JOIKA

PRODUCTION NOTES

SETTING THE STAGE: SYNOPSIS

Joika is based on the true story of Joy Womack, who made history as an American ballerina who was accepted into the Bolshoi Ballet Academy. At fifteen years old she left her family home in Texas to travel to Moscow to follow her dream – to become a Prima Ballerina at the world-renowned Bolshoi Ballet Company.

This fascinating story drew the interest of writer-director James Napier Robertson who after meeting Joy became utterly inspired to tell her remarkable story. Womack wanted *Joika* to show what it really took to become an elite ballerina in such a fiercely competitive atmosphere, - something that she felt had never truly been shown in film. And, having seen Napier Robertson's' multi-award-winning the Dark Horse, Womack felt he was the person she could entrust to do so. With raw, unflinching honesty Womack poured out her story to Napier Robertson and was involved every step of the way through script development and production.

Newcomer Talia Ryder (*Never Rarely Sometimes Always*) gives a career-defining, electric performance as Joy Womack. Sparks fly as she spars alongside two-time Cannes Best Actress Award Winner Diane Kruger (*Inglourious Basterds*) as Joy's enigmatic Russian dance teacher and mentor Tatiyana Volkova.

Joika will be released in cinemas in 2023.

RAISING THE CURTAIN: INTRODUCTION

Joy Womack was one of a very few Americans to ever be accepted into the Moscow State Academy of Choreography, commonly known as the Bolshoi Ballet Academy. Founded in 1773, it is one of the oldest and most prestigious ballet schools in the world and provides a potential pathway to being selected into the elite Bolshoi Ballet Company.

A powerfully engaging, gripping and immersive journey of Joy Womack's formative experiences in Moscow, *Joika* was brought to the screen under the skilled hand of writer-director James Robertson Napier, and his creative team, as the very first New Zealand- Polish co-production.

Napier Robertson met Joy in 2016 and was completely captivated. He says "She's an incredible person. I'm often around people who work very hard and are passionate about what they do, but Joy was at another level in her dedication to her art. I was blown away and moved by her story. I felt it was much more than just her getting into the Bolshoi. I've wanted to use film to bring to life the story of an incredible, complex and inspiring human being who possesses a beautiful and deeply emotional story. A story that I feel should be more widely known."

SPOTLIGHT: REAL LIFE ON SCREEN

As the writer-director of *The Dark Horse* (2015) based on the story of champion speed chess player Genesis Potini, and, more recently as Co-Director on *Whina* (2022), based on the story of Dame Whina Cooper, James Napier Robertson is well versed in dramatisations of real-life stories. He readily admits, "There's always a pressure and responsibility when telling a story about a real person. My approach is to invite that person – or those people – into the process as much as possible. Joy is young, incredibly intelligent and has a huge amount of self-awareness, everything was on the table - we just kept talking."

Womack herself refers to the initial meetings with Napier Robertson as an ‘a-ha!’ moment of no return. She explains, “Before that, I was in denial – or disbelief – that it [the film] might ever happen. It’s such a joy for me to work with people who are so passionate about what they do. James and I are aligned in that. He’s put his heart and soul into telling my story. I knew that it would be in good hands. I felt respected and honoured that him, and the team, brought me into the process.”

Napier Robertson’s script covers the period of time from when Womack first entered the BBA to her performance in the International Ballet Competition Varna, a biennial event in Bulgaria. Widely referred to as ‘The Olympics of Dance’, it can be a significant launch-pad for those pursuing careers in classical dance. “I was 15 years old when I came to Moscow,” says Womack, “Without my parents. I lived there by myself and went straight into Russian school so I could learn the language.” Given the nature of cinematic storytelling, Napier inevitably had to be selective about how he shaped the entirety of Womack’s richly, sometimes distressingly complicated experiences in Russia for the camera – something she understood and accepts. “The film spans almost ten years of my life in two hours, so things are quite compacted and compressed.”

Napier Robertson recognised how vital it was to get the film’s casting right. Especially crucial was making the right choice of who would embody Womack. “As I was writing the script, I remember thinking that the only way it would work is if there’s a truly exceptional performance in the lead. The character of Joy is in almost every scene. It’s a huge and incredibly demanding role, and with that comes a lot of pressure. Talia Ryder has exceeded what I had hoped for. She’s done a phenomenal job.”

ACT I: CASTING

Getting cast in *Joika* was, says Ryder, “…An answer to all my prayers. This felt like something where I could really bring a big part of myself to a character I actually understood. I love acting, but dance is my number one thing. I’ve been dancing since I was three years old. But it’s a very different part of my life compared to Joy’s life. She’s another breed. Going up to teachers and asserting yourself or trying to prove yourself and asking for a role – those are all things I understand, but differently. They’re skeletons of situations I’ve been in before.”

