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ABC begins production on new series *The Heights* in Western Australia

Production begins today in Perth on ABC's new 'slice of life' serial drama series, *The Heights*. Marcus Graham (*Secret City, Cleverman*) and Shari Sebbens (*The Sapphires, Thor: Ragnarok*) are just two members of an impressive ensemble cast, guided by a creative team that fosters emerging and local talent and supports the WA television industry.

The 30 x 30" serial drama centres on the inner-city neighbourhood of Arcadia Heights, exploring the relationships between the residents of the Arcadia social housing tower and the people who live in the rapidly gentrifying community that surrounds it. *The Heights* mines the frictions and commonalities between the upper and working classes in the melting pot of urban Australia.

The Heights is produced by Matchbox Pictures and For Pete's Sake Productions for ABC and developed and produced with the assistance of ABC in association with Screenwest, Lotterywest and NBCUniversal.

Head of Drama, Comedy and Indigenous for the ABC, Sally Riley said, "*The Heights* will broach complex social issues faced in the reality of our lives today.

"We're thrilled to support a 30 episode program that is built on a model of bringing together new talent with experienced creatives for a timely new Australian series that is a microcosm for a diverse nation that is continually redefining itself. *The Heights* will make audiences laugh, think and be emotionally engaged," she said.

The series presents a medley of characters, cultures, classes and backgrounds from the 'tower' community, exploring their relationships, work lives and everyday challenges faced by its characters in an entertaining relationship drama series.

Joining Marcus Graham and Shari Sebbens on screen will be Roz Hammond (*Muriel's Wedding, The Dish, Shaun Micallef's Mad As Hell and Thank God You're Here*), Fiona Press (*Home and Away, San Andreas*), Dan Paris (*Neighbours*), Calen Tassone (*Red Dog: True Blue, Black Comedy*), Saskia Hampele (*Neighbours, A Few Less Men*), Phoenix Raei (*Wentworth Prison, Romper Stomper, Australia Day*), Yazeed Daher (*Safe Harbour, Anzac Girls*) and exciting newcomers Bridie McKim, Mitchell Bourke, Koa Kuen, Cara McCarthy and Carina Hoang. Series regulars also include Kelton Pell (*Three Summers, Gods of Wheat Street, Cloudstreet*), Briallen Clarke (*Muriel's Wedding - The Musical*) and Bernie Davis.

The new series has been created in-house at Matchbox Pictures by Warren Clarke (*Mustangs FC*) and co-creator Que Minh Luu. Clarke will take on the Showrunner

position for the series, which is produced by Peta Astbury-Bulsara (*The Marriage of Figaro, Almost Midnight*) and Executive Produced by Debbie Lee for Matchbox Pictures and Sally Riley and Que Minh Luu for the ABC. The first season is directed by James Bogle (*Whiteley, Closed For Winter, Lockie Leonard*), Andrew Prowse (*Farscape, Home and Away, Underbelly, Rush*), Renee Webster (*Marx and Venus*) and Darlene Johnson (*Stolen Generations*).

From the creative team to the cast and crew, *The Heights* combines established talent with those emerging in the industry. In addition to casting and training many first-time actors, the production will engage a first-time drama director receiving mentorship from director Andrew Prowse, as well as several first-time screen writers contributing to scripts.

As well as providing opportunities for industry newcomers, *The Heights* will provide a huge boost to the WA television industry, with the production engaging nearly 100 local crew and casting 93 speaking and extras roles locally, exemplifying the ABC's unrivalled commitment to making significant investment in homegrown content that fosters Australian talent.

Screenwest CEO Seph McKenna said the entire Screenwest family will be delighted to see *The Heights* make its way into loungerooms across Australia, noting the production is a first for Perth.

"Having a quality, scripted drama coming out of our State is a real game changer for our local screen industry," Mr McKenna said.

"There's a real buzz around the ABC studios in East Perth and it's exciting to see crew and creatives busy collaborating to deliver this local project."

Co-creator of the series Warren Clarke says the joy of *The Heights* lies in its characters, and the way they deal with whatever slings and arrows life throws at them. "It's a diverse community, but this series doesn't seek to exploit the things that make us different but rather explore and celebrate the things that ultimately make us all the same. This isn't story about good versus evil or rich versus poor; it's about the very unifying experience of trying to make one's way in the world, and the family you surround yourself with, whether by bloodline or by circumstance," he said.

Season one of *The Heights* was written by Hannah Carroll Chapman, Romina Accurso, Peter Mattessi, Megan Palinkas, Nick King, , Clare Atkins, Niki Aken, Dot West, Magda Wozniak, Mithila Gupta, Tracey Defty-Rashid, Larissa Behrendt , Miley Tunnecliffe, Katie Beckett and Melissa Lee Speyer. This first season is directed by James Bogle, Andrew Prowse, Renee Webster and Darlene Johnson.

International sales will be handled by NBCUniversal Distribution.

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