



Vai

PRESS KIT

(C) BROWN SUGAR APPLE GRUNT PRODUCTIONS

CONTACT:

Kerry Warkia
Producer
Brown Sugar Apple Grunt Productions
E. kerry@bsagproductions.com

FILM FESTIVAL/SCREENING ENQUIRIES:

Hayley Weston
New Zealand Film Commission
E. hayleyw@nzfilm.co.nz

SALES:

Nicola Goelzhaeuser
VP, Sales & Acquisitions
MPI Media Group
E. nicola@mpimedia.com

NZ/AU DISTRIBUTION:

Jill MacNab
Vendetta Films
E. jill@vendettafilms.co.nz

Technical Information

Film name: Vai

Genre: Drama

Duration: 90 minutes

Available format: DCP

Frame rate: 24fps

Aspect ratio: DCI Scope 2.39:1

Country of origin: Aotearoa New Zealand

Languages Spoken: Fijian, Tongan, Roviana (Solomon Islands), Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, English and Māori (NZ)

Subtitles: English

Film Festival Screenings

2019 Berlinale International Film Festival (NATIVE Programme - Opening Night Film), Germany

2019 SXSW Film Festival, Austin TX, USA

2019 Māoriland Film Festival (Opening Night Film), Aotearoa New Zealand

2019 Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian – Native Cinema Showcase New York, USA

2019 LA Asian Pacific Film Festival, USA

2019 Seattle International Film Festival, USA

2019 Roxbury International Film Festival, USA

2019 Sydney Film Festival, Australia

2019 Taormina Film Festival, Sicily

2019 Edinburgh International Film Festival, Scotland

Awards

2019 Special Jury Award for International Narrative – LA Asian Pacific Film Festival

Logline

A film about female empowerment that spans the breadth of the Pacific, telling the story of one woman's life in eight separate moments from the perspective of eight different Pacific island cultures.

Short Synopsis

Vai is a portmanteau feature film made by nine female Pacific filmmakers, filmed in seven different Pacific countries: Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Kuki Airani (Cook Islands), Samoa, Niue and Aotearoa (New Zealand). It is about the journey of empowerment through culture over the lifetime of one woman, Vai, played by a different indigenous actress in each of the Pacific countries. In each of these Pacific nations 'vai' means water.

Vignettes - In Order of Appearance

FIJI:

In a modest dwelling in Fiji a 7-year-old girl with boundless energy tries to understand why she has to say goodbye to her home country and extended family, as her mother prepares her to leave Fiji.

Written by: Sharon Whippy & Nicole Whippy Directed by: Nicole Whippy

Vai: Mereani Tuimatansiga

TONGA:

Vai, now 13, dreams of going to NZ to sing but her day-to-day chore of filling up water bottles from the neighbourhood water tanks makes her feel as though she will never leave Tonga.

Written & directed by: 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki

Vai: 'Ar-Ramadi Longopoa

SOLOMON ISLANDS:

While fishing from a small canoe off the coast of the Solomon Islands, 16-year-old Vae argues with her mother about the correct way to bait the fishing hook.

Written & directed by: Matasila Freshwater

Vae: Betsy Luitolo

NZ BORN SAMOAN:

Having worked hard to get into university, 21-year-old Vai is now a top student and one of only two Pacific islanders in her class but with her attendance waning due to pressures at home, she finds it difficult to get support from her tutor and struggles to find her voice in a system that isn't built for her.

Written & directed by: Amberley Jo Aumua

Vai: Agnes Pele

KUKI AIRANI (COOK ISLANDS):

Amidst apathy, fear and the trappings of colonialism Vai makes a stand for change on her island of Rarotonga, finding her voice as an activist.

Written & directed by: Mīria George

Vai: Evotia-Rose Araitī

SAMOA:

Now in her 40s, Vai returns to Samoa to perform for an important event but, having been away for many years, Vai struggles with her connection to the performance.

Written & directed by: Marina Alofagia McCartney

Vai: Fiona Collins

NIUE:

Vai, now 64, tries to convince her granddaughter Moana, that leaving the island of Niue will give her an equal start in life.

