



A STAN ORIGINAL AND GOODTHING PRODUCTIONS FILM  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH WILD BUNCH INTERNATIONAL  
AND MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL PREMIERE FUND



FESTIVAL DE CANNES  
COMPETITION  
2021 OFFICIAL SELECTION

# NITRAM

DIRECTED BY **JUSTIN KURZEL**

WRITTEN BY **SHAUN GRANT**

STARRING **CALEB LANDRY JONES, JUDY DAVID,  
ESSIE DAVIS & ANTHONY PAGLIA**

RUN TIME: 112 MINUTES

COUNTRY: AUSTRALIA

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

RATIO: 1.43:1

YEAR: 2020

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Photos and press kit can be downloaded from <https://www.wildbunch.biz/movie/nitram/>



## SYNOPSIS

NITRAM lives with his mother and father in suburban Australia in the Mid 1990s. He lives a life of isolation and frustration, never being able to fit in. That is until he unexpectedly finds a close friend in a reclusive heiress, Helen. However, when that relationship meets a tragic end and NITRAM's loneliness and anger grow, he begins a slow descent that leads to disaster.

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## WRITER'S STATEMENT, SHAUN GRANT

There are certain catastrophic events that stay with you, events where you will forever recall when and where you heard the news. For my country, and for me, it was the news of the Port Arthur massacre. Thirty-five people were killed and 23 wounded at the hands of a lone gunman. At the time, it was history's worst ever mass shooting. Viewing the harrowing images on my TV screen on that fateful day I kept asking myself the same question. A quarter of a century later, that very question remains; Who would do such a thing?

In late 2018 I was living in Los Angeles, California, watching basketball when two broadcasters started arguing about gun laws. There had been two senseless mass shootings in America within the space of ten days and a former-athlete was defending his right to bear arms and hunt with his semi-automatic rifle.



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It was in this moment my mind went back to Port Arthur. I revisited my research, that I had first undertaken almost a decade ago, and I went online to learn that some gun laws in Australia had been relaxed since the introduction of the National Firearms Agreement in 1996 and that many of its suggestions were never even implemented. In fact, I learnt that there are more weapons in Australia now than in 1996. Having attempted throughout the years to tell this story from various points-of-view (be it police, victims or survivors) I now knew the best way to do it, in order to convey my message, was from only one POV; the perpetrator's. I wanted the audience, especially those pro-gun, to sit with a character who clearly should not have access to firearms and watch as they are so easily granted access to them.

Whenever such a heinous act occurs the perpetrators are quickly labelled evil and crazy, for this makes the news easier to digest. But I believe this to be dangerous, as we as a society stand to never learn anything from the tragedy. Instead, I choose to look closer. Not in any attempt to sympathise with the killer but rather to try and better understand what leads an individual to carry out such a crime. I understand a community's wish to

forget the man's name, but to forget the event risks it repeating itself and I would much prefer our reminder to be a scripted narrative film than another news report.

While I realise it is hard for any nation to examine the ghosts of its past, I also believe it to be necessary. It is what art does so very well. An attempt to try and bring sense to the senseless. Yes, we should have films that celebrate Australia, its sporting triumphs, its natural beauty, its good-natured humour. But we should not shy away from the uncomfortable if there is some good that can come from it and I am not merely referring to our history of colonisation but our contemporary history as well. Filmmakers I admire, such as; Coppola, Kubrick and DePalma, all made films coming out of Vietnam that were 'anti-war films.' Currently I feel western society is in a war with its self, where senseless random acts of violence are being carried out daily. Thus, in my frustration I wrote NITRAM, which among many things I consider to be an 'anti-gun' film. My intention is not to give exposure to the perpetrator but the issue. Art, if done well, gives us the tools to confront the darkest of events and I know that everyone behind NITRAM, myself included, have done all we possibly can to 'do well' in the telling of this story.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT, JUSTIN KURZEL

I have lived in Tasmania for the last four years where my wife and I have decided to bring up our daughters. We have done this because there is no more beautiful place than this land and people. There is a spirit and resilience unlike any other. In winter the storms from the Antarctic batter the coasts and in a strange way Tasmania comes alive with energy, a curiosity, a need to explore, to understand this place and it's past.

