

YIN&YANG

Ryan Hodgson & Melissa Kelly

Their first meeting may have been inauspicious, but it didn't stop local producers Ryan and Melissa, both 39, from forging a strong relationship — at work and home. Now they're moving to New York on the back of their debut feature film.

MELISSA

I'M ONE OF SIX CHILDREN and I grew up in Claremont. Mum was a pre-primary teacher and Dad was a stockbroker. It's not like my father was Coppola, so it was a revelation that I wanted to become a filmmaker.

I was always certain I wanted to work in the media but finding out being a producer was something I was good at was a surprise. I went to PLC (Presbyterian Ladies' College) and so many journalists and filmmakers from that school credit a teacher there who ran a media department that was amazing and very ahead of its time.

I first met my husband, Ryan, at a writers' conference around 1999 when I was living in Sydney and I thought he was a charming guy but he doesn't remember that encounter because he had the flu and was quite medicated.

About 18 months later I was back in Perth for a conference and he got my number. We've both been working in the industry for 15 years and mostly in TV. We make TV commercials in order to survive.

We had this wealth of experience but we'd never made a feature film. We had tried but we just hadn't found the right project or been successful in getting it financed. Then about three years ago we made a commitment to produce feature films and we started developing a feature film slate. Blame was a happy accident because it was an addition to the projects we had been developing. We got it financed between WA and Victoria very quickly (the film's writer-director, Michael Henry, is from Victoria).

Our daughter, Jessica, was seven months old at the time and our son was three-and-a-half and that was particularly challenging. Trying to manage a family and make a feature film was the hardest thing we've done. Both our mums came in and did shifts and we also got a babysitter, so between all three we could manage. But it was only possible because we knew we would not be doing ridiculous hours in pre-production and we only had a four-week shoot which would be a very intense period but there was an end in sight.

Being married and working together was fantastic. Ryan and I have a lot of similar skills so at any one time we could be interchangeable with the other. Every night we would debrief so we knew exactly what was going on.

The film is gritty and challenging and beautifully shot. It's full of Australian actors and it is filmed around WA, in the Perth Hills. It's been wonderful to have success overseas but ultimately we want success in our home town.



PICTURE ROB DUNCAN

RYAN

I DON'T REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I met Melissa at the writers' conference. I was dreadfully ill and have little memory of the conference. But I do remember when we met each other again at an industry event at The Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle. I saw Melissa across the way while I was chatting to friends and I thought she was a very attractive young lady. I asked if anyone knew who she was and one of them did so I went over and introduced myself.

Eight years on we are married, have two children, have made a few million dollars worth of commercials together and we have just made a feature film. We had spent two months in New York in 2007 developing projects and it was Melissa who got on a plane at the last minute to Melbourne — after inheriting someone else's schedule — to pitch another project of ours which was based on an American short story.

That is where she met Michael Robinson, who is our producing partner on Blame. Michael explained what Blame was about and Melissa thought it sounded really interesting. She read the script and really, really liked it and as soon as she got home she said to me, "You've got to bloody read this thing."

I was busy but after about three weeks she asked me again, so I sat down one night and I read it and I remember thinking it was really f...ing good.

It's a story about five very emotionally charged young people who decide to go to an isolated property to kill a man. They try to fake it as a suicide so they can get away with the perfect murder but in the course of it they make mistakes and things unravel.

They have to face the consequences of ill-considered actions. That happens all the time and you read about it in the newspapers here, where smart people make dumb decisions and young people are regularly faced with situations where if they mess up it could ruin their lives. It is just that in this film, the stakes are higher because it's murder.

Our audiences overseas have really responded to it. When we relocate to the US this year, Melissa will be working for the first six months and after that, one or both of us will look to get a job in the industry. We'll be based in the US but looking to develop and finance films to shoot back here. [www](#)

Blame debuts at Luna Leederville and Ace Midland on Thursday.

Interviews: Katie Hampson