Written & directed by: Dianna Fuemana

Vai: Maliaga Erick

ĀOTEAROA:

An elderly Vai, 80 years old, gathers with her whānau (family) by the river's edge to perform a naming ceremony for her great granddaughter, Vai.

Written & directed by: Becs Arahanga

Vai: Hinetu Dell

Director Bio - Becs Arahanga



Becs Arahanga (Kai Tahu/ Ngati Raukawa ōku Iwi, Kati Mako te Hapū) wrote and directed the short film *Laundry* at the end of 2016. *Laundry* was selected for the New Zealand International Film Festival 'Best Shorts' and Show Me Shorts programmes, where it was nominated for four awards - Best Edit, Best Screenplay, Best Director, and Best Film. *Laundry* is still in its festival life, having recently played at ImagineNative in Toronto, San Diego, FIFO in Tahiti, Tampere Film Festival and Seattle International Film Festival. Becs has also just completed filming on her next film, *Hinekura*, which follows the journey of a young girl, Hine, as she comes of age and enters the sacred space of women where she is nurtured, challenged and then celebrated. *Hinekura* is set to release in 2019.

Director Bio - Amberley Jo Aumua



Amberley Jo Aumua (Ngāti Hāua - New Zealand / Salelesi, Toamua, Mamau Tai - Samoa) is of Samoan and Māori descent from Manurewa, New Zealand. She is a writer/director who holds a Bachelor of Performing and Screen Arts. Her first short film *Waiting* (2017) won the Jury Prize for Best Film at the New Zealand International Film Festival, Best Student Film at the Show Me Shorts International Film Festival and was in competition at Toronto International Film Festival. It has currently screened in over twenty film festivals, most recently at the 2018 BFI London Film Festival. Her recent short film *Moa Ma Le Pinko* (Chicken & Bingo, 2018) made with two other indigenous key creatives, was created as part of the Native Slam film challenge for Māoriland Film Festival where it won the Audience Award and was selected to screen at the 2018 ImagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival. She is currently researching and writing her feature film and working on other projects.

Director Bio - Matasila Freshwater



Matasila Freshwater (Nusa Hope, Roviana Lagoon (Western Province) / Matakota, Dugaha and Baguri / Vuregare) is a writer/director with a background in anthropology, film, and animation. She is passionate about exploring cultural complexities through storytelling. Matasila's last New Zealand Film Commission funded animated short film *Shmeat* (2016), was a New Zealand International Film Festival Official Selection for New Zealand's Best Short Film and appeared in a number of festivals including 2016 Sitges International Fantasy Film Festival and was awarded Best Animation in A Night of Horror Film Festival in Sydney.

Director Bio - Dianna Fuemana



Dianna Fuemana's (Mutalau - Niue / America Samoa / Pago Pago) career as a playwright and theatre director spans twenty years with her plays being published and produced internationally. She delved into film-making in 2012 when she won the Script to Screen Writers' Internship with Killer Films in NYC. Her first short film *Sunday Fun Day* was shot in 2016. It won the Sun Jury Prize at 2017 Imaginative Film Media Arts Festival, Toronto.

"Bringing Niue and her people to the screen is a rare opportunity. This film gives rise to the women on Niue who keep our traditions, our language, our home fires burning. They allow me to roam free and return to a unique culture that is mine, away from the noise of the world." - Dianna Fuemana

Director Bio – Mīria George



Mīria George (Arorangi, Rarotonga and Areora, Atiu / Te Arawa and Ngāti Awa) is a poet and writer, director, producer of theatre. An award-winning playwright, Mīria's work has toured New Zealand, Australia, Hawai'i, Canada and the United Kingdom. Her plays include *And What Remains*, *Sunset Road*, *The Vultures* and *The Night Mechanics*. Mīria recently directed the Premiere Season of *Bless The Child* by Hone Kouka for the New Zealand Festival and Auckland Arts Festival. In 2017, Mīria was the Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer in Residence at University of Hawai'i and won the Bruce Mason Playwriting Award. Mīria holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the International Institute of Modern Letters. Also a published poet, *The Wet Season* is Mīria's debut collection of poetry, published by the Wai-te-ata Press. *Vai* is Mīria's film directorial debut.