Ryder trained privately for a year before stepping into Womack’s shoes in *Joika*. “I love ballet and had a ballet foundation technique, but it was never my strong suit. I’m more of a contemporary dancer, so I had to get whipped into shape.” She seems to have taken the pressure of playing a real human being, who also happened to be on set throughout the shoot, in her stride. “It’s amazing to have that person be right there, because they’re the best resource you can have. Joy was so open about a lot of moments in the script, answering some really personal questions because she wanted to help me give a completely honest portrayal of her. I was like, ‘’I just wanna make you proud of my portrayal of you.’’ But I also have my own ideas about a character, so it’s really about collaborating, and talking.”

This certainly applied to Ryder’s working relationship with Napier Robertson, too. “He’s really been encouraging,” Ryder enthuses. “I’m a detail-oriented actor. I like to talk about everything down to the pair of socks I’m wearing. James spoke with me for so long about how the choices you make can completely change the feel of a scene. They could go in a million different ways. It's about looking at every moment as important, and then taking the time to make sure you’re happy with the results.”

Womack, for her part, also carries considerable admiration for Ryder. “Ballet is something we dancers spend most of our lives trying to perfect. Doing that in a short amount of time is quite difficult. Talia took on a big challenge. It’s very brave of her wanting to dance as much as she could in the film. I’m proud of her for how much she poured herself into it. I helped as much as I could, making sure that the choreography was manageable yet ambitious enough to show the Russian classical style.”

But, as Womack admits, the blur between her life and the movie version of it was occasionally disconcerting. "*Joika* is one of my first experiences working in film, and I was trying to separate the choreographer role I'd been given from ''This is about me.'' It's kind of surreal. It was interesting, and weird too, to see in the dance class scenes how well Talia had done her homework and picked up little quirks of mine." Still, Womack was the person best placed to know what would ring truest during the filming. "I was touched and honoured to sit at James' side during the shoot and say, 'Hey, this doesn't seem believable,' or to offer some small detail or other that might make a scene seem more authentic. And he was completely open to me taking ownership of everything dance-related."

Diane Kruger plays Volkova, a queen bee of classical dance who can make or break the raw, young talent in her charge – including the central character of Joy. "Volkova is an ex-prima ballerina," Kruger says, "A famous teacher and a director at the Bolshoi Academy who has given her life to the ballet. I've tried to find a truth to her that can be as uplifting and warm as it can be ice cold. She has great discipline, but also a good heart; she's not someone who's mean for no reason. She truly loves her students and will do anything to try and help them flourish in a world that's really tough. She can be as hard as nails because she expects the best from them. They are like her children. As we learn in the film, she has a very frayed relationship with her own daughter; there's a lot of heartache and regrets there. There's also a sadness to Volkova that really attracts me. She has no friends or family. She never married or found love. And she has no time for the human aspects of why we are not all prima ballerinas."

Volkova is loosely based on a couple of people in Womack's life, but principally a woman who was her coach at the Kremlin Ballet (a company she joined after leaving the Bolshoi). "She became like a mother to me," Womack recalls, "And yet she demanded excellence and perfection." Some elements of Volkova's character are also taken from another female teacher in Perm who, says Womack, had a reputation for being highly physical in class. "She was notorious for abusing her students. Yet my partner Mikhail Martinuk (Womack's dance partner for many years, including at Varna) had nothing but good to say about her."

INTERMISSION: BALLET ON FILM

Joika is not so much about ballet as it is a dramatic story set in that refined hothouse milieu. The bedrock of the film's narrative is perhaps best expressed by the person who lived it, the classically trained dancer Joy Womack: "I believe ballet is a bridge between countries and cultures. It's an international language, a way for people to meet and create and do things without words. It's about beauty and celebrating something that is bigger than just the basic functions of being human."

But, as *Joika* reveals, there can be dark and difficult sides to ballet aesthetics. "There is an idea in the Russian system," Womack continues, 'That if you are pursuing excellence and perfection, it's better to be told the truth up-front and bluntly rather than be given false hope. It's a very hard career and even the most talented and lucky don't always make it."

Having built such a complex character as Volkova in *Joika* and immersing herself imaginatively in the highly charged environment she occupies, Kruger regards the film as "A pretty accurate portrayal of what it takes to be a prima ballerina, and how beautiful and wonderful and screwed up the world of ballet is. It's like a curtain has been pulled back, showing us something we don't get to see every day."

From Napier Robertson's perspective, authenticity was a must. "The film really has to delve into the minds and physicality and dedication of those who inhabit this world, but not in a movie way. That's why I asked Joy to be the film's choreographer. I felt there was nobody better to be making the movie within that capacity than Joy herself. I also needed her encyclopaedic knowledge of ballet. Not only did I have her constantly involved as I was writing the script, but she was behind the camera with me figuring out all these huge dance sequences – and doing a phenomenal job – as well as dancing herself in it."

Here Womack picks up the thread. “In the film, we’ve tried to re-create the essence of Russian classical ballet. It’s built upon a logical, pedagogical system designed to give dancers a beautiful technique, but also the ability to dramatise it. It’s very expressive – all about emotion, and hand and eye co-ordination.”

