



sweet TOOTH

NARRATED BY CATE BLANCHETT

ACTORS IN ASSOCIATION WITH SKYMAP STUDIOS PRESENTS "SWEET TOOTH" NARRATED BY CATE BLANCHETT WITH JULIA SWANCK, GEORGE HUNAGAN, CANTWELL, LIZ VIOLETT
CINEMATOGRAPHY EMMA PALME PRODUCTION DESIGNER EMMA BOURKE COSTUME DESIGNER SARINA MYERS EDITOR ROCHELLE BISHACK MUSIC ALISTER HADGE
CASTING AMANDA MITCHELL CSA PRODUCED BY KATHLEEN SHEARER WRITTEN BY SHANNON ASHLYN DIRECTED BY SHANNON ASHLYN

SWEETTOOTHMOVIEAGIC.COM

FILM DETAILS

TITLE

Sweet Tooth

TAG LINE

A fairy tale film inspired by *Hansel & Gretel* - but with a wicked twist!

LOG LINE

Set in a fictional European town in 1780, this is a dark and magical fairy tale film inspired by the classic story of *Hansel & Gretel* by the Brothers Grimm, but it offers a different perspective on the tale you may think you know. *Sweet Tooth* is the untold story of the wicked witch and her infamous gingerbread house.

DISTRIBUTION & PRESS

Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS)
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TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Country of origin - Australia, 2019
Running time - 23 min 22 sec
Exhibition format - DCP
Aspect ratio - 2:39:1
Sound - 5.1
Shooting format - 2K
Language - English
Audio descriptive track - English
Closed captions - English
Subtitled versions available - English, German



PRESS RELEASE

CATE BLANCHETT SUPPORTS EMERGING FEMALE FILMMAKERS

Albert Einstein once said, 'If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairytales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairytales!' And who better to tell you a tale of dark forests and magic beyond your wildest dreams than the inimitable Cate Blanchett?

Sweet Tooth is a daring short film by actress-turned-writer/director Shannon Ashlyn as part of her Masters in directing at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) and actress-turned-producer Katherine Shearer. Inspired by *Hansel & Gretel* by the Brothers Grimm, *Sweet Tooth* is the untold story of the wicked witch and her infamous gingerbread house. It is a new kind of fairy tale in the tradition of Disney's *Maleficent* but with a female protagonist we've never heard from before! *Sweet Tooth* is a story about family, an adventure into the unknown, but at heart it's a story about being brave and taking your fate into your own hands - no matter what.

Blanchett has unquestionably given wings to these filmmakers as they step out onto the international stage with their first film. By endorsing this story, the Australian icon has not only elevated the film in a way they hardly dared imagine until it actually happened, but she has also made a clear statement about supporting emerging female talent going forth and claiming executive roles in filmmaking, the roles which are traditionally (and therefore disproportionately) filled by men.

The week the filmmakers approached Blanchett, Dr. Blasey Ford was standing trial in the Kavanaugh hearings in the US. It never felt more timely to be courageous and to go out on a limb for the sake of women everywhere. Witch hunts are far from being a thing of the past.

To Ashlyn and Shearer, the fact that Blanchett agreed to lend her voice and profile to *Sweet Tooth* is proof that when women unite, anything is possible, and that magic doesn't just happen in fairy tales.



TEASER TRAILER



SYNOPSIS

Once upon a time, there were a brother and a sister called Hansel and Gretel. The children stumbled through the dark woods, lost and afraid, until they came upon a marvelous house of sugar and spice and everything nice. That is the fairy tale we know. But there are always two sides to every story.

Many moons earlier, a little girl is born to a penniless baker's maid - a baby blinded by the Red Devil's disease. Together with her little brother, she must navigate a cold world and stand up to the hardened townsfolk who dislike them. But, as time passes, the children have fewer and fewer places left to hide and must seek refuge in the forest. Out there, it will be up to them to find a home where no one will ever find them. Until, one day, there would come a brother and a sister: Hansel and Gretel.



ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

SHANNON ASHLYN - WRITER & DIRECTOR



Born and raised in Switzerland, Shannon toured Europe as a young actor before moving to Australia to study drama. A graduate of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), she worked extensively across stage and screen before shifting her focus to behind the camera.