Director Bio – 'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki



'Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki (Talau & Falaleu - Vava'u / Vaini & Malapo - Tongatapu) holds close to her heart her relationship with God, her grounded principles in gender equity, feminism, human rights and the right of every human being to live a life of dignity regardless of colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and religion. She does many things but what she loves most is telling stories in whatever possible way she can. She prioritises giving voice to the lived realities of women and children's stories across the Pacific.

Director Bio – Marina Alofagia McCartney



Marina Alofagia McCartney (Pito Nu'u, Satupa'itea, Savai'i - Samoa and Vailoa / Palauli, Savai'i - Samoa / Geordie - England) is from a Geordie Father, Samoan Mother and Cook Islands Step-Mother. Marina is powerfully aware of her cultural heritage, how this affects the way we are viewed and how we view others. She holds an MA in Screen Production (First Class Honours) and is an award-winning filmmaker and teaching fellow at Pacific Studies, University of Auckland. Her academic areas of expertise are Pacific Studies, Pacific Filmmaking, Pacific representation on screen and representations of the Pacific woman.

Director Bio – Nicole Whippy



Nicole Whippy (Tota, Matagali - Mavana, Vanua Balavu, Lau, Fiji / Savusavu, Vanua Levu, Fiji / New Caledonia / New Zealand) was born in Suva, Fiji where she lived for the first couple of years of her life until her family migrated to NZ. She is best known for her work as a Television and Theatre Actress. *Vai* will be her film directorial debut.

“It is an absolute honour to find myself here creating *Vai* with my sister and eight other strong, inspiring Pasifika women. I hope that as a roopu we each represent our island with dignity while showcasing the uniqueness of that nation, its people and landscape.” – Nicole Whippy

Writer Bio – Sharon Whippy



Sharon Whippy (Tota, Matagali - Mavana, Vanua Balavu, Lau, Fiji / Savusavu, Vanua Levu, Fiji / New Caledonia / New Zealand).

“Kai Loma, ‘in between’, that’s me, that’s where I write from, my writing inhabits this space. Fiji born with roots in Savusavu and Vanua Balavu, I grew up in Auckland, now I live and work in Melbourne. I’ve written all my life – poetry, prose and short stories. To see our stories brought to life is a privilege, it shouldn’t be, but it is.” – Sharon Whippy

Producer Bio – Kerry Warkia

Kerry Warkia (Papua New Guinean / Scottish) is a producer who has been at the forefront of some of New Zealand’s most innovative content for film, television and web. Passionate about telling Māori and Pasifika stories she has just produced her second feature film *Vai* set in seven Pacific island countries.

In 2016 Kerry produced, ground-breaking feature film *Waru* made up of eight vignettes - made in collaboration with nine wāhine (female) Māori film-makers.

In 2014 Kerry was acknowledged as that year’s “Woman to Watch” at the NZ WIFT Awards and in 2017, she was awarded the SPADA Independent Producer of the Year Award, a testament to Kerry’s determination to tell a diverse range of stories that ignite her passion.

Producer Bio – Kiel McNaughton

Kiel McNaughton (Māori - Waikato-Tainui / Chinese / Pākehā) is a director and producer most experienced in television comedy and drama.

After spending four and a half years in front of the camera as a core cast member on New Zealand’s most watched soap *Shortland Street*, Kiel moved behind the camera to direct and executive produce the award-winning comedy series *Auckland Daze*. He has since directed full seasons of *Find Me A Māori Bride* and *This Is Piki* and co-produced feature films *Waru* and *Vai*.

In 2017 Kiel was awarded the SPADA Independent Producer of the Year.

Kiel's first film as a director will be *The Educator* - a fast-paced action/comedy set in a cul-de-sac in New Zealand.

