

Sex and the disability - touching tale hits festival's silver screen

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May 11, 2011

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Scarlet Road - Trailer
Scarlet Road follows the extraordinary work of Australian sex worker, Rachel Wotton, who specialises in a long over-looked clientele – people with disability. Video feedback Video settings

IT IS not often that an elderly couple would make up their son's bed with satin sheets and spread rose petals in readiness for a visit by a sex worker.

But this is no ordinary birthday celebration for Mark, who has cerebral palsy and yearns for an intimate relationship. Mark is confined to a wheelchair and speaks via an electronic communication board but his eyes light up at the prospect of an overnight liaison with Rachel Wotton, a Sydney sex worker of 17 years.

The liberating, unexpectedly romantic encounter features in independent director Catherine Scott's latest documentary *Scarlet Road*, which is among the films vying for the \$10,000 Foxtel Australian Documentary Prize at this year's Sydney Film Festival.



Scarlett Road... Rachel Wotton is a sex worker who specialises in clients with disabilities such as John, who has multiple sclerosis.

The full program will be announced today by the festival director, Clare Stewart, and will include many Australian premieres, including films fresh from the Cannes film festival, which begins today.

Scarlet Road centres on Ms Wotton's tireless campaigning for the rights of sex workers and for people with disabilities who are typically perceived as asexual and not in the dating game.

"Representation of sex workers and people with disabilities is a minefield but I wanted to tackle stereotypes head on," says Scott, who befriended Ms Wotton a decade ago and gained sufficient trust to take her hand-held camera behind closed doors.

"The documentary is positive and pro-active about two marginalised groups. Sex workers are everywhere and they come in all shapes and sizes. They are not these isolated, lonely or damaged figures but people who go to the supermarket and lead ordinary lives. The joy of the documentary is that we get to talk about giving pleasure and shine a light on an issue that people haven't thought about."

With a background in psychology and a master's degree in sexual health, Ms Wotton specialises in working with clients with cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and other degenerative conditions. One of her clients, a broadcaster named John, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 26 years ago. A chin-controlled wheelchair affords him mobility but he insists his sessions with Ms Wotton have enabled him to regain some body movement.

Ms Wotton hopes that *Scarlet Road* will shatter myths and prejudices. "I've put in the hard yards of activism and lobbying to fight for the human and legal rights of sex workers. After all the voluntary work with Touching Base [a charity] it would be great to get government funding to further bridge the gap between people with disability, their support organisations and the sex industry."

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