



CHRYS + MIKAELA PHILLIPS

Mother-daughter team celebrates a major hit

This talented mother-daughter duo has a hit on their hands. They've managed to co-produce a web series and sell it to commercial television and to a major international distributor without the help of screen guilds or outside funding. This is a major accomplishment in and of itself, and a first for two Australian women. Their series, called *Counter Play*, is on Channel Nine and is now available through mega powerhouse Amazon, giving it immediate worldwide distribution.



Counter Play is set in South Point, a scenic coastal Australian town hiding many secrets. With a million-dollar coastline, luxury cars and high-end couture, South Point may boast wealth and beauty on the outside but there's an ugly, corrupt side hidden beneath the glossy surface. Three affluent, powerful families believe their secrets will never emerge. However, life as they know it is about to be derailed. In an effort to keep untold truths, devious plans and family scandals hidden, everyone is out for themselves and no one can truly be trusted. False identities, blackmail, greed, murder and love triangles ensue in this insidious town. Chrys is the Executive Producer, Writer and Director of *Counter Play*, and Mikaela helps her mother co-produce the show and also stars as its lead character, Faith Morgan. Think *Dynasty* meets *Neighbours*.

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So how did Chrys and Mikaela manage to beat the odds – and make this happen? The challenges were many, and for Chrys, date back to a difficult childhood. She grew up not having parents around, so she missed having a normal, supportive family structure. She was adopted and passed from one family to another, at times having nowhere to live. She worked multiple jobs from the age of 15 onwards, paid her own bills and even made her own clothes. Chrys knows what it's like to struggle and understands how hard life can be, but she also understands what it takes to get to where you want to go. She has instilled in her daughter the values of hard work and determination, never letting anyone define her or say NO. If a difficult childhood was not enough for Chrys, this mother-daughter duo has encountered many obstacles along the way, including substantial prejudice. Sexism is still rampant in the industry. If you are a woman trying to get a show produced, it's not uncommon to be told that you need a man to direct or head the project to ensure its success. There's still a lack of recognition

for female producers. When a man takes risks on a screen project he is more often than not praised as innovative and creative, and given more credit than two women who have set a record by writing, directing and producing a two-season show which has been picked up by a major commercial network, and is now streaming independently. It's the old, old story of double standards, unfortunately.

So who are Chrys and Mikaela and what are their credentials? Chrys Phillips is a gifted screen, mainstream and musical theatre writer, director, producer and speaker, and an award-winning author. Daughter Mikaela is a multi-talented go-getter. She's been a TV host, presenter and producer and has over 15 years of acting experience under her belt. She trained in Los Angeles with Margie Haber who coached some big Hollywood names over the years, including Brad Pitt, who got his start in Thelma and Louise while training with her.

It should have been easy for a talented duo like this to get funding, right? Wrong. Chrys tried many times to source and apply for funding to assist in the creation of the series. However,

she kept hitting road blocks when she did not fit into the narrow categories of gender, race or age where funding was available. She spoke to multiple contacts at all guilds and was told that if the show got picked up commercially then they could assist. The show got picked up but still nothing happened. Chrys and Mikaela decided that their vision was not going to be supported. They needed to take matters into their own hands by self-financing and taking an entrepreneurial approach to funding the project with sponsorships and other sources of financial backing.

Fast forward. It worked! The two are now busy with season two of *Counter Play*, plus gearing up for a trip to the U.S. for other projects and work engagements. *Counter Play* is the first series of its kind to come out of Australia and make it to a successful overseas platform, proving that Australia can compete on an international level with the likes of *Dynasty* or *Gossip Girl*.

We celebrate the achievements of Chrys and Mikaela and wish them continued success.

You go girls!

BY SUSANNAH PASK

