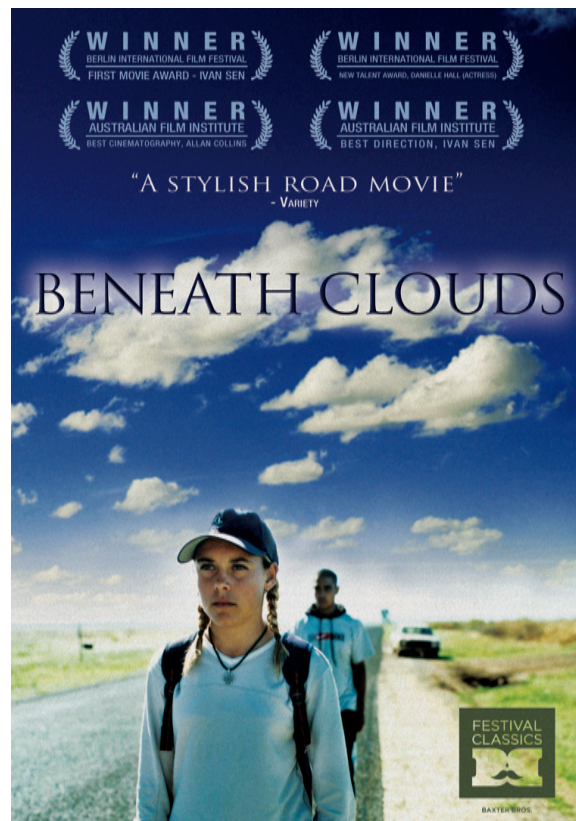




BAXTER BROS.



Beneath Clouds

A film by Ivan Sen

90 mins – Drama/Romance

Release Date: September 7th 2010 on DVD

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Cast

Lena	Danielle Hall
Vaughn	Damian Pitt
TY	Jenna Lee Connors
Jimmy	Simon Swan
Liam	Mundurra Weldon
Kevy	Athol French
Jen	Judy Duncan
Smiley	Kevin Pitt
Old Man	Arthur Dignam

Filmmakers

Production Company:	Autumn Films Pty. Ltd
Producer:	Teresa-Jayne Hanlon
Director:	Ivan Sen
Writer:	Ivan Sen
Director of Photography:	Allan Collins
Editor:	Karen Johnson
Sound Designer:	John Copper- Patterson
Original Score:	Alister Spence and Ivan Sen
Executive Producer:	Douglas Cummings
Costume Designer:	Katerina Pickering
Production Designer:	Peter Baxter
Art Director:	Janie Parker

Short Synopsis:

Lena is a fair-skinned teenage girl with a dark skinned mother in an isolated Australian town. She rejects the Indigenous family that surrounds her, and longs for the love of her Irish father.

Vaughn is a dark-skinned teenage boy who lives in an isolated prison camp. He is angry at the White world that surrounds him and lashes out when provoked. Incarceration has made him old before his time and has separated him from the love of his family.

These two hardened young souls escape from their worlds, and hitchhike together towards Sydney, in a struggle for purpose, identity and love.

Synopsis:

In a tiny desolate town, there is only one road in and out. A fair skinned, blue eyed teenage girl rejects the Indigenous blood of her mother for the blood of her Irish father. She has moulded a tough exterior to survive the abusive world that surrounds her. Finally after being pushed too far, she escapes on a bus to Sydney in search of her father.

A minimum security prison in Western NSW. A teenage Indigenous boy spends all of his time in a plantation pine forest. Years of incarceration have moulded a tough exterior and separated him from any love. The dark colour of his skin is his pride and source of anger towards a society that has forgotten him. Unsure of his feelings in the darkness of early morning, he escapes in a race with his own destiny.

The two find themselves together alone, with no money, and no transport. Over a period of twenty four hours these two hardened souls come together and hitchhike on a lone highway to Sydney where they unwillingly affect their self-identity and inner feelings.

She slowly raises her hardened shell to the person who represents the life she has run away from. And he lowers his defences to a person who seemingly represents the society that rejects him.

They fight each other every step of the way, until they are forced to reveal the emotions they have built for each other. She journeys from her imagined Irish identity to feeling for the first time, she is of two bloods and not one. They touch each other's hearts in a moment of relief as finally the dark shadow of hate is lifted from his shoulders.

And as the final credits fade, we are given a reminder of those rare short moments within our lives that stay with us forever.

Director's Statement:

I have never been certain within myself of what I was setting out to achieve with *Beneath Clouds*. I just knew I wanted to explore the two themes close to my heart, purpose and identity in a framework of dramatic realism. Since commencing the screenplay over four years ago, I have always felt a mixture of emotions surrounding the journey of the two teenage protagonists. I have continually found difficulty in articulating these emotions through words. I suppose it is why I have chosen the medium of film. For it's ability to present the complexity of life in a whole different realm to that of the written word.