Fueled by a passion for inclusive and daring cinema, gender equality and political courage in screen stories, Shannon enrolled at AFTRS and completed her Masters in Directing under Rowan Woods in 2018. *Sweet Tooth*, a feminist retelling of a classic Grimm's fairy tale, is her graduating film.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

'I grew up at the edge of a pine forest in Switzerland and from my bedroom window I would watch the sun set on the scene of so many of the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales: glistening, snowy treetops melting into darkness. For hours on end, I would get lost in my imagination, ignited by these stories.



Now, all these years later, I am just as intrigued by the magical worlds as I was then. The power of fairy tales, to me, is timeless.

For as long as I can remember, however, feminism has also been a defining part of who I am. So it makes me wonder why I have been spellbound by tales that, by and large, are about brave young lads or noble princes on horseback, but meek, servile women who function merely as the objects of their desire. Given that nowadays fairy tale films gross enormous amounts at the box office and are most popular with female audiences, I mustn't be alone with this conundrum...!

Even just a couple of hundred years ago, elders, both men and women, sat around the fire, telling tales about luck and misfortune, adventures and home-comings, about marriage and betrayal, birth and death. Fairy tales were living things. In 1812, however, this changed when the Brothers Grimm came along with ink and parchment. Up until then, every storyteller was free to sprinkle their tale with a bit of their own magic, making it more relevant both to the teller themselves and their listeners. But once these stories were written down, it was only the Brothers Grimm who did any further editing - and that under close supervision of the Church. Roughly a century later, Disney repeated this process of standardising the Grimm's tales, making them more palatable to 20th century folks and printing them on celluloid for an audience of millions. Thus, our fairy tales froze in time - and the social values of the eras in which they were captured were immortalised right along with them.

Today, for the sake of girls and women who are most often minimised, simplified and commodified in these old, patriarchal stories, I think it is high time that our fairy tales are free to breathe and evolve once more. I, for one, plan to do my small part with my privilege as a filmmaker because, whilst I believe that by seeing stories that differ from our own, such as fairy tales from the past, we grow, I *also* believe that by seeing stories in which we recognise ourselves and the ways in which we think and feel in the present, we heal.

I spent my childhood years gazing at the snowy forest outside my window, loving fairy tales for what they were. I hope to spend my adult life cherishing them for what they can once more *become*.'

- Shannon Ashlyn



THE CAST

JULIA SAVAGE - SWEET TOOTH



Julia started acting at the age of seven with roles in TV commercials and the TV mini-series *Mary, Making of a Princess* (2015). She has followed on with TV roles in *Doctor Doctor* (2016), the comedy series *The Other Guy* (2017) and the crime thriller mini-series *Dead Lucky* (2018). She also appeared as herself in the documentary *The Funny Ones* (2017) which is about four young girls with a passion for comedy. Julia played the lead role of Milly in the acclaimed short film *Sherbert Rozencranz, You're Beautiful* (2017).

Julia loved playing Sweet Tooth because this character tells girls that you don't have to have pretty dresses to be the lead character, that you can be valiant at any age and that bravery comes in all sizes.

GEORGE HOLAHAN-CANTWELL - HOPP



George began his singing and dancing training at Brent Street and is now a student at McDonald College in Sydney. A passionate music theatre performer, George has just completed the Sydney season of *Priscilla - Queen of the Desert* playing the role of Benji. In George's most notable TV commercial, however, the *Tip Top Awesomeness Campaign*, he plays himself! George's short film roles include *Love at 5th Site*, *Joy Boy* and *Sherbert Rozencrantz, You're Beautiful*.

George's favourite thing about playing Hopp was working with Baba - the tiny chick - of which there were actually seven on rotation! He found them all to be equally cuddly but also somewhat misbehaved from time to time!

ABBY EARL - THE MOTHER



Upon graduating from the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), Abby landed a role on the Australian TV show *Underbelly: Badness* before winning the part of Anna Bligh in the Foxtel favourite *A Place To Call Home* in 2012. In recognition of her work on the show, Abby received TV Week Logie award nominations for Most Popular New Talent (2014) and Most Popular Actress (2015, 2019) and in 2014, an Equity Award nomination for Outstanding Performance in a Drama Series.