Its past has ghosts, terrible unresolved tragedies, which haunt and have settled like a constant fog over its exquisite beauty. This reflection is complex and cautious; there are things best not talked about, a darkness to evade. The shadows flicker, but they mostly sit in blackness.

Shaun Grant's script NITRAM came from those shadows. It was unexpected and revealing in its honesty and genuine desire to understand and ask questions about one of the darkest chapters in Australian history, the 1996 Port Arthur shootings.

The forensic unpeeling of the character in the weeks leading up to the shootings was as vivid as it was elusive that it reached beyond the monster echoes and confronted me with someone who I felt I had known, walked past, ignored, would see but then forget.

The portrait he invented, the family he created, the street they lived on all felt conversant and familiar. This step-by-step unpeeling of a character, their dismantling and isolation, dared me to consider how someone could evolve into a leviathan. When that person was at their most dangerous and volatile, how were they able to make the worst choices imaginable?

The moment we feel the most unsure and uncertain of NITRAM is the moment that he buys his first guns. The horror of this scene spoke more to me about gun reform than any statistic or opinion piece. It crystallised the tragedy in a way, which made me clearly see the failings of the past, how gun laws could easily be exploited by the most vulnerable and dangerous.



Since my first film SNOWTOWN I have been interested in why these young men search for answers in such extreme violence. Is there a cultural void, which starves these human beings of a tribe, an absence of belonging? When there is no church, no sense of origin, no connection to land and country, what becomes their compass, what corrupts them towards this apathetic and senseless need to destroy life?

As filmmakers we have tried to tread gently. I am conscious that this film is speaking to an event in time, which we would rather look past. The profound pain runs deep. Forgetting helps us survive but freedom comes from memory. I have sought to reach into the darkness to find a truth and to understand the unimaginable. There are no answers but the legacy of Port Arthur is our albatross around our necks, it is part of our history and it warns the future of its perils.

## PRODUCER'S NOTE, NICK BATZIAS

NITRAM is a narrative portrait about the troubled person behind Australia's worst mass-shooting, to shed a light on how these incidents could have come to pass and in turn, perhaps understand what we might do to prevent them. In providing an artistic exploration of the issues and events that led to the person committing the shooting, the film aims to bring to the fore a range of themes that challenge modern-day society including: isolation, family support interventions, mental health and gun control.

This is a difficult film for a lot of people, none more so than the survivors, the victims' families and friends, first responders and the Tasmania community. We have felt a weight of responsibility in making this film, knowing what this horrific event and the memories of it means to so many people. We have taken the greatest of care and specific in not depicting any violence whatsoever. In contributing to the film's making and release, we do so with the utmost respect for the families and communities affected by the tragedy, and with a deep appreciation for the pain it would evoke for them.

As a form of artistic expression, the film has the ability and, we believe, a responsibility to facilitate thought-provoking, productive and responsible dialogue and, in some cases, action around the issues that matter to us as a nation and world, so that we always strive to protect and preserve the things we cherish as a civil society.

At its core, and like other films of its kind, NITRAM exists for this purpose.

## WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE NAME NITRAM AND NOT TO USE THE NAME OF THE CHARACTER IN THE FILM?

As filmmakers we have sought to avoid naming the key characters in our film out of respect for those most impacted by the actual events on which the story is based. In addition, there is a school of thought that believes that in naming perpetrators of such acts, one may be offering up the precise notoriety they were seeking in undertaking their violence.

So why NITRAM? It is after all simply the actual gunman's name reversed. But it is much more than this. It is established as a term of derision in the film. It was the label given to an outsider, to someone who didn't fit, who wasn't 'quite right'. It is a name he didn't want or like; the polar opposite of the notoriety he would seek. Beyond this, NITRAM as a title talks to the point of view in this film, without ever seeking to give the actual perpetrator any satisfaction whatsoever.