For Womack, the entire choreographic process was a fascinating challenge. “How could we get what was in my head to a place where James could shoot it? Tomek [Naumiuk], the cinematographer, was amazing. Together they were trying to show the art and drama of the dance, and the dancers’ expression of it. I also worked with James [Napier Robertson] to create versions of famous ballets – Paquita, La Corsaire, Don Quixote – or of the Russian style, but condensed in a way that the camera could capture. And, of course, we also had Natalia Osipova who was a prima ballerina at the Bolshoi when I was in the school. I think she’s the best example of an actress as ballerina that we have today. When you see her dancing The Dying Swan [in the film] it is actually her interpretation of a swan dying. A lot of people are afraid to be that bold, but it’s something the Russian style really facilitates.”

Although now based in London, where she is a star attraction at the Royal Ballet, Natalia Osipova is indeed one of the world’s finest exemplars of the Russian style. “I was born in Moscow and learnt ballet at the Academy,” she declares. “These are my roots.” She also knows what it takes to remain at the top of her profession. “To be a star or principal dancer, you need to have passion. It’s not just every day you do class and rehearsal. You need to love it like crazy. You don’t need to be a fanatic, but you do have to be full of so many colours to be onstage and tell your story. You need to create a world, a story, a feeling that is right for you and true.”

But, as Osipova admits, “Dance is a beautiful language, but there are so many ambitions and huge egos. You need to be strong and fight for yourself, always.”

Her words echo those of Womack: “If I could wish anything for people watching this film, it’s to find something you absolutely, desperately love, that gives your life meaning and that you can't live without – and do that.”

As the film’s dramatic architect, Napier Robertson’s vision for *Joika* is, by necessity, wider and more equivocal. “I hope it gives an audience a genuine and deep insight into ballet at this competitive level. Beyond that, it’s a study of ambitious determination and what it takes to try and be great at something you love. It’s a complex journey. How much would you give or sacrifice? I wouldn’t want the film to give easy answers. But it’s important to ask the questions, and to show this phenomenal person doing extreme things.”

ACT II: DESIGNING JOIKA

It was James Napier Robertson who was charged with the task of immersing viewers in the intensely dedicated creative environment top-rank ballet demands. Belindalee Hope, one of the film’s producers, readily sings his praises. “James is an incredible actor’s director with the skills of a writer, and it works so harmoniously. He has the whole story completely mapped out in his head. He knows every beat of the film, how he wants to shoot it, and how he wants the audience to feel. He's determined and dedicated, and it’s his obsession that makes this film great.”

As a writer and a filmmaker Napier Robertson knew what had to be done in order to do justice both to Joy Womack’s story and ballet itself. “The character of Joy puts herself through some incredible circumstances. It was crucial that an audience who knows nothing about ballet will inherently understand why someone would be so devoted to it. Part of it is the wonder and awe of this world. It’s very stylised and visually striking, and then there’s the music, and movement which has such a dynamic athleticism. The film had to capture all of that. It had to look strong and beautiful and be an incredibly powerful, visceral experience for an audience, but at the same time it’s tough, hard and gritty and not trying to be a fluffy version of that world.”

For Napier Robertson that meant “colour and light, the anamorphic lens, frame rates, camera movement – everything to embrace the theatrical nature of ballet, but never to the point that we start to feel disconnected

from the characters. There has to be an emotional journey with Joy that the audience goes on as well. We have to understand it at a much deeper level."

Much of that depth arose from the circle of Polish specialists hired to work on *Joika* and their respective teams.

Many conversations were had between Napier Robertson, Production Designer Joanna Kaczynska and Cinematographer Taumusz Naumiuk. "Talking, talking, talking was the starting point for me on the film," says cinematographer. Tomasz, or Thomas, Naumiuk. "Then I asked myself, 'What can my input be to Joy's story?' There's no one word which can explain and represent it. It has so many turning points it would be disrespectful to use just one word. But maybe 'trance' will do."

Naumiuk's idea was to shoot *Joika* as if it were "Kind of like Degas on acid." He continues, "We knew already a few ballet stories on film, but we wanted to make something not so common. Ballet, for our main character, is like a religion, or like being a drug addict."

"There hasn't been a ballet film like this before," agrees Talia Ryder. "I think people are going to be really shocked at how intense some parts of the ballet world are. I hope people will become immersed in that world and appreciate all the hard work dancers go through to look effortless. I also hope that after watching it they'll want to go and support ballet, see local shows and make ballet a part of their lives."

Production designer Joanna Kaczynska, had not heard of Joy Womack before embarking on the film about her. "I was surprised when I read the script that she is still alive, and so young! The movie is her. This reality and this story don't exist without her…. We decided to create something in between reality and magic, and something that is very much in the past but still in a contemporary time frame. We wanted to create a special world that, maybe, even belongs in Joy's mind, so the audience is not even sure if it is reality or not."

