

Wednesday, 24 March 2021

## TWO STRONG FEMALE DOCUMENTARIES SOAR INTO HOTDOCS

Two stand-out NSW-made feature documentaries, *I'm Wanita* and *Playing With Sharks*, have been selected for the prestigious Hot Docs International Documentary Festival, Canada.

Hotly anticipated documentary *I'm Wanita* by director Matthew Walker will have its world premiere at the Festival as part of Artscapes, a program that features work exploring creativity in the performing and visual arts, and Director Sally Aitken's feature documentary *Playing With Sharks* will screen part of the Festival's special presentations program.

Grainne Brunsdon, Head of Screen NSW said the two films had found a perfect launching pad to showcase NSW-talent to international audiences at the prestigious festival.

"NSW documentary filmmakers have been making their presence felt and celebrated on the local and global stage, and these beautifully crafted films will provide unique outlooks to examine two outstanding Australian women and their impact on the world.

"*Playing With Sharks* gives us a window into the incredible life of legendary NSW wildlife filmmaker and conservationist Valerie Taylor, while *I'm Wanita* tells a compelling, confronting and emotionally-charged tale of country music singer, Wanita who takes one last stab at a lifelong dream to make it big in Nashville, Tennessee," said Ms Brunsdon.

Screen Australia's Head of Content Sally Caplan said, "We're very proud to have these distinctly Australian documentaries showcased at Hot Docs this year, demonstrating the quality of our local filmmaking. Both films celebrate two captivating personalities and iconic women. *Playing With Sharks* takes a deep dive into the life of Valerie Taylor, an icon in marine life conservation, and it's exciting to see *I'm Wanita* about a renegade country music singer, taking a regional Australian story to a world stage."

*I'm Wanita* producer Carolina Sorensen said "Hot Docs is a formidable festival! Wanita and her unique story have been overlooked up to this point, but we are thrilled that Hot Docs, with its ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion, is giving this film and woman the platform they deserve."

*I'm Wanita* is the first feature length film by director Matthew Walker and was produced by Carolina Sorensen and Clare Lewis of People Productions in Association with Tait Brady at Acme Film Company. Filmed in Wanita's hometown of Tamworth and the USA, the film received principal production investment from Screen Australia with support from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and financed with the assistance of Screen NSW under the Regional Filming Fund. The film will be released in Australia in 2021 by Label Distribution.

Bettina Dalton, producer of *Playing With Sharks* said "It was gratifying seeing Valerie's story resonate so powerfully with an international audience and for her to receive the

recognition for her massive conservation efforts over the decades. From the coastal shores of NSW in the 1950s and through the decades of filming throughout the world, Ron and Valerie's archive footage revealed not just an important record of our marine life, but Valerie's unrelenting determination to show sharks through a different lens and protect the oceans they inhabit."

*Playing With Sharks* received principal production investment from Screen Australia and was developed and financed with the assistance of Screen NSW.

View the [Hot Docs International Documentary Festival program](#) now.

### **I'm Wanita**

Director: Matthew Walker | Producers: Carolina Sorensen, Clare Lewis, Tait Brady | Australia | 2021 | 86 mins | World Premiere

*I'm Wanita* is a documentary about a country music renegade, hell-bent on realising her childhood dream of stardom before it's too late. The film follows Wanita, a little known but unforgettable country music singer from Tamworth, NSW, who has dedicated her life to country music, but has yet to be rewarded with accolades or fame.

Filmed over five years, *I'm Wanita* takes us on a musical odyssey from Tamworth in regional NSW to Sun Studio in Memphis, the birthplace of rock'n'roll, through to the streets and studios of New Orleans, and finally country music's hallowed ground: Nashville, Tennessee. Will a lifetime of refusing to play by the rules overshadow this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, or will Wanita stand and deliver?

### **Playing With Sharks**

Director: Sally Aitken | Producer: Bettina Dalton | Australia | 2020 | 91 mins | North American Premiere

Valerie Taylor is a living legend and icon in the diving world. A glamorous shark hunter in the 1950s, she was a champion with deadly aim before a personal epiphany transformed her into a passionate marine conservationist – specifically for the ocean's scariest creature, the shark. Long before anyone else, Valerie dared to get close; swimming against the tide of the human perception of sharks and putting herself on the front line for over 70 years.

Featuring a stranger-than-fiction script, a magnetic heroine, the making of *Jaws*, and that most charismatic and terrifying of screen creatures, sharks; this powerful and visually sumptuous 90-minute feature documentary draws on incredible re-mastered film footage captured over 50 years. Through her life's arc, we go on a journey of new understandings, from fear to respect and admiration of these complex, majestic creatures. Valerie Taylor is a marine maverick, a fearless diver, and pioneering conservationist who dared to befriend even the great white shark. This formidable woman forged her own adventure story in a male dominated world; Valerie's passion to change the human perceptions of sharks transformed scientific knowledge and our understanding of these magnificent apex predators.