

***Angel Films præsenterer***

# **MILLA**



**Premiere:** 5. november 2020

**Længde:** 118 minutter

**Censur:** 15 år

**Instruktør:** Shannon Murphy

## **Premierebiografer:**

Grand Teatret, Empire Bio, Gloria, Valby, Café

Biografen Odense, Øst for Paradis, Biffen

Aalborg, Holbæk, Hillerød, Ishøj m.fl.

## **Synopsis:**

Teenageren Milla føler sig som en supernova på kanten af at eksplodere. Hun er alvorligt syg, men det forhindrer hende ikke i at smaskforelske sig i Moses - en småkriminell, der ikke har meget kørende for sig. Millas nye kæreste falder bestemt ikke i forældrenes smag, men Moses bliver starten på en afgørende fase af Millas liv; en fase hvori Milla lærer sig selv og sine nærmeste, hvordan man lever livet hver dag som om det var den sidste.

MILLA havde verdenspremiere i hovedkonkurrence på Venedig Film Festival, og den har sidenhen deltaget på festivaler verden over og vundet mange priser.

Trailer og pressemateriale kan hentes på: <http://angelfilms.dk/milla>

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## LOGLINE

Babyteeth is a heartbreaking comedy about how good it is not to be dead yet and how far we will go for love.

## SYNOPSIS

When seriously ill teenager Milla falls madly in love with smalltime drug dealer Moses, it's her parents' worst nightmare. But as Milla's first brush with love brings her a new lust for life, things get messy and traditional morals go out the window. Milla soon shows everyone in her orbit - her parents, Moses, a sensitive music teacher, a budding child violinist, and a disarmingly honest, pregnant neighbour - how to live like you have nothing to lose. What might have been a disaster for the Finlay family instead leads to letting go and finding grace in the glorious chaos of life. Babyteeth joyously explores how good it is not to be dead yet and how far we will go for love.







## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My ambition with *Babyteeth* was to find a cinematic language to match the peculiar tone of irreverence and sentiment in Rita Kalnejais' whip smart script. I was inspired by the challenge of harmonising this duality of humour and pain in every frame of the film. There could be nothing tentative in my approach in order to authentically represent our protagonist Milla, who at 15 is at the precipice of feeling more alive than she's ever felt, yet abruptly facing her own mortality. The film language involves stylised disruptions through text, music and breaking the fourth wall which allow us to shift and move at Milla's accelerated pace. She falls in love with Moses, who she sees as an opportunity to push boundaries in an extreme way. As we dig deeper into Milla's parents lives we uncover the dysfunction and complicated tensions that exist as this family face their worst nightmare. They are stripped back to their rawest forms. I hope audiences have a visceral experience watching *Babyteeth*, one they feel deep in their bones that allows them to ache for and celebrate their own relationships.



## GENESIS OF THE FILM

Babyteeth is based on a play by Australian playwright and actress Rita Kalnejais, first performed to a sell out season at the Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney in 2012. On the show's opening night, producer Alex White and executive producer Jan Chapman were both in attendance, and the notion that the play would make for a great film was instantaneous. White was working for Chapman at the time and they made a beeline for each other immediately after the curtains closed, both agreeing that this was the project they had been looking for. Very shortly after, they optioned the work and began working with Kalnejais to develop it into a screenplay.

"When I first saw the play, I was completely besotted by its irreverence and the tone of the piece," said White. "It's a tough subject matter but the way it was handled was very delicate and humorous. It allows people to laugh at the unconventional aspects of life and to embrace love in all its forms."

White goes on to explain why this tone would lend itself well to film, saying "What compelled us to adapt Babyteeth from stage to screen was Rita's writing. The play itself felt extremely cinematic. The first conversations (with Rita) were about how she could open the world up into a screenplay. It was exciting and fresh and so original because she's so unique. I think she wanted more for those characters. She was extremely happy with the play but there was more life in them to give. It was just really exciting to start talking about the possibilities."

Kalnejais echoes White's sentiments - expanding on what she was exploring in the play was an invigorating prospect. "I think that with plays like this it's like you are exploring a question. One that you're probably not likely to answer, but something that's going to kind of excite you. So, my question at the time was, 'How do you love like you've got nothing to lose?' The play came out of that, and then it was lucky that it was such a big question, because it continued to resonate in the development of the film"

The decision to keep Kalnejais on for the screenplay was an easy one. "Often writers don't adapt their own screenplays, but I don't think we even thought of anyone else doing it," said Chapman. "Rita had a real knack. Her story is about families and the way we navigate the lives we live every day. This film helps you understand how we all behave towards each other. The ridiculous things

we do. The things that contradict what we think we're going to do. The humour in small situations and the pain."

Charged with helming the exploration of how we interact with each other, was director Shannon Murphy. First approached by White and Chapman with the story, this would be Murphy's first feature.

"The film was pretty well developed by the time we started thinking about Shannon," explains Chapman. "She had made a number of short films and a lot of theatre and had recently directed On The Ropes (for SBS Television) which I thought was incredibly vibrant. She joined the team very easily. It was an all-female team then - myself, Alex, Rita and then Shannon. Shannon seemed to have a lot of energy, an understanding of the film, of what it could be like and fitted in very easily to it."

From her career in the theatre world, Murphy was drawn to Kalnejais' work already. The script further clinched this, Murphy says: "When I first read it, I was incredibly moved by the story but also intrigued by the dynamics between the family members and the people outside the main core family that infiltrate into their lives. I thought the tone of the piece was very unique and challenging and so I wanted to take on that challenge."

That tone, described as a heartbreaking comedy, is articulated by Kalnejais as "A family drama that's funny until it's really not funny. At every step it looks like everyone's making the worst possible decisions, but they're perfect and are pure grace for this family."

