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South Australian First Nations-led horror *The Debt* greenlit for production under Film Lab: New Voices initiative

South Australia's flagship feature film development initiative, **Film Lab: New Voices**, has greenlit its third feature film for production – ***The Debt***, an exciting new horror led by South Australian First Nations filmmakers.

Co-written by Yankunytjatjara writer **Pearl Berry** and **Piri Eddy**, directed by **Johanis Lyons-Reid** and produced by Yankunytjatjara producer **Lilla Berry**, *The Debt* will premiere at Adelaide Film Festival in 2026.

Film Lab: New Voices is an initiative co-funded by the **South Australian Film Corporation** (SAFC), **Screen Australia** and **Adelaide Film Festival** (AFF) which sees three South Australian filmmaking teams mentored through a 12-month skills development program to develop their first low-budget feature film script. At the completion of the lab, one team is selected to receive \$600,000 in screen production grant funding.

The Film Lab: New Voices initiative has proven a hugely successful career accelerator development program since it was launched in 2021. The first film greenlit for production, sci-fi ***Monolith*** from writer **Lucy Campbell**, director **Matt Vesely** and producer **Bettina Hamilton** had its international premiere at the renowned SXSW (South by Southwest) Festival in Austin, Texas in 2023 following its world premiere at Adelaide Film Festival in 2022, and was later released in cinemas in Australia and the US.

Film Lab's second feature, animated comedy ***Lesbian Space Princess*** was unveiled at the Adelaide Film Festival 2024 where it won the coveted Audience Award for Feature Fiction. It received its international premiere at the prestigious 2025 Berlinale (Berlin International Film Festival), where it won the Teddy Award for Best Feature Film, internationally positioning writer/directors **Emma Hough-Hobbs** and **Leela Varghese** and producer **Tom Phillips** of **We Made a Thing Studios** as exciting talent to watch. *Lesbian Space Princess* went on to win the People's Choice Award at the 2025 Sydney Film Festival and has screened at numerous other festivals around the globe. UK-based Blue Finch Film have acquired worldwide sales rights to the film, while Umbrella Entertainment have secured the Australian and New Zealand rights, with an Australian cinema release set for 11 September.

Arts Minister Andrea Michaels MP said: "It is incredibly exciting to see *The Debt* chosen as the third film out of the Film Lab: New Voices program. South Australia has been a hot bed of film and television success over the past few years including *Monolith* and *Lesbian Space Princess* as the previous two films created through this program, both of which received international acclaim. The Malinauskas Government is committed to supporting South Australia's growing screen industry and I look forward to seeing *The Debt* once its released."

SAFC CEO Kate Croser said: "After the incredible international success of *Monolith* and *Lesbian Space Princess*, we are thrilled that *The Debt* go will be the third exciting feature film out of the Film Lab: New Voices program.



"The Film Lab: New Voices program is all about discovering and launching the next wave of talented South Australian filmmakers, and we are so proud to provide a platform for new and diverse voices and stories through it. We are delighted that *The Debt* will continue to deliver on that aim, capturing the perspectives of young First Nations filmmakers – and sisters – Lilla Berry and Pearl Berry.

"I congratulate the entire team of *The Debt* on their bold and distinctive concept, which we are pleased to support for production."

Screen Australia Director of Narrative Content Louise Gough said "The Film Lab: New Voices initiative has established itself as a highly successful career escalator program for emerging South Australian creatives. Congratulations to Pearl, Piri, Lilla and Johanis on support for their debut feature. *The Debt* is a horror with visceral power that will have audiences here and around the world on the edge of their seats."

Adelaide Film Festival CEO and Creative Director Mat Kesting said: "Congratulations to the filmmakers, we can't wait to premiere *The Debt* at Adelaide Film Festival in October 2026. The success of previous Film Lab projects *Monolith* and *Lesbian Space Princess* gives further evidence that investing in creative talent and locally developed IP by means of dedicated lab programs is an effective means of supporting impactful outcomes and ensuring our stories and cultures reach screens both here and internationally."

***The Debt* writers Pearl Berry and Piri Eddy, director Johanis Lyons-Reid and producer Lilla Berry** said: "We are thrilled to be this year's selected Film Lab: New Voices team. We can't thank enough everyone who has supported the project so far at the SAFC, Screen Australia and Adelaide Film Festival, as well as our development mentors and all our friends, family and peers.

"This opportunity is life changing. To be given the green light for our first feature is both incredibly exciting and humbling. We created Dinosaur Disco Films to craft stories that stand out and speak to our current moment, and we hope *The Debt* will achieve those things, as well as elevate the hugely talented South Australian film creatives we are privileged to work with. We can't wait to share *The Debt* with audiences at next year's Adelaide Film Festival and beyond."

The Debt Synopsis:

Alone on a secluded estate, Anna and her 10-year-old ward become trapped in a terrifying ordeal that will settle Anna's debt to society. All she must do is make a choice: end her own life or the life of the child.

For more information, go to safilm.com.au/industry-and-skills#filmlab

MEDIA CONTACT: Petra Starke, SAFC Head of Communications and Marketing 0407 799 907
petra.starke@safilm.com.au

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