## KEY CAST AND CREW BIOGRAPHIES

### CALEB LANDRY JONES - NITRAM

Named one of "Ten Actors to Watch" by both Variety and The Hollywood Reporter, Caleb Landry Jones recently received critical acclaim this year for his work in *THE OUTPOST*. Prior to that he shot *THE FORGIVEN* directed by John Michael McDonagh and will next be seen in *FINCH* opposite Tom Hanks. In 2019, Caleb Landry Jones was a recipient of both the SAG award and Critics Choice Award for Best Ensemble for his work in Martin McDonagh's Oscar-winning *THREE BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE EBBING, MISSOURI*. In addition, he co-starred in Jordan Peele's Oscar winning *GET OUT*, as well as Doug Liman's *AMERICAN MADE* and Sean Baker's Oscar nominated *THE FLORIDA PROJECT*. Additional credits include Jim Jarmush's *THE DEAD DON'T DIE*, Brandon Cronenberg's *ANTIVIRAL* and The Safdie Brother's *HEAVEN KNOWS WHAT*.

### JUDY DAVIS - MUM

Jed Kurzel is best known as the front man and song writer for duo, *THE MESS HALL*. Judy Davis came to prominence for her role in *MY BRILLIANT CAREER*, for which she won BAFTA Awards for Best Actress and Best Newcomer. Davis received Academy Award nominations for her roles in *A PASSAGE TO INDIA* and *HUSBANDS AND WIVES*. She also performed in *TO ROME WITH LOVE*, *CELEBRITY*, *DECONSTRUCTING HARRY* and *ALICE*. The three-time Emmy Award winner's television credits include; *LIFE WITH JUDY GARLAND*, *THE REAGANS*, *FEUD* and most recently Ryan Murphy's lauded series *RATCHED* starring Sarah Paulsen.

### ESSIE DAVIS - HELEN

AACTA and Olivier Award winner Essie Davis has starred in such films as; *THE BABADOOK*, *AUSTRALIA*, *TRUE HISTORY OF THE KELLY GANG*, *ASSASSIN'S CREED* and *BABYTEETH*. On television her list of credits includes; *GAME OF THRONES*, *MISS FISHER'S MURDER MYSTERIES*, *LAMBS OF GOD* and *THE WHITE PRINCESS*. On the stage Essie won the Olivier Award for her performance in *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE* and earned a Tony Award nomination for *TOM STOPPARD'S JUMPERS*.

### ANTHONY LAPAGLIA - DAD

Anthony LaPaglia is an internationally acclaimed stage and screen actor who has won both a Golden Globe, for the TV series *WITHOUT A TRACE*, and a Tony Award for Arthur Miller's *A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE*.

His extensive list of film credits includes: *LANTANA*, *HOLDING THE MAN*, *BETSY'S WEDDING*, *AUTUMN IN NEW YORK*, *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*, *SWEET AND LOWDOWN*, *THE CLIENT* and *SUMMER OF SAM*.

### JUSTIN KURZEL - DIRECTOR

Justin Kurzel's first feature film *SNOWTOWN*, premiered at Adelaide Film Festival in 2011, winning the Audience Award. The film screened in over 15 international festivals including Toronto in 2011 and International Critics Week in Cannes in 2012 where it was awarded Special Distinction of the President.

In 2014, Justin directed a feature adaptation of *MACBETH* starring Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard where it was in competition at Cannes Film Festival in 2015.

In 2016 he directed the blockbuster adaptation of *ASSASSIN'S CREED* starring Michael Fassbender, Marion Cotillard, Jeremy Irons and Charlotte Rampling.

*TRUE HISTORY OF THE KELLY GANG*, a feature film based on the novel by Peter Carey and starring George McKay, Russell Crowe and Essie Davis premiered at the 2019 Toronto Film Festival Gala Section.

Justin is an Executive Producer on the Apple TV/Paramount miniseries *SHANTARAM*, based on the book by Gregory David, being produced by Anonymous Content.

