

REASON8 FILMS presents Michelle Savill's

MILLIE LIES LOW



When a sudden impulse turns Millie away from starting a prestigious internship in New York, her peculiar new path of total evasiveness leads to self-discovery.

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Synopsis

Just as her flight to New York is about to leave the gate, Millie jumps up and insists she be let off the plane. In the moment, she gives no thought to the honor of her having won an internship at a prestigious architecture firm, nor the good friends who saw her off in celebration, nor her new status as a national media figure, stepping out to represent New Zealand on the world stage.

Millie is crestfallen to discover it is no small matter to rebook her flight, unless she pays a hefty fee. She leaves the airport determined to find the money, even as she keeps her whereabouts a secret by posting on Instagram a generic image taken in flight above billowy clouds.

Millie calls her best friend and classmate Carolyn, to whom she sold her car. Although they had agreed there was no rush to pay, Millie asks for money right away; but Carolyn is broke. Millie visits a quick loan office only to learn that her laptop cannot stand as collateral but a car would. Her mother knows something is wrong as soon as she answers Millie's call. She cannot afford to send money for a laptop to replace the one Millie tells her she left behind during a layover in Hong Kong.

Millie uses her key card to squat for a night at the architecture school. A security guard finds her admiring project models she and Carolyn made and asks her to leave. Millie identifies herself as Carolyn and the guard compliments her for having the edge over Millie's work, which was clearly derivative of Carolyn's.

Later that night, she dons a tinted motorcycle helmet and secrets her way into a costume party at Carolyn's to borrow the car keys so she can present the vehicle to the loan officer as hers. At the party, she texts her boyfriend, Henry, who is standing just a few feet away, amazed that she has written him after agreeing to radio silence for six months. On the way out of the party, she passes Carolyn commiserating with two classmates who consider Millie a copycat. They are confident that New York colleagues will in short order sniff her out for as much.

Fastening a New York subway poster to the brick wall of an alley, Millie places a Skype call to Carolyn, who answers in the middle of her party. She is amazed Millie made the trip in record time. But when she asks to see more of her space, Millie abruptly cuts the call off.

Millie settles into the woods behind her mother's home, then retreats to a small blue tent in the rain. From her shelter she photoshops images of her being in New York and is delighted with the many likes her posts elicit on Instagram. Henry tells Millie he has dropped his studies and purchased a ticket to leave the next day to join her in New York. Millie sees her options running out.

Director's Notes

When my short film ELLEN IS LEAVING was selected for competition at Clermont Ferrand, the New Zealand Film Commission paid for my air ticket. Disastrously, I got the dates mixed up and missed my flight. My first reaction was an acute sense of shame, which gave way to a sinking feeling when I learned it would cost three thousand dollars, which I did not have, to rebook. My embarrassment was such that I seriously considered hiding out for three weeks pretending to be in France. Thankfully, I didn't have to do that; but the incident made me consider why loss of face was my first fear, and what it would have looked like if I had followed that impulse to hide out. When, some time later, I began to share this story with friends, I learned I was not the only one with this kind of disaster story. I could feel the kernel of a character study growing; what is the psychology of a person who chooses to hide out?

My own upbringing infused into the film

Having grown up in the Philippines, the child of missionary parents, it made sense for my personal experience to inform Millie's backstory. She struggles with her dual identity, and feels like an outsider in New Zealand, ostensibly her homeland.

The bamboo pole dance, Tinikling, is not widely known or practiced in Aotearoa other than in Filipino communities. The movements imitate the grace, skill and speed of the Tikling bird as it dodges bamboo traps laid by rice farmers. In some ways, Millie can be seen as a flightless bird – she has crippling anxiety, and her insecurity leads her to hide behind (or straight up copy) the ideas of her friends. Also like a Tikling, she is skillful in dodging the traps of lies that she has set for herself, out maneuvering everyone – until she can't.

The people who made it all happen

I brought Eli Kent on as a co-writer. He is a close friend whose work I deeply admire, and we work well together. Guidance from script editor Kate Leys was invaluable to get the script into the strongest place possible.

Desray Armstrong had produced several of my shorts and was on board for MILLIE LIES LOW from the start. As things started picking up, Desray brought on friend and fellow producer Angela Littlejohn, a welcome addition to the team.

I had my eye on Ana Scotney for the role of Millie; we met a few years earlier when she was a student at Toi Whakaari Drama School, and had crossed paths over the years. Even with Ana in mind, I wanted to do my due diligence; to make sure she was right for the role, but also stay open to possible surprises. Working with casting agent Tina Cleary, we started a search for Millie, inviting candidates to submit audition tapes in the character of an architecture student submitting a graduate scholarship project. Ana's was a standout among many excellent submissions – she is a star. We had extensive in-room auditions, which confirmed for us that Ana was the perfect person for the role, her talent was undeniable.

I had worked before with several key crew, who had been attached to the project from the beginning. Particularly, DOP Andrew Stroud shot my short ELLEN IS LEAVING, with Heather Hayward as the production designer, James Hayday as the sound designer and Luke McPake on titles and graphics. It was great to bring them all back together on this project.

Our process

When working with actors, I want to get to know them as a person outside of the film world, and for them to get to know me as well. So I like to have them round for dinner, watch movies, go on walks and hang out when possible.

A rigorous rehearsal plan was created with Dramaturg Tina Cleary, in the lead up to pre-production. With the actors, we worked on psychology, backstory, and the narratives each character told themselves. Our aim was to establish relevant relationships between actors – there was as much focus on their lives outside of the script as the scenes in the film, with lots of improvisation to build muscle memory and create shared experiences.

