

Actress Danielle Macdonald tends to make bold choices. She played the lead role in 2017's *Putti Cake\$*, which required the Australian-born actress to not only speak in a New Jersey accent, but rap in one. She's played the Texan daughter of a former beauty queen, played by Jennifer Aniston, who takes up the gauntlet of pageantry for herself in 2018's *Dumplin'*. And she's played a pregnant woman holed up and holding out during a mass suicide epidemic in the recent worldwide Netflix sensation *Bird Box*.

In her interview for this piece, Macdonald, 27, is perfectly lovely, if a bit careful about what she reveals. It's smart. Earned, too. She's taken plenty of risks in front of the camera—which might leave her slightly cautious over the phone.

Macdonald grew up in the northern suburbs of Sydney, Australia. She recalls a pleasant childhood and adolescence, marked with a certainty of purpose. When it came time in her tenth year of school to select a career path, she decided on acting. She can be opaque in

Blonsky. She was initially cast in the show, which revolved around teens at a weight loss camp, but due to an issue with her work visa, she could not relocate to the States to participate in filming. The show lasted one season.

Once Macdonald ironed out her visa issues, her move to Los Angeles yielded guest spots on *Glee*, *Pretty Little Liars*, and *American Horror Story*. There were several years when acting jobs were sporadic, but Macdonald says she felt steadfast: "This is what I wanted to do, and I had faith."

Macdonald eventually got cast in a lead role in director Jeremy Jasper's debut, *Putti Cake\$*, playing a plucky bartender scribbling down verses and going toe-to-toe on freestyles with the boys. The film came out in 2017, not exactly a cultural moment suited for white rappers from Australia. She remembers, "[With] rapping, doing a skill that I don't have, and having to be good at it...How am I going to learn what people take their whole lives to master in the space of a month before I film? That's really scary."

teenager, and that's exactly what I thought." In the film, based on a young adult novel of the same name by Julie Murphy, Macdonald plays Willowdean, nicknamed 'Dumplin'' by her pageant queen mother. Her decision to follow in her mother's footsteps, competing for Miss Teen Bluebonnet, creates a kinder, more inclusive competition. Willowdean lacks the easy rhythm of other contestants, who seem to rehearse less; it seems she has to do more work to just show up comfortably as herself. It's a feel-good film with ample opportunities for Macdonald to display her range: her foothold in American accents (excellent), her pace-keeping with established actors (whom she often out-matches), and her baring of vulnerabilities for the camera.

In 2018's *Bird Box*, Macdonald acted alongside titans like Sandra Bullock, John Malkovich, and Jacki Weaver. Macdonald brings an intensity to her scenes that might flourish in subtler fare. Early reviews indicate she is strong in the biopic *She's*, based

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her descriptions of her youth, which may also be a decision born of self-protection: "I went through the usual teenage stuff, not too much bullying. I've always been pretty good at shaking things off, if I need to. The things that really affect me are from people I care about and respect, and I've always been very careful about who I let close enough for me to get hurt by." Macdonald's sense of guardedness seems to manifest throughout our conversation, particularly when she tells me she doesn't read reviews. One wishes she'd make an exception for the one in which Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* called her both "irrepressible" and "sensational."

Her breakout role could've come at 19, on ABC Family's 2010 show *Huge*, developed by Winnie Holzman, the creator of *My So-Called Life*, and starring *Hairspray*'s Nikki

Of course, Macdonald felt like she was taking the long odds on the project's success, which came with a Grand Jury Prize nomination at Sundance Film Festival and a Golden Camera nomination at Cannes. The film, which she notes took three years to complete, showed Hollywood that she could anchor a project. *Rolling Stone*'s Peter Travers wrote in his review that Macdonald was "the real thing, a live-wire actress who can deliver a rap or express an emotion with a bracing absence of bullshit."

Since *Putti Cake\$*, Macdonald has starred in two Netflix originals, 2018's *Dumplin'* and *Bird Box*. "The biggest thing with Netflix originals, for me, is that they can reach such a wide audience," she says. "With *Dumplin'* I keep hearing from a lot of people that they wish that they'd had that movie as a

on the true story of reformed skinhead Bryon Widner, playing a woman intent on not staying mired in a racist milieu in time for her children's future.

Next up, Macdonald will appear in *Paradise Hills*, a boarding school thriller co-starring Emma Roberts and Milla Jovovich, which just premiered at Sundance. The filming schedule took her to Spain, which is the farthest distance from Australia she has traveled thus far. Macdonald, who now resides in L.A., has been back home lately filming her first Australian movie, *I Am Woman*, about the singer Helen Reddy. She'll also be in another Netflix original, a detective miniseries called *Unbelievable*. It stars Toni Collette, an Australian actress with both talent and mass appeal in droves—a most appropriate role model. ☐



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New York

(917) 407-4292

Nicki Silverman: nicki@dsreps.com

Los Angeles

(626) 441-2224

Deborah Schwartz: deb@dsreps.com

Crystal Roberts: crystal@dsreps.com