### SHAUN GRANT - WRITER

Shaun Grant is a highly acclaimed screenwriter whose films have premiered at the world's most prestigious film festivals, including: Cannes, Toronto and Sundance. Recently, Shaun won his fifth AWGIE Award (Australian Writer's Guild Award) for Best Adapted Screenplay for *PENGUIN BLOOM*. Prior to this, *TRUE HISTORY OF THE KELLY GANG*, premiered at the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival. The much-anticipated film saw Shaun reuniting with Justin Kurzel after their debut feature film, *SNOWTOWN*, which was selected for Cannes' Critic Week in 2011 and went on to win the AACTA Award (Australian Academy Award) for Best Adapted Screenplay. Shaun's work on Jasper Jones and Berlin Syndrome gave him two further AACTA nominations and an AWGIE win for Best Adapted Screenplay. In television, Shaun has written for multiple series, securing another AWGIE and AACTA nomination for his work on the mini-series, *DEADLINE GALLIPOLI*. More recently, Shaun wrote the finale of *MINDHUNTER* for which he, and the show's writing team, received a Writer's Guild of America nomination for Best Drama. *NITRAM* is Shaun's sixth feature film.



## GERMAIN MCMICKING ACS - DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Germain McMicking has worked extensively within the commercial and entertainment industry, shooting documentary, narrative film and television and is a much sort after Director of Photography.

Recent credits include MORTAL KOMBAT for New Line Cinema; the 3rd series of TRUE DETECTIVE for HBO, with Germain receiving an Emmy Nomination for Outstanding Cinematography For A Limited Series Or Movie; the feature film ACUTE MISFORTUNE for director Thomas M. Wright; TOP OF THE LAKE: CHINA GIRL, with writer/director Jane Campion and Ariel Kleinman; BERLIN SYNDROME for producer Aquarius Films and director Cate Shortland; THE EMPYREAN and feature documentary SILENT EYE with director Amiel Courtin-Wilson; PARTISAN with director Ariel Kleiman, winning the 2015 World Cinema Dramatic Special Jury Award for Cinematography at the Sundance Film Festival. Other projects include the epic TV series GALLIPOLI for producers Southern Star Productions, the Nine Network and director Glendyn Ivin; the feature film HOLDING THE MAN, for producers Goalpost Pictures and director Neil Armfield; THE ACCIDENTAL SOLDIER with director Rachel Ward and producers Goalpost Taylor Productions, which garnered Germain a 2013 ACCTA nomination for Best Cinematography; COCKLESHELL, a segment of THE TURNING feature film for Director Tony Ayres and based on the Tim Winton novel.

Prior to this, Germain shot the feature film screen adaptation of Christos Tsiolkas' award winning novel DEAD EUROPE, directed by Tony Krawitz for Porchlight Films and See Saw Films. This film premiered in competition at Sydney Film Festival 2012, and also screened at the Toronto and London Film Festivals. This was the second collaboration with director Tony Krawitz, Germain shot Tony's award-winning feature documentary THE TALL MAN for Blackfella Films. The film focuses on the infamous death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee on Palm Island in 2004. Germain was nominated for an AACTA award for Best Cinematography in a Documentary in 2012.

## ALICE BABIDGE - PRODUCTION AND COSTUME DESIGN

Alice Babidge designs set and costumes in film, television, theatre and opera. Her feature film credits include THE DIG, directed by Simon Stone and starring Ralph Fiennes and Carey Mulligan, for which Alice has been nominated for a 2021 Best Costume Design BAFTA award; TRUE HISTORY OF THE KELLY GANG from director Justin Kurzel for which Alice won the 2019 AACTA Award for Best Costume Design in a Feature Film; HOLDING THE MAN directed by Neil Armfield; and SNOWTOWN, Kurzel's debut feature which was selected for Critics Week at Cannes and was awarded the Special Distinction of the President. Her recent work includes Costume Designer on THE DIG A Netflix Original Film starring Ralph Fiennes and Carey Mulligan 2021.

