TV Star Turned Producer Alex Davies Tackles the Deeply Personal Subject of Mental Health

by Michael Idato   **October 30, 2016**

When actress-turned-film producer Alexandra Davies took on a short film hoping to break open the often-taboo subject of mental illness, the decision to do so was deeply personal.

The 39-year-old former All Saints star, who is now a Los Angeles-based production executive, was diagnosed with panic disorder in 2003. "After going through the system for diagnosis and help, it was obvious to me there was a lot to be done to overcome society's stigma of those individuals who suffer often in silence," Davies says.

"Films are an extremely powerful resource to bring about awareness and create a conversation for change." But that film has taken the discussion over mental health to a larger stage, having been selected as just one of a dozen

films screened in October at this year's New York Mental Health Film Festival.

Past Imperfect is the story of an estranged brother and sister "whose worlds collide one morning at their ill mother's bedside"; at just 12 minutes long it was shot over three days in Canberra.

The script was written by a cousin of Davies' cinematographer husband Justin "Jay" Hanrahan, Georgina Jenkins, who based it on her own family's experience; Jenkins' brother lives with bipolar disorder.

"When Georgina and I met, she already knew of the work I was doing to raise awareness using my television profile," Davies says."Georgina immediately spoke to me about the film and the lead role, knowing I would have a lot of scope to really treat the material with great care."

Jenkins' husband, cinematographer Robb Shaw-Velzen, directed the film, with Hanrahan operating the camera. "It really was family and close friends in the industry who pulled together all of our resources to make this happen," Davies says.

For her co-star, Davies turned to a close mate and former All Saints co-star, actor (now photographer) Conrad Coleby.

"Conrad and I are old buddies from our All Saints days, where we played ambulance officers for a year," Davies says."Justin suggested I speak to him about playing the role [and] it made complete sense. We already had a

working history together and could easily pass as brother and sister."

Since its establishment in 2005, the New York Mental Health Film Festival has screened more than 50 films. It hopes to serve as a "positive voice, promoting social justice and human rights for people with mental health concerns" It is the oldest, and largest, mental health-focused film festival in the US, though you would be hard pressed to find another, given the social stigma associated with mental health.

Before the film's selection, Davies, who is based in LA, concedes she had no idea the film festival existed. "The first I heard was when Georgina emailed to let me know the film had been selected to screen," she says.

The festival also invited Davies to attend and speak after the screening. "It was incredibly worthwhile and eye-opening," she says of the experience. "It was a huge honour to have the film seen by so many people."

Davies, who is director of production at the LA-based Trimax Media, is also hoping to replicate the festival elsewhere, either in Los Angeles or Australia.

"I'd love to think that every major city in the world could host this kind of festival and give people the opportunity to see some films that perhaps reflect their lives and give comfort that they are not alone in the fight to get well," she says.