Kaczynska, a great believer in research, knew that first and foremost on her agenda was a manifestation for the screen of all the spaces associated with the Russian ballet. "Not only the theatre," she specifies, "But the places where people live, and the studios and offices in the school.

The making of storyboards went hand in hand with scouting for locations. "It's hard to find empty, unused and unrenovated spaces in a such a huge city as Warsaw (where the film was primarily shot)," Kaczynska says. But, luckily, find one they did: a building, formerly occupied by the University of Warsaw's music department, that had been vacant for a dozen years. "It was a gift for us." There she and her colleagues got busy creating Volkova's flat, dance studios, a kitchen, the Womack house in America, student sleeping quarters and much more.

As Kaczynska sums it up, "All the sets look very old, maybe even before the Second World War, but some props and costumes belong to contemporary times, and all the emotions and the story are from our time." The predominant colour palette for the settings was derived partly from Naumiuk's colour board, part of what he refers to as his mood book – a collection of inspiring images and ideas that can be fed into the film directly or indirectly. Kaczynska describes the tones and textures as "Gradients of grey and brown, reddish, and pieces of wood. Tomek worked it further in post-production, so the colours go further, deeper than what I created on set."

Working with Napier Robertson was, says Kaczynska, a treat. "His positivity was very helpful. He wasn't sure of everything I was trying to present, but he never said something was wrong or that he didn't like it. He gave me a lot of space. He trusted us."

Her favourite scene in the film was the climactic one at the ballet competition in Varna. "We created it from nothing – a huge set built in the biggest studio in Warsaw. It took a lot of energy but was a lot of fun.''

For costume designer Katarzyna Lewinska, the initial impulse was "Trying to figure out what is it that fascinates me about dancers." The answers, she says, are "Their legs and feet, and what they do with their bodies in skin-tight outfits, and how as human beings they turn into something totally different once the music starts."

In common with many designers, Lewinska has certain methods that she relies upon with each new project. "I always start by doing my own Bible for the characters, and then exchange that with the actors. That's how the conversation starts, whether we think the same way or not. Things move along when we meet for fittings. We learn what works and what doesn't. Sometimes it changes. You find the arc of a character doing the fittings. It never stops till all the costumes are in front of the camera."

She too speaks of the colour palette desired by both Napier Robertson and Naumiuk, and how she and her team worked with it. "Violet and purple were among the most significant colours, and ethereal colours. The ballet Don Q[uixote] of course has a dress code: black and red, black and white, black and black."

"There's an elegance in dance clothes that speaks for itself," Kruger chimes in. "You're immediately in a certain place when you see someone in that attire. I wanted to make sure the audience could see that Volkova is an ex-dancer, and for the lines of her clothing to be a mix between that and a teacher – so that it's not too formal when she's in class, but that what I wore would be able to move with me."

Talia Ryder also understands the importance of costuming. "Clothes are how we present ourselves. What you wear is going to affect what you're doing. In *Joika* we wanted to play with colours and shapes. Kasia [Lewinska's nickname] is so smart and detail oriented. In the scene in Volkova's office I wear fitted attire to show my figure and present a certain image to her. At other times in the film when I'm not doing as well – when Joy is overwhelmed and distressed – I wear baggier clothing to hide that part of myself."

Lewinska places savvy distinctions between the kinds of costuming decisions she had to make. "All of the ballet costumes in the film – like the tutus – are easy to do. The more difficult ones are the...let's call them psychological costumes. Talia [Ryder]'s Joy walks through the streets of Moscow in a scarf and purple coat. She's coming back from a rehearsal, it's cold and snowing and she looks really broken psychologically. That costume really works. It's beautiful but also touching. I love a costume like that."

In Joanna Kaczynska's opinion, "It's very hard to say something about this movie without coming back to Joy Womack." And so the final words related to *Joika* should, by rights, probably come from its true source:

"What makes my story worth telling?" Womack wonders, "And unique enough to be turned into a film? That's a question I've been asking myself. I may not have the most successful career in the entire world, but I'm young and involved and still going. What I do have is dedication and a work ethic. No matter what hits me, in my career, I try to persevere. No matter what hardships might happen, I still have a love for ballet."

FINALE: CAST AND CREW BIOS

CAST

Talia Ryder | Joy Womack

Talia Ryder, one of Sundance 2020's break-out stars, was nominated for an Indie Spirit Award and a Critics' Choice Award as the co-lead of Eliza Hittman's critically adored *Never Rarely Sometimes Always*, distributed by Focus Features. She can currently be seen in the lead role of Michael Lewen's Netflix feature *Hello, Goodbye, And Everything In Between*, which was released on Netflix on July 6th, 2022. She will next be seen in Jennifer Kaytin Robinson's Netflix feature *Strangers*, which will be released on September 16th, 2022. Talia just wrapped the indie feature *The Sweet East*, opposite Jacob Elordi, Simon Rex, and. Jeremy O. Harris. Previous film credits include: Steven Spielberg's *West Side Story*, and Mariama Diallo's feature *Master* for Amazon, opposite Regina Hall, which premiered at Sundance 2022. A native of New York, Talia began her performing career on Broadway, and is quickly transitioning to a major career in film and television.