## JED KURZEL - COMPOSER

Jed Kurzel is best known as the front man and song writer for duo, THE MESS HALL. They were the recipient of the Australian Music Prize in 2007. Jed's composition career began several years ago with contributions to several independent short films. He then wrote the score for the critically acclaimed documentary NAKED ON THE INSIDE before composing the music for the Griffin Theatre production SAVAGE RIVER in 2009. His television debut came in scoring the music for both seasons of the Southern Star/Foxtel television series SPIRITED. In 2010, Jed made his feature film debut composing the soundtrack for SNOWTOWN for which he won Feature Film Score of the Year at the 2011 Screen Composer Awards. He has since composed the score for DEAD EUROPE, directed by Tony Krawitz and his third feature film, THE BABADOOK.

## NICK FENTON - EDITOR

Nick Fenton is a film editor who has worked on a diverse range of films. Early in his career, he worked with Turner Prize winner Jeremy Deller, and he also frequently collaborates with outstanding British director Clio Barnard (including THE SELFISH GIANT, which was screened in Karlovy Vary in 2013). He worked with Icelandic band Sigur Rós on their films HEIMA (2007) and INNI (2011). Other credits include AMERICAN ANIMALS, THE DOUBLE, SUBMARINE, ESCAPE FROM PRETORIA.

## CAST

NITRAM: Caleb Landry Jones  
 MOTHER: Judy DAVIS  
 FATHER: Anthony LAPAGLIA  
 RILEY: Phoebe TAYLOR  
 JAMIE: Sean KEENAN  
 DOCTOR: Conrad BRANDT  
 PUPIL'S MOTHER: Jessie WARD  
 YOUNG CHILD: Zaidee WARD  
 TEACHER: Ethan COOK  
 PUPIL: Kyan HUGH MANA WALTERS  
 HELEN: Essie DAVIS  
 SALESMAN: Lucas FRIEND  
 WAITRESS: Charlotte FRIELS  
 REAL ESTATE AGENT: Annabel MARSHALL-ROTH  
 NURSE: Christiana PLITZCO  
 BARMAN: Nick BATZIAS  
 WOMAN OUTSIDE THE BAR: Lucy-Rose LEONARD  
 HUSBAND: Ian HUME  
 WIFE: Carolyn HUME  
 OFFICER: Trelawney DEWE  
 TRAVEL AGENT: Anita JENKINS  
 GUN SHOP OWNER: Rick JAMES  
 GUN SALESMAN: Fergus O'LUANAIGH  
 SURFING BUDDY: Josh JOHANSSON  
 FARMER: Simon GILBERTSON  
 SON: George BATZIAS

## CREW

Directed by: Justin KURZEL  
 Screenplay: SHAUN GRANT  
 Producers: Nick BATZIAS, Virginia WHITWELL, Justin KURZEL, Shaun GRANT  
 Executive Producers: Nick FORWARD, Paul WIEGARD, Anthony LAPAGLIA, Alice BABIDGE, Jenny LALOR  
 Associate Producers: JAMES HEWISON  
 Director of Photography: GERMAIN McMICKING ACS  
 Production Designer: ALICE BABIDGE  
 Editor: NICK FENTON  
 Costume Design: ALICE BABIDGE  
 Music by: JED KURZEL  
 Supervising Sound Editor: STEVE SINGLE  
 Location Manager: NICCI DILLON  
 Casting: NIKKI BARRETT CSA, CGA, ALISON TELFORD CGA, KATE LEONARD CGA  
 1st Assistant Director: NATHAN CROFT  
 Production: GOOD THING PRODUCTIONS  
 Co-production: MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL  
 Premiere Fund: WILD BUNCH INTERNATIONAL  
 In association with: NUDE RUN ; STAN ORIGINALS  
 French Distributor: AD VITAM  
 International Sales: WILD BUNCH INTERNATIONAL

The producers would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the unceded lands upon which this production was filmed.

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