of male intimacy that drives so much violence. It's about sport and sporting culture, about what makes an Aussie hero. It challenges the assumptions on which the Australian male identity is based. It's about the origins of bullying. It's dark and it's funny."



Actor Matt Levett (right) plays protagonist Len in *Drown*.

The film is shooting at the moment using underground techniques on a small budget, which was partially raised through a crowd-funded Kickstarter campaign.

"One of the most important functions of cinema is to draw attention to issues that no one wants to talk about and make their discussion acceptable," Francis continues. "It's time we instigated a complex discussion about bullying and homophobia and their root causes. Cinema allows us to harness all the emotional power of the issue and entertain an audience as well as provoking them ... Unless we look at our culture as a whole and the root causes of bullying we will never fix the problem."

"Additionally, sexuality has been placed on the public agenda with the gay marriage debate. *Drown* taps into the civil rights cause of our time." Garrett Bithell

(From SX)

HEAD ABOVE WATER

Two brave new Aussie films — *DROWN*, directed by DEAN FRANCIS and starring HARRY COOK, and *TEENAGE KICKS*, directed by CRAIG BOREHAM and starring MILES SZANTO — have gone the crowd-funding route to tell their tales of contemporary masculinity in crisis. BY CARA NASH

work for other films on my slate, but with *Drown*, I knew from the start that I could only do it completely on my terms."

Francis was initially approached to direct *Drown* as a play by its writer, Stephen Davis, but the filmmaker immediately realised its cinematic potential. The hard-hitting story follows three surf lifesavers on a big night out in Bondi, where their lives take a tragic turn as a result of bigotry and violence. "I had such a strong emotional response to Stephen's play," Francis recalls. "It really struck me on a very primal level, and asked questions that I was keen to explore. The last time that I delved into this subject area was with my film school short, *Boys Grammar* (which looked at the fallout after a boy is raped at a prestigious high school), and that received a strong reaction. After the more 'paint by numbers' [2010 horror thriller] *Road Train*, I was looking for something with a bit more of an edge, and that was a personal statement."

Someone who responded to that statement was talented young actor, Harry Cook (*Accidents Happen*, *Caught Inside*), who plays Meat, a teen who becomes sadly entangled in the nasty world of homophobia and prejudice that exists in sporting culture. "My character's the tagalong guy who really looks up to the central character, Len," Cook explains. "But he doesn't really do anything to stop what he knows is wrong until the last minute. He's one of those characters that you can't help but feel sorry for. He's a bit of a good guy gone bad, and he has to redeem himself. But his behaviour comes from a bigger picture of feeling scared."

While *Drown* is set in competitive surf culture, Cook

believes that this behaviour potentially lurks in any testosterone-fuelled social context. "These attitudes aren't specific to any community," Cook says. "Trouble can happen whenever someone feels that their manhood or masculinity is threatened. Any environment where you put a lot of 'blokey' or really 'manly' guys together can be quite dangerous in itself. Len [played by *Winners & Losers* Matt Levett] is a really lost guy in a very macho world, and his violence comes from a place that is so confused."

Interestingly, the crowd-funding campaign utilised an anti-bullying angle. "We focused on the social justice element of our story," Francis says about their campaign on Indiegogo. "That topic arouses strong feelings in people, so there was an instant tie-in to their lives." It certainly proved a strong hook, but Francis admits that the process was all uncharted water to him. "It's more time consuming than I thought," the director reflects. "You need to have a constant social media presence, and really commit to many hours a day plugging your own work. I found that a bit daunting at first, but the belief that people have in the project actually inspires your own faith in it."

Someone stuck in the daunting depths of the crowd-funding experience right now is writer/director, Craig Boreham, who has set his sights high, attempting to raise \$67,000 in 67 days, to fund his feature, *Teenage Kicks*. "It's pretty nerve-wracking, mainly because the stakes are high, and it's outside our control," Boreham says about the Pozible campaign, which, when FilmInk speaks to the filmmaker, has raised just over half its goal, with a few weeks remaining. "We believe in the story, and just have to hope that it hits a chord with people. It's a tricky balance

for the time being, it's a stretch to state that crowd-funding has revolutionised independent film financing and liberated it from the shackles of the traditional funding bodies. But there's certainly something to be said about launching a project on your own terms, and to your own schedule. Crowd-funding has given aspiring creatives this opportunity, as well as green-lighting all sorts of works that explore stories, themes and characters that can be neglected on Australian screens. Two such projects are the local crowd-funded feature films, *Drown* and *Teenage Kicks*, directed by Dean Francis and Craig Boreham, respectively. Coincidentally, the two filmmakers themselves are friends (having helmed the 2007 short, *Stray*, together), and while both are quick to stress the narrative and stylistic differences between their films, thematically they're both exploring ideas of sexuality and masculinity in new and courageous ways.