Diane Kruger | Tatiyana Volkova

Diane Kruger has proven to be one of Hollywood's most respected actresses. Upcoming, the German born Kruger will be starring in the highly anticipated noir thriller *Marlowe* directed by Academy Award winner Neil Jordan opposite Liam Neeson and Jessica Lange. The film is based on the novel *The Black-Eyed Blonde* by John Banville, set in 1930s Los Angeles the film follows a private detective (Neeson) who is hired to find the missing lover of an heiress (Kruger). It debuted at the San Sebastian Film Festival as its closing title and also screened at the Zurich Film Festival.

Kruger also stars in Yann Gozlan's French psychological thriller *Visions* starring opposite Mathieu Kassovitz. The film follows a brilliant airline captain, Estelle (Kruger), who leads a seemingly perfect life with her husband until she reunites with a former flame who mysteriously disappears, and Estelle begins to lose her grip on reality. The film is distributed internationally by SND. Kruger also starred in Neil LaBute's neo-noir film *Out Of The Blue* alongside Ray Nicholson.

In 2022, she released her first children's book, *A Name From The Sky*. The book follows an enchanting story about how learning the meaning of her name changed her life – and how our names can help us find our own special powers.

She was seen in director Simon Kinberg's spy thriller, *The 355* starring alongside Jessica Chastain, Lupita Nyong'o, Fan Bingbing, and Penelope Cruz. The film was released by Universal Pictures on January 7, 2022 and follows a group of female spies from international agencies around the world. Kruger also starred and served as executive producer for AJ Edwards' *First Love*.

On television, Kruger was seen starring in The Roku Channel drama series *Swimming with Sharks*, a contemporary retelling of George Huang's 1994 film that both celebrates and skewers the Hollywood studio system, alongside Kiernan Shipka.

Kruger is most widely known for her award-winning role in the German film *In The Fade*, directed by Fatih Akin. The film premiered at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival where Kruger was awarded Best Actress for her performance. Among other accolades, *In The Fade* was awarded Best Foreign Film at the Golden Globe Awards and Critic's Choice Movie Awards in 2018.

In one of her most memorable roles, Kruger played Bridget von Hammersmark in Quentin Tarantino's critically acclaimed hit *Inglourious Basterds*, opposite Brad Pitt, Christoph Waltz and Mike Myers. The film premiered at Cannes Film Festival in 2009, then reached number one at the box office, grossing over $300 million worldwide. For her performance, Kruger earned a Screen Actors Guild Award® nomination for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role, and won the SAG Award® as part of the ensemble cast.

Born in Germany, Kruger was first launched to international fame as the infamous Helen in Wolfgang Petersen's *Troy*, opposite Brad Pitt and Orlando Bloom. That same year, she starred with Josh Hartnett in Paul McGuigan's *Wicker Park*. She has since starred in both the U.S. and in Europe in such films as the Oscar®-nominated French film *Joyeux Noel*; *Copying Beethoven*, with Ed Harris; *Goodbye Bafana*, Bille August's ode to Nelson Mandela, also starring Joseph Fiennes; and *Anything For Her (Pour Elle)*, from director Fred Cavayé.

Kruger is also known for her roles in the Sci-Fi thriller THE HOST, alongside Saoirse Ronan, her dual role in *Mr. Nobody*, with Jared Leto, Sarah Polley and Rhys Ifans, and Baltasar Kormakur's harrowing indie feature about organ trafficking, *Inhale*, also starring Sam Shepherd, Dermot Mulroney and Patricia Arquette. Kruger also starred opposite Djimon Hounsou in the French-filmed action-adventure *Special Forces*, from director Stephane Rybojad and the high grossing Jerry Bruckheimer *National Treasure* films opposite Nicolas Cage.

Kruger is an ambassador for The Global Fund and a strong supporter of amfAR (The Foundation for AIDS Research), UNICEF and Stand Up To Cancer. She currently resides in New York.

Oleg Ivenko | Nikolay Lebedev
Oleg Ivenko is an accomplished ballet dancer and actor. Born in Ukraine, he studied for 10 years at the Kharkov Choreography School (1996-2006) before moving to the Belarusian State Choreography College for four years. Since 2010 Oleg has been a member of the Musa Dzhalil Tatar State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre Company.