I gave all the cast and crew a personal letter with a mood board expressing my vision, what this film was about to me and where each character, scene and story point had come from, plus film references for everyone to watch. I wanted to welcome everyone into the family, and get us all on the same page, knowing what kind of film we were making from day one. Everything I did as a director was trying to create an environment in which the actors are inspired and equipped to do great work.

About the Director

Michelle Savill is a writer and director, based in Auckland, New Zealand. Michelle grew up in various parts of the Philippines, the child of missionary parents, moving to New Zealand permanently as an adult.

Michelle's short ELLEN IS LEAVING (2012) won the Grand Jury Prize for Best Narrative Short Film at SXSW Film Festival and San Francisco Film Festival. Savill's short films have screened at various international festivals including Aspen, Rotterdam, Sydney, Edinburgh, Clermont-Ferrand and Melbourne, where she attended the MIFF Accelerator Programme. She has also attended the Berlinale Talent Lab and won a script development internship in New York through Script-to-Screen.

MILLIE LIES LOW is her feature directorial debut.

About the Producers

Desray Armstrong is an award winning independent producer with 17 years of physical production experience, previously in documentary, reality and studio based entertainment television and since 2007, predominantly in feature film and scripted series drama.

STRAY launched her feature film producing career. Premiering at Moscow International Film Festival in 2018 the film had a nationwide theatrical release in NZ. Her second feature, COMING HOME IN THE DARK, premiered in the Midnight Madness section at Sundance 2021 and was theatrically released in NZ in August 2021.

Besides MILLIE LIES LOW, her upcoming projects include Matthew Saville's JUNIPER, starring Charlotte Rampling and Chelsea Winstanley's feature documentary TOI TU TOI ORA: VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY.

Angela Littlejohn is a seasoned international screen producer and executive who has worked in the film and TV industry for the past 30 years. Prior to returning to New Zealand in 2000, Angela spent 15 years in the UK where she worked as Drama Co-Production Executive and Programme Finance Manager for Channel4 and Film4.

Besides MILLIE LIES LOW, her recent producer credits include Ivan Sen's feature film EXPIRED, and Leah Purcell's The Drovers Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson (SXSW 2021, Melbourne International Film Festival 2021), Matthew J Saville's JUNIPER (starring Charlotte Rampling).

ABOUT CAST

Ana Scotney graduated from Toi Whakaari, New Zealand's foremost national drama school. Her breakthrough screen role came as Sepa in Jackie Van Beek and Madeleine Sami's 2018 hit comedy feature THE BREAKER UPPERERS.

Ana also made waves on the National stage with her solo work The Contours of Heaven. The verbatim piece won multiple awards at the 2018 Auckland Fringe Festival and played as part of a season of New Zealand theatre at the Soho Playhouse in New York in January 2020.

She has just wrapped filming the Melissa McCarthy and Ben Falcone's upcoming Netflix series GOD'S FAVORITE IDIOT.

Ana is of Māori (Tūhoe), German, Jewish and Irish descent and speaks fluent Te Reo.

Jillian Nguyen is a graduate of the 16th Street Actors Studio in Melbourne and holds a Bachelor of Arts from The University of Melbourne. Jillian had a key role in SBS original drama Hungry Ghosts and plays the female lead in the upcoming U.S/ Australian sci-fi feature EXPIRED, co-starring Ryan Kwanten and Hugo Weaving.

Born Huyen Dieu at Sungai Besi refugee camp in Malaysia, both Jillian's parents are Vietnamese, with Chinese heritage on her mother's side. She immigrated to Australia when she was 14 months old.

Chris Alosio is a New Zealand Samoan actor and is a graduate of Toi Whakaari drama school. His breakout role was in the 2018 critically acclaimed Australian drama series Fighting Season for which he was nominated for Best Male New Talent at the 2019 Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Awards. Chris' upcoming projects include Taika Waititi's NEXT GOAL WINS.

Rachel House is one of New Zealand's most highly regarded actors. Highlights of her career include HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE, MOANA, THOR, BOY, SAUL and the upcoming Taika Waititi's NEXT GOAL WINS. She is also an award winning theatre director most notably for the Maori version of Troilus and Cressida performed at the Globe Theatre in London. Rachel has also been awarded an Arts Laureate, NZOM, Mana Wahine (WIFT) and Te Waipuna a rangi (Matariki awards) as an actor and director.

THE CAST

Millie - Ana Scotney
Carolyn - Jillian Nguyen
Henry - Chris Alosio
Marlene - Rachel House
Scott - Sam Cotton

THE CREW

Writer / Director - Michelle Savill
Co-Writer - Eli Kent
Cinematographer - Andrew Stroud
Producers - Desray Armstrong, Angela Littlejohn
Editor - Dan Kircher
Composer - Evelyn Ida Morris
Production Designer - Heather Hayward
Costume Designers - Gabrielle Stevenson, Sara Beale
Makeup Artist - Catherine Maguire
Sound Designer - James Hayday

TECH SPECS

Running time: **100 min**
Aspect ratio: **1.85:1**
Sound: **5.1 Surround**
Shooting format: **digital**
Language: **English**
Production countries: **New Zealand**

Production Company: **Lie Low Limited**
In Association with: **Sandy Lane Productions, Long & Short Story Studio
and the New Zealand Film Commission**



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