

# SURVIVING GEORGIA



**With her first two films** – the barely seen *Max's Dreaming* (also known as *Deeper Than Blue*) and the favourably reviewed *The Caterpillar Wish* – writer/director Sandra Sciberras announced herself as a filmmaker interested in the relationships that can develop out of tough, almost crippling difficult situations. Boasting strong performances, richly layered scripts, and truck-loads of angst, both films spoke of a director unafraid to burrow into dark, painful – but never shocking or sensationalist – ground. With her third film, *Surviving Georgia* (on which she co-directs with Kate Whitbread, who produced and appeared in her last two films as an actress), Sciberras softens her stance a little with a sweetly told tale that still deals with a few emotional home truths.

Reserved, sensible and slightly repressed Heidi (Pia Miranda, surely one of the most charming, talented and utterly engaging actresses to emerge in Australia in the last ten or so years) and blowsy single mum, Rose (one time *Neighbours* star and occasional pop starlet, Holly

Valance, is terrific here, finding all the inherent sass and swagger in her opportunity-rich character), are sisters, but they couldn't be more different. Still bruised by their larger-than-life mother's (Caroline O'Connor) desertion twelve years prior, they must confront a few old demons when they receive news that their mother has died and, in her will, has left them a milk bar in the small town where they grew up.

From its light, breezy, pop-inflected soundtrack to its idealised romantic interests (Spencer McLaren as Heidi's nice guy boss, and Shane Jacobson as the decent, knockaround cop who understandably carries a torch for Rose), *Surviving Georgia* is a warm, positive film that counters every moment of sadness and heartbreak with one of optimism. Directors Sciberras and Whitbread obviously love their characters, and that feeling spills infectiously off the screen – *Surviving Georgia* is a real charmer. **Erin Free**