Oleg's repertoire of roles includes Basil in *Don Quixote*, Solor in *La Bayadere*, Colin and Alain in *Futile Precaution*, Shurale in *Shurale*, Jester and Neapolitan Dance in *Swan Lake*, Prince, Harlequin and Chinese Dancer in *The Nutcracker*, Happy Dwarf in *Snow White*, Blue Bird in *Sleeping Beauty*, Mercutio and Benvolio in *Romeo And Juliet*, Conrad Ali in *Le Corsaire*, Franc and Friends in *Coppelia*, Nuradin in *Golden Horse*, Student in *Anyuta*, Pierre Gringoire and Akteon in *La Esmeralda*.

Oleg's career as a ballet dancer has awarded him critical acclaim, winning several international competitions across both ballet and theatre. In 2010, he participated in the 5th International Festival of Choreographic Colleges and Schools in Kazan and received diplomas at the International Competition in Varna and the International Competition of Ballet Dancers in Arabesque. In 2012, Oleg took part in Russia Culture's TV competition show *The Big Ballet*, showcasing the best seven Russian ballet couples from the country's leading theatres. That year, he was also a prize winner at the 12th International Ballet Dancers' Competition and Special Prize winner at the Union of Theatre Workers of The Russian Federation.

One of the most important annual events in the world of ballet is the Yuri Grigorovich International Competition - Young Ballet of the World, and Oleg has won twice, first in 2012 as an II Prize winner and again in 2014 as a Grand Prize winner. In 2012 Oleg won the Prize Winner of the Krasnoyarsk International Ballet Competition Grand Prix of Siberia. And in 2016 he was the Prize Winner of the IX Korean International Ballet Competition.

Oleg made his acting debut in 2018 in *The White Crow*, written by acclaimed playwright David Hare and directed by Ralph Fiennes. In *The White Crow*, Oleg played the main role of Rudolf Nureyev. He was chosen for both his dancing and acting abilities and his performances was critically praised.

CREW
James Napier Robertson | Director
James Napier Robertson is a New Zealand writer and director.

His 2015 film *The Dark Horse* was nominated for over 50 awards at festivals around the world and won over 30, Variety stating it "exceptional...the most deserving cinematic export to emerge from New Zealand in years", The Australian calling it "outstanding...a work of the highest artistic excellence" and the RNZ Film Review declaring it "one of the greatest New Zealand films ever made." Napier Robertson won New Filmmaker of the Year at the 2014 Spada Awards, and *The Dark Horse* won Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor and Best Score at the 2014 New Zealand Film Awards. It was released theatrically in the United States in 2016, where it was presented by James Cameron, and in late-2016 was formally screened at the White House for then-President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama.

In 2018, Napier Robertson wrote and directed two episodes of Australian mini-series *Romper Stomper*, which won Most Outstanding Miniseries at the 2018 Logie Awards. In 2019 he worked on BBC mini-series *The Luminaries*, and in 2020 he directed 100 year-spanning Dame Whina Cooper biopic epic, *Whina*. *Whina* recently completed it's theatrical run in New Zealand, taking it's domestic box office by storm and grossing well over $1M. The film will be released in other territories around the world in the coming months.

Belindalee Hope | Producer

Belindalee Hope is the lead Producer on *Joika*, she stepped onboard the project in 2019 and lead the project into production as the first ever New Zealand, Poland co-production. Together with Director James Napier Robertson she travelled to Poland for production, returning to oversee post-production in New Zealand.

Belindalee was Co-producer on *Shadow In The Cloud* starring Chloë Grace Moretz and which premiered at TIFF 2020. She was a Producer on Royd Tolkien's *There's A Hole In My Bucket*, a documentary feature and has produced several short films. Her short *Everybody Else Is Taken* with writer/ Director Jessica-Grace Smith premiered at NYICFF 2017, won the Youth Jury Award at Palm Springs ShortFest 2017 and the best narrative short fiction at Barcelona IFF 2017.

Belindalee has been a Line Producer on notable indies such as Taika Waititi and Jemaine Clement's *What We Do In The Shadows* (2014), the re-boot of a kiwi classic *Pork Pie* (2017) and the totally twisted *Guns Akimbo* (2019) starring Daniel Radcliffe and Samara Weaving. Her film roots go deep into middle earth, as a Production Manager on Peter Jackson's *The Lord Of The Rings* film trilogies, as well as *The Hobbit* sequels and Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong* (2005), in which you can even find her cameo on the streets of New York as Cherrie Rype.

Tom Hern | Producer
Tom Hern recently co-wrote, produced and directed his first drama series, *The Panthers,* about The Polynesian Panthers; a group of street-gangsters-turned-social-revolutionaries, who modelled themselves on The Black Panthers in the USA. The series broke streaming records in New Zealand before premiering at TIFF 2021 (as one of only four series in the programme; and Hern's third production in as many years to play at the festival). In 2022, *The Panthers* was nominated for Best Limited Series at the Emmy-qualifying Banff Rockie Awards and is currently nominated for a record-breaking 18 awards at the NZ TV Awards.

