

A FILM BY MICHELLE SAVILL

MILLIE LIES LOW



SANDY LANE PRODUCTIONS AND LONG AND SHORT STORY STUDIO IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION PRESENT MILLIE LIES LOW STARRING ANA SCOTNEY RACHEL HOUSE CHRIS ALOSIO JILLIAN NGUYEN SAM COTTON
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREW STROUD PRODUCTION DESIGNER HEATHER HAYWARD EDITOR DAN KIRCHER SOUND DESIGNER JAMES HAYDAY COSTUME DESIGNERS GABRIELLE STEVENSON SARA BEALE MAKEUP DESIGNER CATHERINE MAGUIRE
COMPOSER EVELYN IDA MORRIS CASTING DIRECTOR TINA CLEARY EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS KELLY ROGERS & KEVIN GORDON PRODUCERS DESRAY ARMSTRONG & ANGELA LITTLEJOHN CO-WRITER ELI KENT WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY MICHELLE SAVILL © LIE LOW LIMITED 2021. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

SYNOPSIS

Millie, an architecture student from Wellington, New Zealand, has landed a competitive internship with a prestigious architecture firm in New York City. Her friends, family and professors have proudly bid her farewell as she takes this next step in her career. With her life in Wellington now on hold, all Millie has to do next is get to New York. However, she is suddenly struck with a panic attack right before her plane takes off and is unable to reboard after the attack subsides. Desperate and ashamed, she decides to save face by hiding in plain sight around Wellington until her next flight out. Suitcase in tow, Millie anxiously evades suspicion with the help of crafty social media and full-blown denial. Though narrowly convincing her friends that everything has gone to plan, after witnessing their lives without her, Millie's self-destructive spiral turns into a reluctant journey towards self-discovery.

An exemplary debut feature from Michelle Savill, this SXSW selection has been praised for capturing “the chaotic self-destruction of *Fleabag* and the anxious missteps of *Eighth Grade*,” (*FilmDaze*). MILLIE LIES LOW showcases newcomer Ana Scotney's comedic chops and proves to be a timely comment on mental health and the performative nature of social media.



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.

CAST

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

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

TECHNICAL SPECS

Running Time: **100 minutes**
Aspect ratio: **1.85:1**
Sound: **5.1 Surround**
Shooting Format: **Digital**
Language: **English**
Production Country: **New Zealand**

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



ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT

Founded in 2002, Film Movement is a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films based in New York City. It has released more than 250 feature films and shorts culled from prestigious film festivals worldwide. Its catalog includes titles by directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Maren Ade, Jessica Hausner, Andrei Konchalovsky, Andrzej Wajda, Diane Kurys, Ciro Guerra and Melanie Laurent. In 2015, Film Movement launched its reissue label Film Movement Classics, featuring new restorations released theatrically as well as on Blu-ray and DVD, including films by such noted directors as Eric Rohmer, Peter Greenaway, Bille August, Marleen Gorris, Takeshi Kitano, Arturo Ripstein, Sergio Corbucci and Ettore Scola.

For more information, visit www.filmmovement.com.



PRESS CONTACT

Michael Krause | Foundry Communications | (212) 586-7967 | mkrause@foundrycomm.com

FILM MOVEMENT BOOKING CONTACTS

Maxwell Wolkin | Theatrical | (212) 941-7744 x211 | maxwell@filmmovement.com
Erin Farrell | Non-Theatrical & Festival | (212) 941-7744 x206 | erin@filmmovement.com