

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday November 5, 2019

Australian psychological horror SWEET RIVER **commences shooting in northern NSW**

Production is underway in the Byron Bay and Tweed Heads region on the new psychological horror ***Sweet River***, starring UK actor Lisa Kay (*Heartbeat*, *Indian Summers*), Martin Sacks (*Blue Heelers*, *Underbelly*) and Genevieve Lemon (*Top of the Lake*, *The Dressmaker*). Kay plays Hanna Montague, a woman whose search for her young son's body leads her back to sleepy Billins, a sugar cane town with a dark history. Hanna's investigations uncover more than she expected and threaten to expose the town's secrets... secrets that both the living and the dead will fight to protect.

In her search for answers, Hanna moves in to a cottage on a sugar cane farm. Her neighbours John and Ellenor Drake (Martin Sacks and Genevieve Lemon), live in the neighbouring farmhouse and own all of the surrounding sugar cane fields. ***Sweet River*** is a film about two women from completely different worlds, who are learning to deal with the grief caused by the loss of their children. Hanna's son Joey was abducted by a serial killer and is presumed dead, and Ellenor's daughter lost her life in a tragic bus crash along with several other local children. As Hanna spends more time in the town investigating her son's disappearance, and with some unexplained encounters with the supernatural after dark, it becomes clear that no one wants her here. The town is intent on protecting its secrets and a wound that will not heal.

Sweet River is written by Marc Furmie and Eddie Baroo, and is based on an original story by Justin McMillan, who is directing. The film is produced by Ashley McLeod, and the shoot will take place over four weeks in November in the Byron Bay and Tweed Heads region. The cast is rounded out by Rob Carlton (*Paper Giants*, *Chandon Pictures*) and Eddie Baroo (*Ghostrider*, *Australia*).

Director Justin McMillan comments "For a long time I've been fascinated with the power of fear as a storytelling tool. After seeing *A Quiet Place*, I completely reconsidered the way I looked at the horror genre, and was inspired to write a psychological horror story with an emotional message."

Producer Ashley McLeod adds "when Justin presented me with the story of ***Sweet River***, I was struck with the raw emotion of the story. The fear every parent holds of losing one of their children, really resonated with me. We have assembled an experienced film crew with top notch credentials, and I'm excited about what Justin, our DOP Tim Tregoning and editor Simon Njoo will bring to the project."

International sales for *Sweet River* will be looked after by REASON8. Anna Krupnova, co-Managing Director of REASON8 comments "Having almost two decades of experience with genre projects, we are very excited to board worldwide sales on *Sweet River*. The script that delivers not only scares but also a powerful message and the creative vision of the team makes us believe the film will resonate well with the international audience."

The Byron Bay and Tweed Heads region is home to not only director Justin McMillan and producer Ashley McLeod, but several members of the cast and crew. The sugar cane farms, with their unique and eerie aesthetic as if they are hiding secrets, brought much inspiration to Justin for the story, and the region was the natural choice for the shoot.

Sweet River will be released in cinemas in 2020 through FilmInk Presents. Post-production will be completed in Dolby Vision by Brisbane-based post facility Serve Chilled.

Ends.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

SWEET RIVER - ONE LINE SYNOPSIS:

A mother's search for closure and a town hell-bent on hiding its dark secret.

CAST BIOS:

Lisa Kay – plays 'Hanna Montague'

Originally from the UK, Lisa Kay has appeared in various film, television and theatre productions. She has worked with world-class directors including Anthony Minghella (*Breaking and Entering*), Tim Burton (*Corpse Bride*), Sharon Maguire (*Bridget Jones' Diary*), and Jamie Payne and Jonathan Teplitzky (*Indian Summers*). Lisa is best known for her role as nurse Carol Cassidy in the UK hit TV series *Heartbeat*, but more recently for her role as Stella Barham in *Indian Summers* and Carol McAteer in *Silent Witness*. Lisa relocated to Australia in 2016 and has worked on *Neighbours*, *Home & Away*, *Time and Place* and *The Second*, as well as narrating numerous documentaries.

Martin Sacks – plays 'John Drake'

Martin Sacks has worked in film, television and theatre for over 35 years. He studied acting at the prestigious Stella Adler Acting School in New York, and has appeared in film and television roles including feature films *Emoh Ruo*, *Slate*, *Wyn and Me*, and *Love in Limbo* with Russell Crowe. In Australia, he has numerous television credits, but it was the police drama *Blue Heelers* that established Martin as one of Australia's most talented actors, earning him five consecutive silver Logies for Best Actor. Following his departure from the show, Martin moved behind the camera to direct his first film *Crushed*, as well as directing several episodes of *Blue Heelers* and *All Saints*. He returned to acting when offered the role of loan shark Mario Condello in the original and highly acclaimed crime drama, *Underbelly*. He has most recently appeared in the Foxtel series *Wentworth*.

Genevieve Lemon – plays 'Ellenor Drake'

Genevieve Lemon is an Australian singer and actor who has appeared in numerous theatre productions including the London and Sydney seasons of Working Title's production of *Billy Elliot*, for which she won Helpmann, Sydney Theatre Critics, and Green Room Awards. Genevieve's television credits include *Frayed*, *Heartland*, *Neighbours*, *Prisoner*, *Rake*, *Redfern Now*, *The Secret River*, *Three Men and a Baby Grand*, *Top of the Lake* (Equity Ensemble Award), and a special guest starring role on *Home and Away*. Film credits include: *Acute Misfortune*, *The Dressmaker*, *Billy's Holiday*, *Holy Smoke*, *The Piano*, *Soft Fruit*, *Suburban Mayhem*, *The Water Diary*, *Acute Misfortune*, *Ladies in Black*, and *Sweetie* (Australian Film Critics Award). Genevieve has sung on cabaret stages the world over, and released a live album of her Sydney Opera House concert, *Angels in the City*. She also performed in many incarnations of The Wharf Revue, and shows at the Tilbury Hotel.

CREW

Justin McMillan – Director

Justin McMillan always had an appreciation of cameras growing up. He loved telling stories and could sing every commercial jingle on TV. By age 13, he could recite the entire screenplay for my three favourite films of the time – *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *The Lost Boys* and *Stand By Me*. Justin was first exposed to the film industry when he started work as an art director in Sydney's advertising scene, and he instantly fell in the love with the craft of filmmaking. When he's not making commercial films, he makes short films and develops feature film and TV series concepts. Justin loves aerial cinematography and how it gives the audience a sense of geography within the story. He is the co-owner of drone company www.heliguy.tv, which keeps him on top of advances in filmmaking tools available to the storyteller.

Ashley McLeod – Producer

After an early career racing yachts professionally, Ashley made the transition from sailing to film, via the role of sound recordist for Australia's top rating television program *Burke's Backyard*. Working his way through industry roles, Ashley established his own locations company in 2001 – sourcing, securing and managing locations for the Australian and international film and television industry. In 2010, Ashley was head hunted by one of the world's best television commercial directors to produce for him both in Australia and internationally. Having successfully produced over 70 television commercials for clients including Coca Cola, Kelloggs, NAB, Audi and Netflix, Ashley established ACM Films in 2016 with a focus on feature film projects.