



The Silence

Cate Shortland

AUSTRALIA, 2006
English

104 minutes ■ Colour/Digital Betacam
Production Company:

Jan Chapman Films

Executive Producer: **Scott Meek,**
Miranda Dear

Producer: **Jan Chapman**

Screenplay: **Alice Addison, Mary Walsh**

Cinematographer: **Robert Humphreys**

Editor: **Scott Gray**

Production Designer: **Melinda Doring**

Sound: **Liam Egan**

Music: **Antony Partos**

Principal Cast: **Richard Roxburgh,**

Essie Davis, Emily Barclay,

Alice McConnell

Production: **Jan Chapman Films,**
250a Glenmore Road, Paddington,
Sydney NSW 2021 Australia.
T (61-2) 9331-2666 F (61-2) 9331-2011
chapman@optusnet.com.au

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Foreign Sales Agent: **ABC Enterprises**

(see page 430)

Cate Shortland's extraordinary debut feature, *Somersault*, announced a profound new talent on the Australian scene. Her languid, sensual imagery and queering, dissatisfied young protagonists seemed to embody the frustrated hopes of her generation.

The Silence is not exactly her newest film; it is a two-part television drama commissioned by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. It was greeted with enormous critical approval upon its broadcast earlier this year – and it's easy to see why. It shares the same visceral, slightly dangerous flavour and dreamy mise-en-scène of *Somersault*, but transposed into a kick-ass *policier*. This work may have premiered on television, but its visual power and total command of storytelling make it cinema through and through.

Detective Richard Treloar (the superlative Richard Roxburgh) is transferred to a desk job at the Police Museum after his involvement in a fatal, largely unexplained shooting. While preparing for an exhibition, he becomes obsessed with a haunting black-and-white image of a woman, gunned down in a silk dress, lying on a pier, her belly a blotchy mess from the bullet she took. He starts searching for her face in other images and begins to see anomalies.

Richard launches into an investigation that leads him to an ornery former cop who is now a boxing coach. He holds the key to the mystery; Richard returns to speak with him once more only to find him dead – as though murdered by the now-uncovered past. Richard finds that he himself is increas-

ingly implicated not only in the murder, but also in the photograph itself, as the film leads to an unexpected and unsettling conclusion.

Performances are wonderful around, with Roxburgh terrific as the tortured cop and hot new talent Emily Barclay as Evelyn, his reluctant sidekick. The film also has a most interesting point of view: this is one of the few male-centred *policiers* I can recall that was written (by Alice Addison and Mary Walsh) and directed by women. The perspective is fascinating and the central character much more rounded – especially in his relationship to the women in his life – than the genre usually yields.

■ Noah Cowan

Cate Shortland was born in Temora, Australia. She earned her BFA from Sydney University and a graduate diploma in film directing from the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, where she won the Southern Star Award for most promising student. In addition to directing several episodes of the television series "The Secret Life of Us," she has written and directed four acclaimed short films: *Strap on Olympia* (95), *Pentuphouse* (98), *Flowergirl* (99) and *Joy* (00). Her feature films are *Somersault* which played at the Festival in 2004, and *The Silence* (06).

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