After starting out as an actor, Hern broke onto the international scene as a creative producer with his production *The Dark Horse* (2015); a gritty-based-on-a-true-story-drama, directed by his longtime friend and collaborator, James Napier Robertson. *TDH* launched at TIFF to glowing reviews, sales to all major territories and Oscar-buzz for Cliff Curtis's transformative performance and went on to win Audience Awards at the Rotterdam, San Francisco, Seattle, and Palm Springs International Film Festivals.

Later, alongside Occupant Entertainment, Hern produced the high-octane action-comedy, *Guns Akimbo* (starring Samara Weaving and Daniel Radcliffe) and the grippingly mad action-horror, *Shadow In The Cloud* (starring Chloë Grace Moretz and directed by Roseanne Liang) which won the TIFF 2020 Midnight Madness Award.

Hern sat on the International Jury for the Berlin Film Festival (Generation Section) in 2015 and won the pitching prize at the MIFF 37 Degrees South market in Melbourne in 2016. He won the Moa-award for "Best Film" at the 2014 New Zealand Film Awards for *The Dark Horse* (and was a dual nominee that year, also getting a nod for festival darling, *Everything We Loved*). In 2022, Hern won a Pacific Music Award, for Best Video Director.

Klaudia Śmieja Rostworowska | Producer
Klaudia Śmieja-Rostworowska is a Producer based in Warsaw, Poland. She is an active EFA and Polish Producers Association member, working as a tutor and panelist for selected international events.

In 2015 Klaudia Śmieja-Rostworowska together with Beata Rzeźniczek founded MADANTS, a Warsaw-based production company with the aim to produce independent films with potential for distribution and international festival access. Since the moment of establishment it has become one of the most active Polish production outlets involved in such films as Claire Denis' *High Life* (TIFF, San Sebastian FF, US distribution by A24) starring Robert Pattinson and Juliette Binoche, partly shot in Poland; as well as Hafsteinn Gunnar Sigurdsson's *Under The Tree* (Venice FF, TIFF, US distribution by Magnolia Pictures); Babis Maridis' Sundance-selected *Pity*; Emir Baigazin's *The River* (Best Director winner at Venice Orizzonti selection); Icelandic *Lamb* by Valdimar

Jóhannsson starring Noomi Rapace (Un Certain Regard Cannes 2021, US distribution by A24), produced with Warner Bros; a dark hip-hop musical titled *Other People*, directed by Aleksandra Terpińska (Tallinn Black Nights FF 2021); and Agnieszka Smoczyńska's first English-language film *The Silent Twins*, starring *Black Panther* actress Letitia Wright, selected for Cannes Un Certain Regard 2022.

She is involved in several upcoming co-productions, including among others *Babi Yar* by Sergei Loznitsa, *Joika* by James Napier Robertson starring Talia Ryder and Diane Kruger and the newest Carlos Raygadas film.

Joanna Kaczynska | Production Designer
Joanna Kaczynska, a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam, has worked on many Polish Television, Film and Theatre productions as an interior decorator and set designer.

She had the opportunity to work on three films by Jerzy Skolimowski: *Four Nights With Anna*, *11 Minutes* and *Essential Killing* which won the Special Jury Prize at the 67th Venice International Film Festival, Golden Astor Award at the Mar del Plata International Film Festival as well as the Golden Lions Award for Best Film at the Gdynia Film Festival.

She worked on two big series with acclaimed Polish directors for Canal Plus: *Illegals* directed by Jan P. Matuszyński and Leszek Dawid, and *Blood of Blood* directed by Xawery Żuławski. For her collaboration on Xawery Zulawski's film *Polish-Russian War*, she received a nomination for the Polish Film Academy Award for set design. She worked at the Łukasz Ronduda films *Heart Of Love* and *Performer*, which went to Berlin International Film Festival 2015 and where the production won the prestigious THINK: Film Award.

At the last Polish Feature Film Festival in Gdynia, the film for which she created the set design *All Our Fears* directed by Łukasz Ronduda and Łukasz Gut won five awards: Journalists Award, Film Discussion Clubs Award, Youth Jury Award, best cinematography and Golden Lions for the best film of the Festival.

Waldemar Pokromski | Hair and Make Up Designer
Waldemar Pokromski was born in Poland and is one of the most internationally acclaimed make-up and hair designers. He began his career as a make-up artist at the Babelsberg Studio, Germany in 1972 and since then has worked on more than sixty film productions.

Mr. Pokromski has worked with some of the greatest film directors: Steven Spielberg (*Schindler's List*), Roman Polanski (*The Pianist, The Ninth Gate, Oliver Twist*). Michele Haneke (*Cache, The Piano Teacher, Funny Games, The Castle, The Time Of The Wolf, The White Ribbon*), Tom Tykwer (*Perfume, The Princess And The Warrior*), Volker Schlöndorff (*The Ogre*), Andrzej Wajda (*The Revenge, Katyn*), Oliver Stone (*Snowden*), Stefan Ruzowitzky (*The Counterfeiters*), Terence Malick (*Radegund*), Anthony and Joe Russo (*Captain America: Civil War*), and Pawel Pawlikowski (*Cold War*). Nine of them were made by Oscar winning directors. He had worked on three Oscar winning films: *Schindler's List, The Pianist, and The Counterfeiters*, as well as on three Academy nominated films: *Downfall, Bader Meinhof* and *Katyń*.

