

THE AUSTRALIAN

Girl asleep star Bethany Whitmore is wide awake to creativity

PHILIPPA HAWKER THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM August 20, 2016

Young Melbourne actress Bethany Whitmore is a film and TV veteran at 16 whose credits include roles in the US mini-series *The Starter Wife* and in director PJ Hogan's comedy *Mental*.

She is now appearing in her first lead role in the Australian film *Girl Asleep* in what the director describes as a crucial piece of casting. "She's a passive protagonist, and that's a challenge," said Rosemary Myers.

"We knew we had to find an actor who could carry a lot of the story on her face. That's hard to find, but Bethany does it so beautifully."

Whitmore said *Girl Asleep* was about a journey, although her character barely leaves the confines of her bedroom. She plays Greta Driscoll, an adolescent girl plunged into a complex life of the imagination closely linked to the adult world around her.

Whitmore has wanted to be an actor since childhood. In *The Starter Wife*, she was the five-year-old daughter of Debra Messing (*Will & Grace*). She voiced the young girl Mary in Adam Elliott's animated feature *Mary and Max*, and played Rebecca Gibney's red-haired daughter in *Mental*.

Girl Asleep, adapted from a stage production, is the first feature from Myers, artistic director of Adelaide's Windmill children's theatre. It has already been a hit at international festivals and opens in Australian cinemas on September 8.

Whitmore said she relished the task of getting to know a character who was "scared of the adult world, but intrigued by it".

Greta's bedroom was a set, but the scenes in the Driscoll family home were shot in a genuine 1970s Adelaide house, lovingly augmented by the design department.

That the film takes place in the 70s was a bonus for Whitmore. "I don't know where it started or how it came about, but I love the 70s and the 60s," she said.

She's interested in fashion and music from those decades and has just bought herself a record-player: Pink Floyd is getting a workout on the turntable, as is a lot of Australian rock from that era.

Whitmore has learned to balance acting and the demands of her school, Swinburne Community College in Melbourne. Her next project is season two of the TV series *The Family Law*.

She said she would like to try working overseas after she finishes school, and is keen to write and direct one day.

She has stories in notebooks and scripts in progress, and is immersing herself in the best of new and classic cinema: “I spend most of my time watching films and gathering inspiration.”