



## Rebecca Daly and Rachel Griffiths on 'Mammal' (and that bathtub sex scene)



### Writer/director Rebecca Daly and actress Rachel Griffiths talk to Helen Barlow about their upcoming film 'Mammal', screening at the 2016 MIFF.

By Helen Barlow - 5 AUG 2016 - 6:55 PM

When Irish director Rebecca Daly cast Rachel Griffiths as an Aussie in her second Irish film, *Mammal* (after *The Other Side of Sleep*) she wanted the 47 year-old to be a fish out of water in her Dublin environs. Daly also wanted the actress to rein in her naturally gregarious personality for the role of Margaret, a mum whose estranged 18 year-old son has died. In fact she never really knew him but is consumed with grief. When she finds a young larrikin, Joe (Barry Keoghan) lying beaten up on the ground, she takes him in and offers him her spare room. A few sparks begin to fly so that the relationship veers away from being purely platonic.



***HB: Where did the story come from?***

Rebecca Daly: My co-writer Glenn Montgomery originated the idea. He wanted to write a story about this woman we discover a little way into the film who has not raised her child and is not a conventional kind of mother. We developed the story out of that. We are always interested in a bit of mystery, so there's this time in the film where you're getting to know her and you don't really know what this other layer is and what comes next.

I was interested in the tension between Rachel as a warm outgoing woman versus the character who's introverted and not so verbal, and taking these big unexpected decisions.

***HB: How did you facilitate the chemistry between Rachel and Barry?***

RD: We spent a lot of time together over a couple of weeks. A lot of humour was used as both of them are outgoing, so it was a natural way to connect. There's a mother-son dynamic going on and when they're having sex in the bathtub it's a womb-like space. There's something a bit foetal about the position of their legs and it's soothing rather than being really sexy.

***HB: How did the sex come about?***

RD: Joe is probably driving the sexual agenda more, but Margaret is also a participant. She takes a step back from it after a while and there's an interesting tension between them.

***HB: Did Rachel appreciate having a woman director?***

RD: Interestingly we didn't talk about that, though we enjoyed the experience. I think she was excited by how different it is from the kinds of things she'd been doing.

***HB: Are you a mother?***

RD: No, but I talked to a lot of mothers in my research. Rachel of course is a mum, so she has all that to bring to the character.



## **Rachel Griffiths**

***HB: What was it like to be in Ireland with your husband and kids, and then to play a mother unlike yourself in a movie?***

Rachel Griffiths: I think as mothers we go to work, we play a different role and we come home. I think it's our strength as multi-taskers. We might manage 100 people at a law firm and hopefully we don't manage our family in the same way. We're all challenged by those shifts on a daily basis.

It was lovely to share weekends with my family and we did some great drives and showed the children the castle of my husband's ancestors.

**HB: Your husband, artist Andrew Taylor, has an Irish background?**

RG: Don't we all, if you dig back far enough! You know, we're talking Norman!

**HB: What was it like to work with a woman director? You haven't done that much.**

RG: One has less opportunities, I guess, statistically. I had a lot of female directors on *Six Feet Under* and many of my favorite directors on *Brothers & Sisters* were women. I've probably worked with more men than women, though everyone is different. Some are real cutters, some are real communicators and some are kind of squirrels.

I think Rebecca is the real deal in that she is actually an auteur. I'm not overly worshipping at the notion of the auteur and a lot of people think they're auteurs when they're not. They're good craftspeople. But Rebecca's vision of the world and her understanding of certain states is so specific and delicate and rare that the movies she makes are utterly unique and cohesive to this very specific lens. And to me that's the definition of an auteur. When you watch her movies, you feel like you're seeing the world through her eyes and it was incredibly exciting to surrender to that and it's not something I've done. I mean (*Muriel's Wedding* director) PJ's a real auteur but I haven't worked with a lot.

**HB: How do you look back on *Muriel's Wedding*?**

RG: (Cackles) I saw it recently and it's so beautiful. I'm so full of gratitude for the opportunity and I'm so proud of PJ and Toni and I'm even proud of my younger self and to see how our careers have grown. I just feel so lucky that I was hired for that job. I met the guy who was handling all the press for *Muriel's Wedding* in America last night. I hadn't seen him since then and we were talking about loading the cannon when I was shooting out into the atmosphere! It was so nice to see him again.

**HB: How was it filming your latest Australian film, *Hacksaw Ridge* directed by Mel Gibson? (The film will world premiere at the 2016 Venice Film Festival.)**

RG: It was extraordinary. I loved it. It was a serious role but a joyful process. It was wonderful working with an actor who really understands actors. I've never seen Hugo Weaving, who I rate so highly as an actor, be so good (as her husband in the film). Andrew Garfield was doing the best work he's ever done too.

Mel has this wonderful way of bypassing the intellectual stuff, which sometimes as an actor I just think gets in the way. Somehow he makes you understand what he wants the movie to be in that moment. It's almost as if he's able to describe it for you sitting in the audience – the feeling that's on the screen – without ever really directing you. It's quite mysterious. The crew loved him, his cast adored him and I'm very, very excited for that movie. I think it's an amazing story and it's going to be great for Australian filmmaking in general.

*'Mammal'* is screening at 2016 Melbourne International Film Festival on August 10 and 12.