Abby and Shannon went to drama school together and fortunately for Shannon, Abby is equally passionate about feminist cinema, so, with a bit of luck, this is just the first of many collaborations.

LOUISA MIGNONE - THE LADY



A graduate of the Flinders Drama Centre, Louisa has worked extensively on stage and she is especially proud of her own theatre company *isthisyours?*. Louisa's film and TV highlights include *Secret City 2*, *Rake* (2,3,4), *Miss Fishers Murder Mystery*, *Fat Tony & Co*, *My Place*, *East West 101*, *Danger 5*, *Infini*, *Trust Fund*, *Two Fists One Heart*, *Spike Up*, the upcoming Channel 7 telemovie *Australian Gangster*, and *Latte e Miele*, which she wrote, directed and starred in and which was in official selection for Sydney Flickerfest 2014, also appearing on ABC iView's Best of Flickerfest series.

As creatives, Louisa and Shannon are both committed to normalizing on-screen representations. It is not enough to push for gender balance if the casting choices on our screens continue to be as narrow as they have been in the past.

LIZ WHEELER - THE WICKED WITCH



If you'd told Liz ten years ago that she would leave a successful corporate career to return to university, become a public speaker, an actor and spend most of her time with a dog by her side, she wouldn't have believed you. If you'd told her that she'd do it all with her eyes closed and a smile on her face, she'd have been sure that you were lying. But it's all true. It took the loss of more than 95% of her sight and the addition of her guide dog, Poppi, for Liz to gain the vision she needed to lead a purposeful life.

Liz wanted to try acting to challenge her fears. When she heard about *Sweet Tooth*, she decided to audition. Luckily, it turned out to be one of the best decisions she ever made as she found it to be a completely transformative experience. Poppi was at her side every step of the way.



AUTHENTIC CASTING

It was of paramount importance to the *Sweet Tooth* team that no seeing actor would play the role of a vision-impaired character, as feminism without intersectionality negates itself. Liz was a seeing child but became legally blind due to a degenerative disease. Her story mirrors Sweet Tooth's with auspicious accuracy and this profoundly moved everyone involved in the casting process. Liz and Julia were the match that many believed would be impossible to find - right down to their green eyes.

THE CREW

KATHERINE SHEARER - PRODUCER



Katherine Shearer is from South Australia and a graduate of Flinders University. With a background in music, she performed at international theatre festivals with *SMK1* and, as an actor, she has worked across stage and screen in Sydney, where she put on the award-winning play and NSW premiere of *Bitch Boxer*, Adelaide and Los Angeles. Most recently, she was the company manager for *Pop Up Globe* in Sydney and is currently working on a number of film projects.

Katherine and Shannon knew each other as actors and reconnected as *Sweet Tooth* entered preproduction. The rest, as they say, is history...! Since then, they've formed *Skymap Studios*, a creative collective focused on inclusive genre content.

EMMA PAINE - DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY



In 2015, Emma Paine won a NSW and ACT ACS Gold Award for her work on *We Will* and a Silver Award for *Infused Honey* in the Web Content and New Media category. Recently she won her first Gold Tripod at the ACS National Awards for *We Will* and her first feature film, *Zelos*, was in competition for the 2017 AACTA Awards.

Emma was a part of the *Sweet Tooth* team from its earliest stages. With a shared love of the classic family film but an equal burning passion for contemporary female representations on screen, Emma and Shannon worked on the visual concepts for *Sweet Tooth* long before the script was finalised.

ON FEMINIST FILMMAKING

Sweet Tooth passes the Bechtel Test which requires two named female characters to have a conversation that is not about a man, as well as the Uphold Test which demands that at least fifty percent of on-set crew are women. For *Sweet Tooth*, the statistics were calculated on the first day of shooting and the female crew constituted 68%, with all executive roles filled by women.



Already in her 2014 Oscar acceptance speech, Cate Blanchett asserted that movies about women make money: ‘Those of us in the industry who are still foolishly clinging to the idea that female films with women at the center are niche experiences: they are not. Audiences want to see them! And in fact, they earn money’. A global shift towards female-driven screen content is not only culturally essential, but economically wise as well. We, the women, are buying the most cinema tickets and subscriptions to streaming platforms and want content that speaks to us.



