



Monday 18 September

**#CINEMAFORTHESENSES**  
**11th Annual Byron Bay Film Festival October 6-15**

**Filmmaker Interview: Phil Borges**  
***CRAZYWISE***

**By Tyson Yates**

**What better place than Byron Bay to premier *CRAZYWISE*, an organic exploration into how we in the West frame mental health in comparison to indigenous cultures around the world?**

*Co-director and renown human rights photographer Phil Borges tells BBFF 2017 how a simple project on meditation grew into a cross-cultural documentary challenging the stigma we place on mental health and how answers may lie beyond what we think we know.*

**BBFF:** Firstly can you tell us a bit about *CRAZYWISE*?

**PB:** It's really a cultural look at the way we in the modern world, in the West especially, are diagnosing and treating severe mental emotional crises. It's taking a look at the way traditional cultures have done it in the past and the way we're doing it now and kind of doing a comparison between the two – just bringing out the differences, especially around the language that we use when we talk about a psychological turmoil of any type.

We're very much of the thought that the language in itself can do a lot of good or it can do a lot of harm when someone is given a diagnosis.

**BBFF:** How did the idea of the film originate and how did the collaboration with co-director Kevin Tomlinson come about?

**PB:** I was just doing my human rights work around the world and I happened to be introduced to individuals, either visionaries or healers, who go into some kind of altered state to do their work and I became fascinated by that. I was originally introduced to the Oracle of Tibet when I was doing a project there. Some people call him the Dalai Lama's Oracle, who at 30 years old went into trance and started what they call speaking in tongues, then collapsed and was carried out of the room. I had no idea what was going on.

So I later got to interview him and he told me how he was identified as having that capability of what we would call in the West channelling the spirit protector of the Tibetan people and it was just fascinating to me how they chose to look at hearing voices, having personality changes, mood swings, feeling very vulnerable.

To us these things that would be a severe crisis of some sort, to monks in his monastery they looked at that as an opportunity to develop a sensitivity he had.

Kevin Tomlinson (co-director/ executive producer) was an old friend and a great cameraman. Kevin was doing a documentary on me as a photographer and the work I had done in the different places around the world and I said to him instead of just doing a documentary on me, let's just combine forces and make this an everyman's journey into following Adam (one of the film's subjects) and we'll start interviewing mental health experts, people with lived experience, a lot of people that are in the mental health professions and let's put something together around that.

**BBFF:** In CRAZYWISE we see one of the film's subjects, Adam, go through a number of transformations based around his various mental states over the five-year period you were documenting him. What did you conclude based on your experience with traditional cultures and did you go through a process of change during the course of making CRAZYWISE?

**PB:** To tell you the truth, I didn't have a position to begin with. I knew nothing about how people were diagnosed, how they were treated, I knew nothing of the mental health crisis that is going on in our country (US) right now with the skyrocketing levels of suicide and depression rates and the people going on mental health disability.

Just the way I heard the young shaman, the language that was used, the story that was told to him and how different that story was to what was being told to people with lived experience here.

Basically the young shaman was told you have a special sensitivity and it can be useful to us, it can be useful to our community and it is difficult and it is challenging but you can learn to control it and in fact we are going to give you a mentor to help control it, an older shaman who himself or herself has already been through what you're going through now and has learned to control it and once you're initiated and once you've got this under control you're going to be very valuable to us... That story just gave those people a lot of hope, a lot of meaning and a lot of purpose.

Then compared to the story I heard here from people with lived experience, I so often heard 'I was told I have a chemical imbalance in my brain, and that unfortunately right now we don't have a cure for it, we can manage the symptoms with these medications but you can expect to be on them for a lifetime'. So many people were told that story. And if you think about it, that message doesn't come with a lot of hope.

**BBFF:** What was the most challenging part of the filmmaking process?

**PB:** Raising the money (laughs). That's always an issue.

Probably the most challenging to me was my relationship with Adam. I got a full-blown exposure to somebody going through one of these states. I was in fear of compromising Adam's life, you know, here I am documenting his life, putting out something that's very personal, that could come back and bite him in a culture that stigmatises these issues so heavily. There was one time when I pulled up to meet him, I got out of the car and went over to his car where he was living and he wasn't feeling good, I could tell. So we went for a walk and he just started saying, you know man, I can't take this, this is just way over what I signed up for and I said you know I'm in the same boat, I don't think I can take it anymore and I kind of broke down and cried a bit. And he just wanted to take care of me after that, he has a lot of natural compassion, Adam. We bonded at a deeper level at that point and he started trusting me more.

**BBFF:** In exploring of the topic of mental health, have you noticed a shift in the West towards more traditional modes of healing?

**PB:** It's hard to know for sure, but now that I'm in this of course I've gravitated to the more holistic side of the equation in terms of dealing with mental health issues, to be treated more holistically rather than a purely medicated approach. Though, I also want to say that this is not an anti-medication film. We've heard it from everybody, it (medication) is good to have in your toolbox especially during a crisis, but it has muscled out the psychological, the social, the spiritual and the biological aspects of good mental health, things like getting enough sleep, eating right, exercise. We're a culture that doesn't like pain, we run from it.

## **LIFT OUT QUOTES**

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Crazywise is part of the **11<sup>th</sup> Annual Byron Bay International Film Festival** Official Selection.

The Byron Bay Film Festival is illuminated with two dazzling red carpet gala events in the heart of town. Opening Night offers a chance for industry networking and a taste of the flavour of the festival to come, and features a highlight film screening. The culminating celebration event is an exciting night of recognition for filmmakers, the festival, Byron Bay, and the international film industry, and not to be missed. Early ticket purchases are recommended to avoid disappointment to these two popular events.

The 11th Annual Byron Bay Film Festival is held on Friday 6 – Sunday 15 October 2017 in multiple venues throughout Byron Bay and surrounding suburbs.

Program will be released over the coming weeks.

**Tickets are on sale now via [www.bbff.com.au](http://www.bbff.com.au)**

**End.**

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