

An interview of the Greek Film Director Nadia Tass

The Australian newspaper «The Sun Herald» has published an interview of the Greek film director Nadia Tass. The well-known director talks about her new movie entitled «Matching Jack». The interview has as a title «Stories based on the true life». Nadia Tass also refers to the financial problems she coped with when she moved to Australia. Her new movie describes the story of a child that is suffering from a blood disease and his mother's search for a bone-marrow donor for her son. Tass is known for her skill in directing children. Examples include the award winning film Amy (1998) and Disney movies The Miracle Worker (2000) and Child Star: The Shirley Temple Story (2001).

Nadia Tass is a unique figure in the Australian film industry. First there's her singular combination of effusive warmth, unapologetic femininity and fierce intelligence. Then there's her ongoing multi-stranded career, encompassing films, television and theatre. She'll direct a film here, a play there, and throw into the mix a CBS telemovie, zipping from London to St Kilda to LA throughout the year. Yet her best-loved local films like Malcolm (1986) and The Big Steal (1989) tie her forever in the public imagination with Melbourne, "the most beautiful city in the world because it's my home, and the place that visually speaks to me," she says fervently.

Now Tass is home again with her new Melbourne-set film Matching Jack, the latest in a long line of collaborations with her writer/producer/cinematographer husband, David Parker. Parker co-wrote the script with Lynne Renew, shot the film and co-produced it as well, in what is a typical Tass Parker family affair.

Nadia Tass: AFI Fast Facts

- Nadia Tass began acting and directing theatre while she was studying at Melbourne University, and continues to intersperse theatre work with film and television projects. Together with David Parker, she has worked extensively in the US for the last ten years.

Tass directed her first feature film, Malcolm, in 1986. The Melbourne-set story of a shy mechanical genius, played by Colin Friels, Malcolm was written, shot and co-produced by David Parker. For Malcolm, Tass won the 1986 AFI Award for Best Director and the AFI Award for Best Film (shared with David Parker). David Parker also won the 1986 AFI Award for Best Original Screenplay for Malcolm, and together Tass and Parker received the 1986 Byron Kennedy Award.

In 1990, Tass was nominated for the AFI Award for Best Film for The Big Steal, a nomination she also shared with David Parker.

Other films directed by Tass include Rikky and Pete (1987), Mr Reliable (1997) and Amy (1998). Amy received a total of 23 international awards, including Best Film at the Paris Film Festival (1999), Grand Prix de Cinecole at Cannes Film Festival (1999) and Grand Prix Cannes Junior (1999).

The story of a mother's search for a bone-marrow donor for her son (and the love she finds along the way), the film reveals Tass's unique sensibility. Her signature strengths are evident: beautiful performances from children, an assured handling of romance, and a light touch applied to heavy material. It's a telling detail that Tass recently introduced her film to a media preview audience with the following reassurance: "Don't worry, the film has a happy ending!" Which is not say, it won't make you cry, because it probably will, especially if you're a parent – and it's parents who'll especially warm to this grown-up drama.

There's a very good reason why Tass is quick to reassure people that Matching Jack isn't just "one of those stories about sick kids and medical records." The fact that the plot included those elements made it very hard to get funding and made the project "a very hard sell to distributors," she says. "They were all saying, 'who'd want to see this?' And I'd have to convince them that this was just a catalyst for everything that takes place beyond that. And then some of them would say, 'okay, you've convinced me, but I'll pass anyway.'"

Tass spent ten long years getting the film up, and the story of her struggle is a drama of epic proportions. Like so many films releasing right now, it's a backstory that involves the global financial crash. "Five years before we shot it, we got the script to Jimmy [James] Nesbitt," says Tass. "He read it and instantly connected and wanted to do it. Then, during the financial crash, we lost our main investor. At that stage we had all the elements in place, and suddenly this investor dropped out, and I knew that pretty soon, if I didn't pull it all together and make it, it was all going to disintegrate, and then we'd have to start from scratch – and God knows if you're ever going to get those elements again. It was a horrific time. We went out into the community and basically found some

lower level investors who were prepared to come in, who believed in the film. They invested what they could, and we scrounged around to find the money. So we went back to Jimmy and said, 'it's not going to be X budget, it's going to be Y budget this time, because of what we lost during the crash.' And thankfully he

same time I didn't want to hate this man, I wanted him to be a flawed human being, who, by the end of it, arrives at some kind of control in his life, and he becomes the father he wants to be."

