



BELIEVING IN THE DREAM

The independent Aussie film *The Dream Children* tells the story of a gay couple who become dads but are blackmailed by the mother. Leading man Nicholas Gunn tells **Matt Myers** about playing gay and filming some rather authentic sex scenes.

DNA: Are you happy with the final cut of *The Dream Children*?

Nicholas Gunn: Yes. Our director Rob Chuter had a strong idea about what he wanted. He didn't want it to be camp or stereotypical, but to focus on two guys in love. It's basically a love story. I understood that and, for me, the film is important because my two great uncles came from a time where they had to hide their sexual preference. That gay marriage and adoption today is still not legal is plain embarrassing.

Since the movie was made, Australian adoption laws have passed milestones, particularly in Victoria. Do you feel part of cinematic history?

Yes. It's an important film, and I only wish it could have come out earlier. It highlights a very real struggle that is ultimately heartbreaking. In fact, I find it hard to watch because I know couples who have the desire to do these things.

You were close to your two uncles?

Yes, they are separate uncles on my grandfather's side. One has been in a thirty-year relationship and the other is single. It's been cool having them, to some degree, raise me. They've been loving and I've always been exposed to that environment, which to me is very normal.



Nicholas Gunn and Graeme Squires go for authenticity in *The Dream Children*.

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IF YOU WERE GAY WHO WOULD BE YOUR MAN CRUSH?

"Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson. He's a handsome guy with a sharp look. Patrick Stewart is incredibly handsome, bald head and all."

How did you prepare for the role of Alex?

It was an opportunity that came sooner than I'd have liked in terms of my acting ability. To prepare, Graeme and I went around as a 'couple'. We talked to gay couples about their sexual lives and, luckily, we spoke to people who were very open and honest.

Did you discover differences between gay and heterosexual relationships?

The big difference we found was how the sexual relationships differed. I learned a lot about the culture and the rules of an open relationship, which I thought seemed healthy. There's a real bond of confidence and trust.

The sex scenes in the film are quite full-on. As a straight actor, were they awkward to shoot?

At the beginning, Rob asked Graeme and I to come together in a hug. We had only just met and I thought it would be easy but we were so awkward. I'm glad it wasn't filmed! Rob immediately said, "This is why we have five weeks until the sex scenes. We're going to get you guys comfortable."

It looked like you got pretty comfortable! Did you have stand-ins?

No, that was us! In the beginning we were given what's called "modesty pouches" which we tried on. We were struggling to get it right and I ended up saying, in my youthful, liberated way, "You know what? Let's just go on naked. It'll be cool to break the barriers!" So we did, and when we disrobed I thought, "Oh fuck! We did it! We're naked in front of these people. It's no big deal." Then I looked down at him, as you do, and thought, "Wow, that man is incredibly well-endowed!" Next to him I was like a little boy! That was the one thing I got self-conscious about. So I went to the toilet to fluff myself up and look respectable. Can you imagine me in the corner, naked, and doing the motions of masturbation?

Yet I didn't want to get too hard because then that would also be awkward! So I'm trying to "manage" myself and then the girl who collects everyone walks in and sees me in the corner where it appears I'm having a tug. She says, "Oh! Well... whenever you're ready." I didn't know what to say so I didn't bother to explain.

Let me ask, even when you're straight, with all the body contact and the emotion of the scene, isn't there a chance that you could get... hard?

That's a fair question. I thought the same thing about Halle Berry and Billy Bob Thornton in *Monster's Ball*. I thought they created a very hot, real moment. I thought, "How did he not bar up?" But to answer your question, and I'm glad it had such a reality to it...

...it was ever hotter than *Queer As Folk*!

Thank you! But, interestingly, we never even bumped genitals. It comes down to the way it was shot – there's the camera guy, the sound guy and a whole bunch of people watching! You want to be as present as you can and give all you can to the scene but arousal doesn't come into it. Even if I got to do a scene with Halle Berry, and I love her, it would be the same because of the unnatural circumstances.

Overall, you put a lot into this role.

I wanted to honour my uncles and the shit they



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went through. I wanted to make the relationship as real as I could. Graeme and I did a little method acting – things like going out on a date together. I remember walking down the street and I went to grab his hand to see how it felt. We held hands but, being true to his character as a closeted celebrity, he was quite stiff about it. I'm comfortable with my sexuality but I did feel as though there was a spotlight on us the whole time. What I also felt when I took his hand was vulnerable. I thought if the wrong person sees this we might get beaten up! That annoyed and saddened me.

How have your friends and family reacted to your performance?

This is where I'm grateful to be in this current

generation. They're proud that this film was made. Not that I was challenging my own boundaries, but because of the film's message. I'm lucky to be surrounded by friends who were supportive of that.

You're a handsome bloke. You must occasionally get cruised by other men?

Yes. I've gone to gay clubs numerous times and really enjoyed the environment. I like the fact that there's no pressure to pick up. I wear my heart on my sleeve and I'm very open about my sexuality to a point where my wife is like, "Can you just shut up?" [Laughing] So, yes, I do sometimes get hit on!

If you were gay who'd be your man crush?

Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson. I'm a huge wrestling fan and I think the way he holds himself makes him cool. That's more a judgment of his energy, but he's definitely a handsome guy with a sharp look.

It's the raised eyebrow, isn't it?

Yes, it's the raised eyebrow and shaved head!

Oh, come on, then you'd be into marines!

Marines and army guys don't do it for me. Going strictly by body and looks it'd be the Jackman/Clooney types. Patrick Stewart is incredibly handsome, bald head and all.

What about your diva?

Amy Winehouse. I love that she brought jazz back into the mainstream. As for her struggle, it was fascinating and very sad. I watched the Amy Winehouse episode of *Autopsy: The Last Hours Of...* Apparently, coming off everything, her body couldn't handle it and just shut down.

Your television work includes *Offspring*, *Utopia* and *Neighbours*. How do you find working for TV compared to film?

I enjoy both. *Neighbours* is a well-oiled machine. They shoot six episodes a week and you have to know your stuff. It's a great training ground and a nice work environment. It's very different to an indie film where you get a lot more time to try and fail creatively.

You've also completed a new film *Skateboard Or Die* – do you skateboard?

I can't skate... or fight! It's an action comedy we filmed on the Gold Coast. They did have a body double for me who was a badass skateboarder. You'll see one scene of me in the film gliding away but if you look closely I'm almost falling over!

Jocks, boxers or freeballing?

Fitted boxers. I hate loose boxers and I hate commando where you flail around everywhere.

MORE: Find *The Dream Children* on the OzFlix and HaView streaming service and on DVD.