

The Australian

Film

Red carpet unrolls, but Cannes gives local filmmakers short shrift

- by: Michael Bodey
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Short-film creators Edward Housden, left, and Nick Sherry. Picture: Stuart McEvoy

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TWO short films by Victorian College of the Arts students are Australia's only representatives at this year's Cannes Film Festival.

After Samson and Delilah won last year's Camera d'Or for the best debut feature at the world's highest profile film festival, the lack of an Australian feature length film in competition is disappointing.

But Edward Housden and Luke Sherry's Muscles is in contention for the short film Palme d'Or this year and is one of only nine shorts selected in competition.

"They're pretty good odds when you consider it," says Sherry, with a laugh.

And there is some fine pedigree. Three Australians -- Jane Campion, Laurie McInnes and Glendyn Ivin -- have won short film's top prize and Swinger kicked off Gregor Jordan's directing career after it won the jury prize in competition at Cannes.

Sherry describes Muscles as "fairly kind of arthouse and dramatic at the same time." It is the story of a 10-year-old boy whose 14-year-old sister becomes a "better boy" in the family as she trains to be Miss Olympia. And it features a pet donkey.

Muscles was shot by another VCA student, Ariel Kleiman, whose film *Deeper Than Yesterday*, is selected to screen in Critics Week at Cannes.

"This is Ariel's third-year VCA piece; his second-year piece, *Young Love*, won another award at the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year," says *Deeper Than Yesterday*'s producer, Ben Gilovitz.

Deeper Than Yesterday, at 20 minutes, was too long to be accepted into the official competition stream. It is also unlikely to be viewed as an Australian film by virtue of the fact it is set on a Russian submarine and the dialogue is spoken in Russian.

Kleiman filmed it in the de-commissioned HMAS Otama off Hastings in Victoria.

"We shy away from making it obviously Australian," says Gilovitz. "Ari doesn't set out to tell an Australian story, he sets out to make international films."

The VCA squad is now preparing to walk the red carpet on the Riviera in the footsteps of Russell Crowe and Cate Blanchett, who will attend with their opening night film *Robin Hood* and Naomi Watts, who has two films premiering in Cannes.

Sherry is amused at the contrast of the 20-something students and friends next to the Australian A-list stars.

"We'd look quite out of place if you lined up the other Australian representatives with us guys," he says, smiling.

Well that may be so but everybody has to start somewhere and Cannes selectors are known for having favourite filmmakers; Quentin Tarantino, Rolf de Heer, Pedro Almodovar, Baz Luhrmann, Jane Campion and Alejandro Gonzalez Iarritu among them.

Once a director's film has been chosen he or she can be assured their subsequent films will at the very least be closely considered for inclusion in the festival.

There are no guarantees in filmmaking, even a win at Cannes can amount to derision from critics and no additional box office or international sales but as Warwick Thornton's experience with *Samson and Delilah* showed in 2009, the festival can also make a director's career.

Gonzalez Iarritu's new film *Biutiful* will unspool in competition this year alongside Abbas Kiarostami's *Certified Copy*, Takeshi Kitano's *Outrage*, Doug Liman's *Fair Game* and Mike Leigh's *Another Year*.

The opening night film in *Un Certain Regard* is American director Derek Cianfrance's debut feature *Blue Valentine*.

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