BEHIND THE SCENES



Sweet Tooth was produced with a budget contribution from AFTRS, as well as from a crowdfunding campaign. However, even with the phenomenal help from family, friends and generous strangers, it was only possible to make the film thanks to the generosity of our volunteer cast and crew who believed in this story wholeheartedly.

Sweet Tooth was filmed over nine days in New South Wales, Australia: four on location in the Blue Mountains, two in the studios at AFTRS in Sydney and three days in the magnificent Sugar Pine Forest. The crew was made up of both students and professionals and, whereas some of the actors were seasoned pros, others were stepping in front of the camera for the very first time.

To find out more about all aspects of production, click on the *Behind the Scenes Featurette* below. (Please be advised that it contains numerous spoilers! It is best watched after viewing the film.)





WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE FAIRYTALE OF HANSEL & GRETEL TO BASE YOUR FILM ON?

Shannon Ashlyn: Actually, it all began with a curiosity of what a life-sized, somewhat creepy but totally amazing version of the famous gingerbread house that I had imagined so vividly in my childhood could look like! I knew I wanted to retell a fairy tale from the perspective of the female villain, but in many ways, I feel this particular story picked me. It lured me with rich images of dark pine woods, ruby red candy apples, gingerbread doorways and a glistening roof of frosty icing... Who could resist?

HOW DID YOU CREATE A WINTERY, EUROPEAN FEEL WHILST SHOOTING IN AUSTRALIAN SUMMERTIME?

Shannon Ashlyn: Ha! Yes, who's idea was that?! Well, once I knew the story would be set in 1780 (roughly 30 years before the Brothers Grimm published *Hansel & Gretel*), I went to my incredible production designer, Emma Bourke. I thought 'She's either going to love it or think I'm officially crazy, so I might as well find out right away!' Needless to say, she thought I was stark raving mad! But she came around... eventually! I mean, who doesn't want to play with 20 kilos of bio-degradable snow?

Katherine Shearer: As for the European feel, yes, that was tricky. We were lucky to find a heritage location that allowed us to create all the town spaces in one place, but we relied on the weather for the cloud cover we desperately needed to make the team's hard work look authentic. That was scary, being the producer with no Plan B! We were setting up in scorching heat but, no word of a lie, as the cameras began to roll, rain clouds rolled in - and stayed in place perfectly for all the exterior shooting.

HOW DID YOU CONVINCE CATE BLANCHETT TO JOIN THE SWEET TOOTH TEAM?

Shannon Ashlyn: The answer is very simple: we just asked her - from the heart and with zero expectations. Mad as it sounds, we never imagined anyone else narrating, so when it finally came to it, I plucked up the courage to record a piece to camera explaining why I had written the film and why I believed its message might be something Cate may also deem important. Admittedly, it felt surreal...!

Katherine Shearer: That was the first, crucial step. But after that, it still took a lot of faith and support from the people around us to get our message to Cate. For instance, our casting agent and mentors at AFTRS really put themselves out there for us, even as first-time filmmakers. That was incredibly humbling, and we are so thankful. The fact that Cate actually agreed was - and is - a dream come true.



MAIN CREDITS

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY
SHANNON ASHLYN

PRODUCED BY
KATHERINE SHEARER

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY
EMMA PAINE

PRODUCTION DESIGN BY
EMMA BOURKE

COSTUME DESIGN BY
SABINA MYERS

EDITED BY
ROCHELLE OSHLACK

MUSIC BY
ALLISTER HAIRE

CASTING BY
AMANDA MITCHELL CGA

SWEET TOOTH
JULIA SAVAGE

HOPP
GEORGE HOLAHAN-CANTWELL

THE WICKED WITCH
LIZ WHEELER

THE NARRATOR
CATE BLANCHETT

THE MOTHER
ABBY EARL

THE LADY
LOUISA MIGNONE

THE RAKER
GREG HATTON

THE GUARD
KIM KNUCKEY

For full cast and crew credits please visit our [IMDB](#) listing.

FOLLOW THE TRAIL...



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