Tass sings the praises of her entire cast, not just Richard Roxburgh for his skill at making the scoundrel palatable. There are also special mentions for Kodi Smit-McPhee ("he's astounding – Jimmy used to call him 'Brando' on set") and Nesbitt – "I love Jimmy! He met all my needs as an actor, in the dramatic emotional moments as well as the comedic, humorous moments". For Jacinda Barrett, Tass is full of wide-eyed admiration. "Oh that woman is extraordinary, extraordinary! What she had to do in this role was to be a romantic lead, an angry wife and a mother with a sick child. It's a lot to ask of an actor."

Tass is known for her skill in directing children. Examples include the award winning film Amy (1998) and Disney movies The Miracle Worker (2000) and Child Star: The Shirley Temple Story (2001). What is her secret to getting the best out of young actors? "They key is to really know what acting is about," she says. "I've spent many many years studying that and working with that because I've been directing theatre since I was very young. It's about knowing performing, knowing what it takes to arrive at that moment where you're breathing life into a moment through a character."

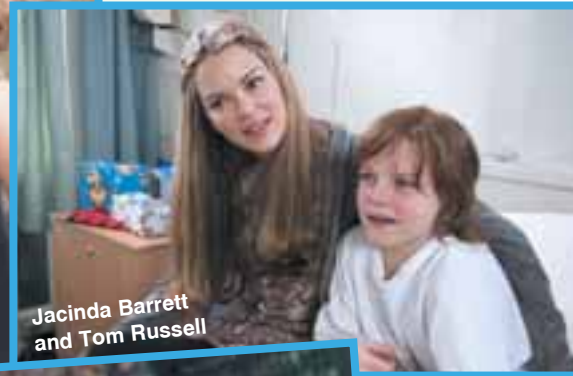
Surprisingly, Tass doesn't expect child actors to know the script. "I have to know the script for them," she explains. "I have to put them in situations where they will behave in that specific way that's going to fit in with what I need for the film. It's about really understanding childhood and understanding acting. I love it!

Love and passion are common words for Tass when she talks about her motivation. What else would keep a director focused on a difficult project for ten years? "It is very very wearing," she admits, "trying to raise the finance for every project. But when the subject matter is so potent, and I feel so strongly about it, that's what keeps me going. There's no choice." Is she a workaholic? "No, no...I just love it. I hate the idea of not being involved creatively. Theatre, movies, it's a part of my life and as soon as I finish one thing, I have to keep going." Matching Jack releases nationally 19 August.

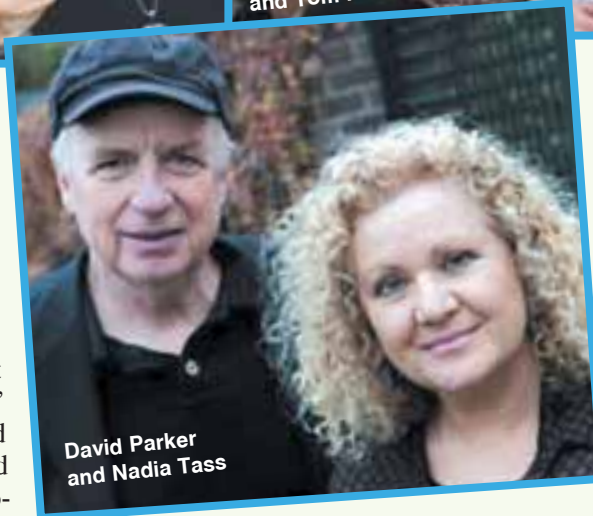
Article from the Australian Film Institute
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Nadia Tass



Jacinda Barrett and Tom Russell



David Parker and Nadia Tass