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tv

Millions of viewers globally but now the Sydney filmmakers behind 'Starting From ... Now!' are hoping to make it big in Australia

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The cast of hit Australians series Starting From ... Now! Picture:Supplied

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IT'S the Australian drama that's big in Boston, massive in Manchester and quite the thing in Frankfurt, But ask someone in Sydney — where the series is filmed — if they've heard of Starting from ... Now and they'd probably look at you with a blank stare.

Despite being seen by 20 million people, the show's actors are anonymous in Australia but are stopped in the street in the US by adoring fans.

"It's incredible and we often pinch ourselves and think what the hell is going on," the show's writer and director Julie Kalceff tells news.com.au.

Now Australian audiences will get a chance to see what the rest of the world is raving about when Starting From ... Now! debuts on TV next week, fresh from its big screen premiere at the annual QueerScreen Mardi Gras film festival in Sydney.

The show, now in its fifth season, is described as a "lesbian love quadrangle" following the lives of Emily, Steph, Kristen and Darcy "as they search for happiness and love and experience life" in Sydney's inner west.



Rosie Lourde plays Darcy in Starting From ... Now! which is completely filmed in Sydney. Picture: supplied Source:Supplied

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IT'S NOT DAYS OF OUR LIVES

The series started life online and, Ms Kalceff admitted, in its early days it's production values weren't exactly the highest. "It was really low budget, a labour of love and a bit of a toe in the water to see how responsive the audience was."

But respond they did. "Within the first couple of months we started getting great feedback with people saying it was refreshing to see characters who happen to be lesbian but it's not just about them being lesbian, they are complex women dealing with issues everyone can identify with."

Starting From ... Now! has all the ups and downs of a good, edge of your seat drama, said Ms Kalceff. "You're writing short 10-minute episodes for online, so you need people to come back and watch the next one. There is some of the same soapy set up but it's handled in a more sophisticated fashion. It's not Days of our Lives."

Actor and producer Rosie Lourde said the audience for the show was diverse and because it avoided stereotypes, it wasn't limited to gay viewers. "I think our approach, and the really strong cast that people have responded to, means we have a wide appeal."

The team had originally planned just one season, "but when we finished shooting we realised there was more to the story," says Ms Kalceff. "We decided if we were going to keep going we would ramp up the production values and expand the cast."



"It's not just about them being lesbian, they are complex women dealing with issues everyone can identify with," says creator Julie Kalceff. Picture: supplied Source:Supplied

AWARD WINNING

The increasing slickness of the show brought in more viewers and even awards with Starting From ... Now! winning best web series at the 2015 SHE WebFest 2005 and Sarah de Possesse winning best supporting actor at the prestigious NYC WebFest awards for her portrayal of Steph.

Producing work online has also helped the cast showcase their work and get out in the public sphere in an industry where it can be notoriously difficult to catch a break. "Lots of actors are unemployed and figuring out how to make their own content so platforms like YouTube and Vimeo are an easy way of honing skills and everyone gets a boost," said Ms Lourde.

It was with season three, Starting From ... Now! exploded internationally.

"We saw the numbers spike in the millions. It was mainly from the US but also France, Germany, the UK and then Australia," says Ms Lourde. "People hadn't see this type of story come out of Australia before and I think there is a novelty overseas of watching Australian actors playing Australian women on Australian streets."

The backstreets and bars of Marrickville and Newtown provide the setting for the series which is has led Sydney's inner west, as well as the city's beaches and suburbs, to be beamed into houses across the globe.

So much so that Government backed organisations Screen Australia and Screen New South Wales have helped bankroll the most recent season.

