

## BRUCE BERESFORD TO DIRECT *LADIES IN BLACK*

Tuesday 21 March 2017: Academy Award® nominated director Bruce Beresford (*Breaker Morant*, *Puberty Blues*, *Tender Mercies*, *Driving Miss Daisy*) will bring to life Madeleine St John's 1993 best-selling Australian novel *The Women in Black* after securing major production investment funding from Screen Australia.

Produced by Allanah Zitserman and Samson Productions' Sue Milliken, *Ladies in Black* will be Beresford's first Australian film since *Mao's Last Dancer* (2009) and will reunite him with long-time collaborator Milliken. Together, Beresford and Milliken have written the screenplay for *Ladies in Black*.

Sony Pictures Worldwide Acquisitions has secured worldwide distribution rights with the film receiving major production investment from Screen Australia in association with Screen NSW, and support from The University of Sydney. Executive producers will include Morris Ruskin of The Ruskin Company.

Bruce Beresford said: "I've been obsessed with making a film of Madeleine St John's *The Women in Black* (now *Ladies in Black*) since I first read the novel about 15 years ago, after being told about it by Clive James, who had also been at Sydney University with Madeleine and myself. I was attracted by Madeleine's wit, her light touch, her deft characterisations and her portrayal of a Sydney I knew so well - the Sydney of the 1950s and '60s - a time when the whole of Australia began to change because of the influx of European migrants (most of them escaping a depressed war-ruined Europe), who brought a whole range of talents (and invariably delicious cuisine) that created the successful multi-cultural society of the Australia we live in today."

*Ladies in Black* is set in Sydney in the summer of 1959, against the backdrop of Australia's cultural awakening, breakdown of class structures, and liberation of women. It tells the coming-of-age story of suburban schoolgirl Lisa, who while waiting for her final high school exam results with dreams of going to the University of Sydney, takes a summer job at a large department store. Here she works side-by-side with a group of saleswomen who open her eyes to a world beyond her sheltered existence, and foster her metamorphosis.

Graeme Mason, CEO of Screen Australia said: "*Ladies in Black* is a uniquely Australian story about a seminal point in our history as a multicultural nation, and has already proven hugely popular with audiences as both a novel and a musical. Now in Bruce Beresford and Sue Milliken's experienced hands, this feature film incarnation promises to be visually stunning, with a female-led story that has the potential to be another box office hit like *The Dressmaker*."

Stephen Basil-Jones, Managing Director of Sony Pictures Releasing (Australia), said: "We are thrilled to be the local and Worldwide Distributor for this wonderful female character-driven Australian story that has the potential to appeal to audiences all around the globe. It's incredibly exciting to be working with Allanah Zitserman, Sue Milliken and director Bruce Beresford as they bring this charming and funny drama to the 'big screen'."

Michael Brealey, CEO of Create NSW, said: "Screen NSW is proud to help bring this quintessentially Sydney yet universal story, helmed by two NSW film industry greats, director Bruce Beresford and producer Sue Milliken, to the screen. We look forward to welcoming Bruce, Sue, fellow producer Allanah Zitserman, and their entire cast and crew to our film friendly city."

*Ladies in Black* will shoot in Sydney and surrounds in 2017 with casting to be announced shortly.