

STRAIGHT MATE / *with Matthew Myers*



PHOTO: MARK ROGERS

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Matt Day has come a long way since he and Toni Collette spilled the beans in *that* scene from *Muriel's Wedding*! Now he's all about the hit TV show *Rake* and getting out of his comfort zone.

DNA: On *Rake*, your character David Potter has gone from tax lawyer to leader of the NSW Labor Party. What happens next?

Matt Day: Complications ensue! You'll see a lot more of David's personal life and there's more conflict as he tries to lead the 'moral life', while also getting his own way, which is kind of the basis of *Rake*!

The cast is a *Who's Who* of Australian actors.

Did you have any idea the show would be so successful? I had a good inkling, given that Peter Duncan, who's an old friend, was writing it, and also that Richard Roxburgh was involved. The reason it attracts the cast that it does is the quality of the writing. Great scripts make the show and, of course, the acting too. But if you don't have the words to work with it's a pointless exercise. As they say, you can't polish a turd. Although I've been informed that you can roll it in glitter!

With productions like *Jack Irish*, *Wentworth*, *Janet King*, *Molly* and *A Place To Call Home*, do you think this is a golden age for Australian television?

There's certainly more focus on television now, and some of the prestige has shifted away from cinema. But I don't think it's a golden age to the extent of what we see in the US. There still isn't the money or market size to support that here but certainly working in television these days is much more advanced [than it was]. Australian TV isn't slumming it anymore, and it's no longer the poorer cousin.

Tell us about working on *Muriel's Wedding*. I'd known PJ Hogan [director] from my very first job on a kids' show called *The Bartons*, which he and his wife Jocelyn Moorhouse [*The Dressmaker*] wrote. Years later I auditioned for the part of

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Brice Nobes [a parking inspector who has a crush on Muriel] in *Muriel's Wedding*. I remember reading it and thinking, "Wow! Who's going to want to see a film about an overweight girl who loves ABBA and wants to get married?" [Laughs].

You had no inclination it would become a hit? None at all. I remember the day I got the job and I had to workshop a couple of scenes with Toni Collette. We did the beanbag scene and on the day PJ said the part was mine, and that's the only time that's ever happened to me! I was thrilled to get my first film, having only ever done TV. But we had no idea it would become what it did. There would be very few people who could've foreseen that it would take off. There were no stars in it, and no indication it would become so successful. In many ways, *Muriel's Wedding* is actually a very dark film. Re-watch it and see how dark it actually is.

You also worked under the direction of Woody Allen on *Scoop*. That must have been incredible? He's always been a hero of mine and I grew up watching his films. The first audition I ever did, at St Martins Youth Theatre in Melbourne, for my monologue I memorised an album of his stand-up routine. So while all the other kids were doing *Hamlet*, I was talking about how "I ran into my ex-wife!" [laughs]. So with *Scoop*, I had to read one line to camera in a London casting agency, and three weeks later I was told I had the part! And it was such a thrill to be on set meeting Woody Allen himself.

From all the productions you've worked on, has one been particularly special? I'd probably say two, the first being *Love And Other*

Catastrophes [1996]. We made that film in 17 days on a budget of about \$250,000. It was around that time in the '90s where indie theatre was really taking off. You had films like *Clerks* and *Sex, Lies And Videotape* turning heads. *Love And Other Catastrophes* was a part of all that and we got into Venice Film Festival and then Sundance. It just exploded. And I love the film, too! The other one would be *Shackleton* [2002] with Kenneth Branagh, which was my first job in the UK.

What advice would you give to people wanting to enter the acting industry? Take it very seriously because when you're young it's easy to think that it's just the way things roll. Maybe go to the UK, push yourself and get out of your comfort zone. Apply yourself to the craft and try to master it. That will make the difference from being a flash-in-the-pan to having a long and sustained career!

Who are your best gay mates? Mitchell Butel, who is a wonderful actor and director, is a good friend of mine and I have plenty of gay friends in the industry. I should also mention that my uncle, Crusader Hillis, and his partner Rowland Thomson opened the first gay bookstore in Melbourne, Hares And Hyenas, where you can buy DNA!

If you were gay, who would you go for? Daniel Craig is such a great Bond, it's hard to go past him. And also a young Sean Connery.

Who is your diva? Patti Smith or Deborah Harry.

Our last Straight Mate, Damian Walshe-Howling, said the same! Oh, he's a mate of mine, and obviously with good taste!

What's your favourite fashion look? My wife is big on fashion and taught me to keep it simple and neat, but also to make an effort when walking out the door. Fashion should also hurt!

Hopefully not your underwear! What kind, if any, do you wear? I've just switched from loose to fitted boxers. For some reason I didn't have any undies at work one day, and they lent me a pair of fitted-boxers and I decided they were the go.

MORE: Find *Rake* on ABC1 free-to-air and on iView.