

ENDLESS SUMMER

Local Perth photographer and cinematographer Matt Loucas
films short film *Beneath the Waves* – by **Vanessa Abbott**

'Beneath the Waves' - DOP Matt Loucas



It was in mid-2017 when Matt Loucas, a Western Australia-based photographer and videographer, responded to a Facebook advert looking for a local Perth DOP for a narrative short film about two surfer brothers. The film was low-budget, and required a mix of interior, exterior and surf/underwater filming. Loucas was put in contact with the Director, James Cunningham (and Editor of this publication), by one of the film's producers and soon the two were having coffee in Perth's North Beach.

"I loved Loucas' visuals. Some of the work on his online portfolio was just perfect in regards to the direction I wanted to take with this film," says Cunningham. After Loucas was hired, he was invited to meet the main cast, consisting of two Perth surfers and non-actors Higin Prazmo and Kris Felix, to observe rehearsals. Cunningham had created a script with no dialogue, and the narrative was to play out entirely with visuals. It was for this reason the Director, used to writing and directing for the stage, opted to work with surfers rather than actors.

Beneath the Waves is about two estranged brothers who embark on a surf-trip together on the WA-coast. Attempting to overcome and bury past grievances, the delicate

bonds of brotherhood are tested. During rehearsals, Cunningham and Loucas carefully planned the surf choreography with Prazmo and Felix. Guided somewhat by the surfing duo, the crew opted to shoot at the more isolated location of Yanchep Beach, about fifty-five kilometres north of Perth. This gave them a somewhat secluded beach, meaning the visual element of isolation became embedded through the fabric of the story. With some clever scheduling the surfing was then shot on a grey, overcast day meaning the dark skies became a metaphor for the brothers relationship.

Loucas shot *Beneath the Waves* on a Sony a3000 in 4K resolution, using a waterproof dive-pouch for his camera. On the day, the surf was somewhat choppy but worked for the film. Over the course of about three-and-a-half hours, the crew filmed various moments on and under the waves. **"The surf footage is mint,"** said Loucas upon viewing the footage the following day. There were roughly two hours of footage taken on the waves and in the ocean, with the best shots making up only about three minutes in the finished film. Some of the surf footage in the film appears in glorious slow-motion. The rest of the film consists of scenes shot at locations including on Yanchep

Beach, Mullaloo Surf Life Saving Club about thirty minutes south of that location and others, like a small motel nearby.

After the footage was edited in Sydney by Vivek Asri, Loucas graded the shots for the finished film. In conversations during pre-production Cunningham and Loucas had discussed *Beneath the Waves* taking on a certain quality, referencing a surf-themed fashion photography story called 'Pursuit of the Wave' photographed by Hard Cider New York. **"The colours were so rich and the shadows so dark,"** says Cunningham, **"It reminded me of the work of LeRoy Grannis, a surf photographer of the 1960s and 1970s. This is what I wanted, but more contemporary."** The Director goes on to say that his Cinematographer, **"Nailed it!"**

A haunting score was written specifically for the dialogue-free film by an Argentinian musician, Sebastian Benegas, and *Beneath the Waves* is currently being submitted to film festivals. **"This was a real passion project for me,"** says Cunningham, **"and... completely self-funded."**

Vanessa Abbott is a writer based in Melbourne.