Refuting the fact that challenging personal stories are more difficult to get backed via the traditional funding route, Dean Francis emphasises that crowd-funding and private investment was their approach from the outset. Low budget was not a last resort, it was our original plan," asserts Francis, who is currently in post-production on *Drown*. "It's easy to feel that your first step is the funding bodies, and that will make or break your film, but these days, there are many options available. We've stayed in touch with the funding bodies throughout, but we wanted to move quickly and work in unconventional ways. I didn't want to explain my process to investors, or give up final cut. I wanted to shoot the film myself. I wanted to cast exceptional but little-known actors. This process would not



"LOW BUDGET WAS NOT A LAST RESORT, IT WAS OUR ORIGINAL PLAN."

too. There can be a tendency in crowd-funding to hammer people too hard and just push them away, so we've tried to be as respectful as we can. We want to keep the content relevant, up to date, and just try not to panic!"

Helping boost awareness and goodwill around the project is the fact that the story started its life as a short film titled *Drowning*, which picked up a swag of acclaim on the festival circuit. The short follows Mik, a conflicted teen (Miles Szanto) attempting to navigate through his guilt over his brother's death, as well as his own sexuality and feelings toward his best friend (played by Xavier Samuel). While Samuel is not returning for the feature, talented Aussies, Bojana Novakovic and Luke Arnold, have signed on, and Szanto is stepping back into the shoes of the central character. "I felt an instant connection to Mik and his struggles as a kid on the edge of adulthood, terrified to jump in," says Szanto, currently in LA. "There was a tenderness to the script for *Drowning* that never bordered on sentimentality. It was raw and gritty, but hopeful. I didn't know at the time that there was a feature in the works, but I knew that it would be a waste to let this story and characters float away."

The short represented another impressive addition to Boreham's resume of work, which has continually seen the filmmaker drawn to stories exploring relationships, sexuality and masculinity, and in a fluid way not often seen on Australian screens. "Sexuality is neglected generally," Boreham says. "It's changing, and there is more out there these days, but there is still this tendency for GLBTQI characters to be fairly generic and uncomplicated. There is also this trap that if a character is not your standard hetero character that they suddenly need to represent everyone in the GLBTQI community, which becomes in itself quite sanitising. It's what interested me about the character

of Mik. He's still young and figuring himself out. His sexuality is blurry and undefined, and something that exists as instinct for him more than an identity. He lives in a world that is so far from an urban gay community, and it isn't something that he has acknowledged about himself. I like that this is just who he is; it's not what the film is about."

Szanto admits to being pulled in by the film's depiction of a different side to masculinity. "Men, in general, are conditioned to keep their feelings to themselves," Szanto reflects. "Even with their best mate... perhaps even more so. Mateship is a common theme in Aussie film, but there's an important part of those close friendships that's neglected. It's really interesting in this film to see two young men, who quite obviously need each other, trying to break their inarticulate nature to express how much they love and mean to one another. The feature script has really allowed space to explore this."

As for the release of these films, both Francis and Boreham have their eye on the festival circuit, and are quietly confident about finding an audience. "I'm not really sure if it's particularly harder for drama or arthouse films," Boreham says in regard to securing a distributor. "There is often that perception, but so far, our conversations with distributors both here and internationally have always seen the scale of the film and its audience as well matched." Adds Francis: "*Drown* is arthouse crossover, so we'll start small. World sales will initially focus on Europe. We're working on pretty exciting plans, but for now, it's back to the editing suite!"

For more on *Drown*, visit www.drownthemovie.com. For more on *Teenage Kicks* and to find out how to contribute to its campaign, visit www.teenagekicksthemovie.com.