Contact:

Kerry Warkia - kerry@bsagproductions.com

Kiel McNaughton - kiel@bsagproductions.com

Producers' Statement

Vai was created as a follow up to our feature film *Waru* (2017) which was a portmanteau film made with nine wāhine Māori (Māori women).

The goal with *Vai* was to bring underrepresented voices to the fore and tell a story of female empowerment through culture which is inclusive of as many Pacific Island cultures as possible.

The writers and directors are all New Zealanders with indigenous ancestral links to each of the Pacific Islands where they set their stories.

We chose the nine film makers and invited them to work together and with us to develop the stories they wanted to tell, within a set of creative restrictions that each film had to follow:

- 10 minutes long;
- Real time / continuous take where possible;
- Lead indigenous female character named *Vai*;
- *Vai* has a shared history throughout stories;
- A moment in *Vai*'s life around 8-12 years apart from the other stories;
- Theme of female empowerment through culture;
- Water to be used as a visual theme.

Vai was filmed over six weeks in August/September 2018. The directors each got a full day's camera rehearsal and one day to shoot. Our NZ crew travelled to eight Pacific islands (including the North and South Islands of Aotearoa). We used additional local crew in each of the different Pacific Islands.

Locations:

Fiji - Suva

Tonga - Siesia Island

Solomon Islands - Honiara

NZ Born Samoan - Auckland

Kuki Airani (Cook Islands) - Rarotonga

Samoa - Manono Island

Niue - Uluvehi

Āoteaora - Motueka

Credits

Directed by:

Nicole Whippy

‘Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki

Matasila Freshwater

Amberley Jo Aumua

Mīria George

Marina Alofagia McCartney

Dianna Fuemana

Becs Arahanga

Written by:

Sharon Whippy & Nicole Whippy, ‘Ofa-Ki-Levuka Guttenbeil-Likiliki, Matasila Freshwater, Amberley Jo Aumua, Mīria George, Marina Alofagia McCartney, Dianna Fuemana, Becs Arahanga

Producers:

Kerry Warkia & Kiel McNaughton

Director of Photography:

Drew Sturge

Production Designer:

Riria Lee

Costume Designer:

Lindah Lepou

Music by:

Lauren King

Editor:

Dione Chard

Casting Director:

Christina Asher

Cast Credits

Lead Cast:

Fiji

Tonga

Solomon Islands

NZ Born Samoan

Kuki Airani (Cook Islands)

Samoa

Niue

Āotearoa (NZ)

Mereani Tuimatanisiga

‘Ar-Ramadi Longopoa

Betsy Luitolo

Agnes Pele

Evotia-Rose Araithi

Fiona Collins

Maliaga Erick

Hinetu Dell

Supporting Cast:

Frankie Adams, Ana Tuigamala, Ateca Ravuvu, Miliame (Mima) Radinasawa Mati, Vao Langi, Sami-Pola Z.B.C Likiliki, Indira Moala Stewart, Rokolani Lavea, Kathy McRae, Patricia Wichman, Taungaroa Emile, June Baudinet, Sariah Magaoa, Rhonda Tibble, Kasina Campbell.

Additional information about cast

Fiji: 7-year-old actress Mereani (Vai) and Mima (Yaca) have never acted before.

Tonga: None of the cast had ever acted before. Ar-Ramani (Vai) has the job of collecting water for her family in real life.

Solomon Islands: Betsy Luitolo (Vae) has never acted before.

NZ Born Samoan: Agnes Pele (Vai) has never acted before.

Kuki Airani (Cook Islands): Evotia-Rose (Vai) has never acted before.

Samoa: The hair of Moana from Disney's 'Moana' was modelled from Fiona Collins (Vai). Frankie Adams (Mata) stars in US sci-fi series 'The Expanse'.

Niue: The entire cast were first time actors.

Āotearoa (NZ): Hinetu Dell (Vai) has never acted before. Rhonda Tibble (Mata) adjusted the ceremonial chant to suit each pepi (baby) who was playing Pepi Vai in the different takes.