The Journey

The directing challenge of *Beneath Clouds* was to not just admirably convey the story on film, but to intensify the emotional journey of the characters to such a level that the audience will have no choice but to join the two young characters and absorb each dramatic moment as it is felt by the characters. Perhaps the largest hurdle in achieving this was the casting of Lena and Vaughn. The script called for two young people with special requirements. It also meant they probably had never acted before in their life.

Casting:

Lena is hardened from her harsh environment with a whirlpool of insecurity deep down inside. She is of two bloods but feels only one.

Physically, Lena required a fair skinned, blue eyed girl. Anglo in appearance but of Indigenous background. This proved a tall order from the very beginning. She also required a country accent with an aggressive attitude, capable of non-verbally showing the audience her every thought. Over a period of several months I searched the rural areas of my youth and finally came across Danielle Hall, deep in cotton country.

When the front door opened, I was immediately hit by her penetrating blue eyes. She felt the perfect size. I ran some lines with her and I was impressed. She was so convincing, it was like she was originating the lines herself. Her voice was full of tone and texture and importantly was capable of being very aggressive. Her physical presence was absorbing as was her non-verbal ability.

What really sold me was Danielle's ability to respond to direction. It was instant and as accurate as I have seen from any professional actor. She was also only seventeen, and she looked it. A life at the cross-roads, between child and adult.

I had always had a vision of Vaughn in my mind. Dark skinned and obviously Indigenous, with a body strong enough to backup his mouth

I saw him to be visually aggressive with a faint ember of sensitivity. A high percentage of Indigenous boys live the real life of Vaughan. Unfortunately this reduced my choices, as almost half the boys I searched for were behind bars themselves. I did come across a handful of boys with strong vocal ability, but none had the aggressive vision in my mind.

I came across Damian Pitt only an hour from where I had found Danielle. I drove into a run-down area of Moree and saw a group of twenty boys hanging out in front of a house. I quickly scanned them from the car. My eyes suddenly stopped on Damian. I go out of the car and walked up to the group. I told them I was looking for someone to act in a movie. They all laughed and asked "how much you get payed?"

Damian thought I was joking to begin with, but he was keen to do a reading. He had the perfect look. It was aggressive but also had another quality. A quality that made it difficult to stop looking at him. It was pushing me and pulling me at the same time. This was the quality I was after. This was what was needed for the audience to believe Vaughn's aggression, but to also empathise with him at the same time.

I ran lines with Damian the next day, and my relief was enormous. His vocal ability was brilliant, his accent was strong, his non-verbal ability was also excellent. As far as I was concerned, the hard work was over. An intense repetitive rehearsal period quickly focused Damian and Danielle's raw natural qualities into the dramatic beats of the story. I saw the characters of Vaughn and Lena come to life in front of me and begin their journey from hardened total strangers, to sharing the most important moment of their life.

Locations:

Beneath Clouds is journey of the physical and the emotion. A constantly changing landscape allowed the emotions of the characters to move into uncharted territory. As they changed, so did the physical environment. From the flat depressing heat of Lena's home, to the green pastures and the mountains, to the cold blue industrial backdrop of the city outskirts. These locations act as a reference to the state of mind of the characters, allowing the audience to feel as though they are on the journey themselves.

Camera:

I don't really believe in the concept of one distinct camera style for a whole story. For me, the drama of each scene is what dictates the use of the camera. I suppose that is the visual style of Beneath Clouds.

I always wanted to be in full control of the audience. To have the choice to allow or not allow the audience inside the heads of the characters. The choice of Light, Lens, T Stop, Film Stock, Shutter Angle, Camera height, angle and movement was constantly varied to keep the audience within the story without making them aware of it. It was important to always sit comfortably within the realms of the drama and control the space of the world that surrounds the characters.

Sound:

The music track of Beneath Clouds was written as I wrote the screenplay. It was a source of inspiration well before the actual film shoot. The music evolved and developed over a very long period. I had always intentions of exploring Irish pipes to represent Lena's romanticised feelings of Ireland and her father. While electric guitar distortion was also a main factor when representing Vaughn's aggressive state of mind. These two instruments combined with a contemporary electronic feel in tandem with a conventional strings section. The strings section enforced a

cinematic quality and provided a strong emotional texture to the story. We approached the music and sound in much the same way as the camera. To enrich emotions without driving the drama. It was important to keep on the subtle side of the line to minimise any chance of losing any realism. The sound design was also important to the journey of the characters. The natural atmospheres had a direct link to the physical and emotional changes which faced the two characters. From the hot uncomfortable winds and insects, to the cooler tranquil bird-life. These sounds help present the diverse canvas the characters move through, and represent the movements within themselves.

Conclusion:

I feel all of these vital and intrinsic craft elements have come together to produce an artwork which respectfully acknowledges the task of survival to the audience the film depicts, and serves as a rare emotional incite for the rest of us.