(From FilmInk)

CAST AND CREW LIST

JJ SPLICE FILMS PRESENTS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
CUT 10 PICTURES, HIGH CONCEPT MEDIA GROUP and **LOST KITTEN**
A **DEAN FRANCIS** FILM
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS **RAYMOND Y.H. CHAN, NICOLE HARCOURT, ROSS JACOBS,**
SHAUN MILLER, LUCAS PLUNKETT, SIMON PLUNKETT
CO-PRODUCERS **KAYNE TAYLOR, ALEEYA MCGUID, DOMINIC McDONALD**
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **DEAN FRANCIS**
PRODUCTION DESIGNER **CHRISTOPHER BALDRY**
EDITED BY **DEAN FRANCIS** and **THOMAS GOODIN**
COSTUME DESIGNERS **CHRISTOPHER BALDRY** and **CHLOE LAWRENCE HARCHER**
MUSIC COMPOSER **IAN KITNEY**
SOUND DESIGNER **BROOKE TREZISE**
CASTING BY **TIMOTHY MAY**
BASED ON A PLAY BY **STEPHEN DAVIS**
WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY **STEPHEN DAVIS** and **DEAN FRANCIS**
DIRECTED BY **DEAN FRANCIS**

CAST in order of appearance

Len	Matt Levett
Woman Who Drowned	Maya Stange
Phil	Jack Matthews
Meat	Harry Cook
Girls on beach	Lucy Green
	Jessina Oakes
	Meg McDermott
	Kimberly Lim
Drowning Boy	Robin Gonnella
Drowning Boy's Mother	Kate Ryerson
Groundskeeper	Jeremy Burtenshaw
Chook	Matt James
Beach bystanders	Corey Willis
	Namir Salim
	Nadene Weissenborn
	Jasmine Weissenborn
Danno	Daniel Needs
Fingers	Joel Davies
Philly	Phillipe Witana
Mal	Bill Young
Dredlocks	Shane Brunette
Lifesavers	Blake Kirby
	Rhys Mugdan
	Adam Southam
	Dylan Hare
	Matt Barker
	Josh Morton
	Jose Heredia

CAST AND CREW LIST (CONTINUED)

Mary	Debra Freeman
Mick Smithy	Anthony Phelan
Nippers	Shane Merrigan Michael Brindley Simon Cabello Dylan Cartwright Nicholas Giddings Allister Chick
Tom	Sam Anderson
Titty Bar Spruker	John Logiacco
Bartender	Elianne Oz
Beefy Guy	Adam Syed
Flirty Girl	Leah De La Cruz
Flirty Girl's Friend	Elisa Menniti
Laughing Woman	Stephanie May
Laughing Woman's Friends	Jenny Wu Maha Wilson
Aggressive Guy	Josh Brennan
Bar Bouncers	Tendai Dzwauro Jacob Myers
Helen	Heather Mitchell
Levdog	Madeleine Levins
Levdog's Boyfriend	Nicholas John Powers
Guys Holding Hands	Mitch Walker Derrick Walton
Skaters	Lincoln Tapsell Lucy Vecchio
Nightclub Line Patrons	David Mulligan Yiscah Symonds
Big Bouncer	Evan Burrell
Michael Patterson	Luke Hoole
Surf Club Awards Attendees	Colin Huxley Margarita Nazarenko Ross McLachlan Jacqueline Murray Alicia Kelly Victoria Ren Peter Zellmer Darren Willis Leanne Willis Amy Beaumont Jezzabell Doran Rosemary Burtenshaw John Flynn Ruby Tapa

CAST AND CREW LIST (CONTINUED)

Vomiting Boy **Jack Liston**
Vomiting Girl **Emily Sheehan**

Gay Club Patrons **Shane Spooner**
Jordan Fowell
Reece Tyrone
Jamie Meland-Proctor
Cody Ottens
David Francis
Michael Abbey
Adam Pedicini
Andrei Boyd
Saba Saliba
Aiden Hirn
Mita Pomare
Jake Harlow
Justin Seputra

Dan **Jayr Tinaco**

Boris the Drug Dealer **James E. Lee**

Jim Harden **Craig Walker**
Guy Jacking Off **Josh Maloney**
Guy Having Sex **Tomas McBride**
Guy Giving Blowjob **Dylan McDonald**

Police Officer **Peter William Jameison**
Charles Rixon



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