Mr Pokromski has won the "Golden Lola" awarded by the Polish Film Festival in America, Chicago to Mr. Pokromski for his outstanding achievements in the art of film outside of Poland (2010). He has also won the "Golden Lion" given for the film *Revers* and awarded by the Gdynia Film Festival, Poland for best make make-up design (2009) Mr. Pokromski was nominated by the British Academy of Film (BAFTA) as best make-up artist for the film *Schindler's List* (1994)

Mr. Pokromski is a member of: The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, The European Film Academy, The German Film Academy, and The Polish Film Academy.

Tomasz Naumiuk | Cinematographer

Mr. Naumiuk graduated from the "Lodz" film school, one of the best schools for cinematographers in the world, and has under his belt dozens of commercials helmed by renowned directors, feature films and television series (most recently *Odwilz* and *Wataha* for HBO and *Lethal White* for BBC).

In the last few years, he worked on several award-winning feature films including *Nina* by Olga Chajdas, *53 Wars* by Ewa Bukowska, *High Life* by Claire Denis and a Berlinale Premiere: *Mr Jones* by Agnieszka Holland. He is extremely versatile and likes to experiment with new technology.

He is the recipient of the following awards: Best Cinematography - Camerimage 2018 Polish Films Competition (*Nina*, 2018); Best Cinematography - "Youth and Film" - Festival of Film Debuts in Koszalin (*Disco Polo*, 2015); and Best Cinematography - "Youth and Film" - Festival of Film Debuts in Koszalin (*Being Like Kazimierz Deyna*, 2012). He has received the following nominations: Polish Cinematographers Guild Awards (*Mr. Jones*, 2020; *Nina*, 2019; *Amok*, 2018); Best Cinematography - Polish Academy Awards (*Mr. Jones*, 2020); and Best Cinematography - Camerimage 2019 International Competition (*Mr. Jones*, 2019).

Chris Plummer | Editor
Chris Plummer is a highly sought-after screen editor, working across both high-end television and feature films in New Zealand, Australia, and the US.

Chris has edited many of New Zealand's most highly regarded films, including *BOY* (dir. Taika Waititi/ Whenua Films, 2010), *In My Father's Den* (dir. Brad McGann/ Icon Entertainment, 2004), *Black Sheep* (dir. Jonathan King/ IFC, 2006) and has worked with renowned NZ filmmakers including, Vincent Ward (*Rain Of The Children*, 2008) and Toa Fraser (*Naming Number Two*, 2006).

A versatile editor working across art house and US studio movies, Chris is equally comfortable finding creative solutions for modest independent films, as well the highest level of studio productions. He has worked with Brenda Chapman (*BRAVE*, 2012), Andrew Adamson (*Mr. Pip*, 2012), George Lucas (*Strange Magic*, 2015), and Steven Spielberg on his first 'mocap' film *The Adventures Of Tin Tin* (2011). Through Lucas Film/ILM he has managed large editorial teams and worked on cutting-edge R&D with new technologies in film making.

Chris' recent credits include Wayne Blair's hugely popular feature film, *Top End Wedding* (Goalpost Pictures, 2019) and Working Titles' major television adaptation of Eleanor Catton's acclaimed novel, *The Luminaries* (dir. Claire McCarthy). Most recently, Chris cut the feature film *Whina* (GFC Films, 2021) for acclaimed filmmaker James Napier Robertson. He is currently serving as editor on the four-part SBS crime series, *True Colours* (Bunya Productions, 2022).

Martin Brinkler, ACE | Editor
Martin Brinkler has established himself over recent years as one of London's most exciting film editors, successfully working with both art-house auteur filmmakers and mainstream entertainment.

Credits include critically acclaimed OMAR, a Political Thriller directed by Oscar-nominated & Golden Globe winner Hany Abu-Assad. Winning the Jury Award at the Cannes Film Festival 2013 and a nomination for the Best Foreign Film Oscar at the 2014 Academy Awards. His long-time collaboration with genre Director, Johannes Roberts includes OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR (Twentieth Century Fox) and the box office smash hit 47 METERS DOWN (Entertainment studios) and was the highest grossing independent film of 2017.

Martin recently completed post production with Director Udayan Prasad on STARZ/ LIONSGATE produced, first season of BECOMING ELIZABETH, A 16th century costume drama, and New Zealand based creature-feature THE TANK Directed by Scott Walker.

Between time in the editing room, Martin is also a panelist for numerous film school scholarship funds, A visiting tutor at the National Film and Television School and a member of the American Cinema Editors (ACE). He currently resides in New Zealand and is represented by Sandra Marsh & Associates