The family at the center - the Finlays - are holding tightly to each other at the beginning of the film. "When we first meet the Finlay family, they seem like quite a normal family, trying to cope in their own way on their own journey with their daughter's recent diagnosis," explains Murphy. "As we dig deeper into the layers of what's going on, we realise there's actually been quite a lot of complicated tensions that have been happening, even prior to this." For Murphy, Babyteeth has been an incredibly rewarding project. "I have loved every minute of directing this film with our glorious cast and dedicated crew," she says.





## THE LOCATIONS

The film was shot on location in Sydney, but the filmmakers didn't want to showcase stereotypical Sydney images and instead captured the essence of the city.

With such a large portion of the film being set in the Finlay household, finding the right home was important. The process of finding the house, located in St Ives, was a surprisingly quick process, with White saying "We basically saw one house, fell in love with it and worked in it for the majority of the shoot. It had to feel like a space that these people have lived in and loved for a long time. The woman who owned the house built it and raised her children there, so it already came with a lot of those feelings."

This space was a perfect fit for the character of Milla and the feelings she was having at the time. Director Shannon Murphy explains, "What I loved about the house is that it had a glass courtyard, which was very much prominent in all the shots in the house. It's impossible to get away from the glass. We talked a lot about how Milla feels like a bird trapped in this atrium. Even though inside it feels warm and inviting and like a place where you would want to be - she was busting to get out of that space and so that's what that house offered us."

Like the Finlay home, the home of Gidon -found in a community housing block in La Perouse - helped inform the characters. "Gidon" is Milla's music teacher and she goes there to learn about music but it's also very much Gidon's 'School of Life,' where he offers so much more to students than just a lesson in violin," explains Murphy. "Both Milla and Anna have often come to Gidon as their oracle, who is able to tell them exactly what place they're in or what they need, before they are even able to assess that for themselves."

"There was an incredible coziness in the design of Gidon's house and so much detail was added to allude to his past life, all the things that he collected. He opened up Milla's world to a much larger demographic than the safety of the small existence she has in her glass boxed home," said Murphy. For Milla and Moses' big night out, the filmmakers utilised places they themselves loved as well as drawing on experiences they had.

"It's like so many great nights out that are long and rambling. You go from one place to another and you don't know where you are going to end up," says Murphy. "I talked a lot with our designer Sherree Philips about creating a party that was more of an art school party, where no matter what room you walked into you weren't quite sure what to expect. We created space for this interaction between Milla and a performance artist on the night out, which becomes transformative for her."

## CASTING

Rising stars Eliza Scanlen (Sharp Objects, Little Women) and Toby Wallace (Romper Stomper, Acute Misfortune) joined acclaimed actors Essie Davis (Game of Thrones, The Babadook) and Ben Mendelsohn (Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, ANIMAL KINGDOM) as the lead cast in Babyteeth.

Producer Alex White said, "It's been a true joy to watch our incredible cast bring this story to life. Eliza Scanlen and Toby Wallace give breakout performances alongside the electrifying duo of Essie Davis and Ben Mendelsohn, who returned home to make this film with us."

## PRODUCTION AND COSTUME DESIGN

Production and costume design intertwined, especially when it came to considerations around time, with director Shannon Murphy, production designer Sherree Philips and wardrobe designer Amelia Gebler talking at length about how they wanted the film to feel modern, but not rooted in a particular year. They avoided using a lot of phones because they didn't want technology, an indicator of time, to pin the story down. They also endeavoured to pick locations and design elements that were generationally accessible for the audience.

"We really wanted to honour the fact that these days, the younger kids are all wearing vintage clothing or replica styles" said Murphy. "We paid a lot of attention to that and picked spaces that could be accessed by any generation that was watching the film because it's very much a film about a young girl's memory and in many ways it's a story that Milla could be telling from the past and from the future."

## HAIR AND MAKEUP

Hair and makeup play a pivotal role in Milla's illness. "I've worked with Angela Conte (hair and makeup designer) before and we always talk about aiming for bold looks. I really like to push what we can get away with in terms of visually exploring character."

Conte and Murphy felt it was essential that actress Eliza Scanlen shave her head to play Milla, a requirement that was made clear to all the young actresses that auditioned for the role.

Said Murphy, "I'm all about raw, authentic performances. We do the same with the lighting and camera work. It would have been impossible to do it any other way and luckily, Eliza felt the same way. She felt strongly that it was essential for her to feel what Milla was feeling and to be able to lose her hair and shed that part of herself that so many of us hold on to and understand what that means - to see yourself so drastically changed by what is happening."

Scanlen concurs her commitment to it saying, "I knew that this was a really special film and if I got the role, I would have to do it. I don't think I would have had permission to tell this story if I didn't shave my head. I think it's a very emotionally intense part of the chemotherapy process." Scanlen found being in public was confronting and, in the end, necessary for her to empathise with her character.

## CINEMATOGRAPHY

For Babyteeth, director Shannon Murphy expressed how fortunate she was to work with Andy Commis, a cinematographer she had admired for a very long time. Says Murphy, "Andy and I talked a lot about how he wanted to shoot this, and we knew that we wanted to give ourselves the freedom in the performances to capture the energy of Milla and Moses."

They decided to use hand-held in order for the camera to be a participant of the family dynamic, not just an observer. Murphy continues, "We were often inspired by some of our favourite films like A Woman Under the Influence and Breaking the waves, two films where the camera work is incredibly authentic and vibrant, and you really feel like you are in those scenarios with those characters."









## BIOGRAPHIES

### SHANNON MURPHY – Director

Raised in Hong Kong, Singapore, Africa and Australia, Shannon Murphy is an award-winning theatre director and deviser. In 2007, she attended the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) and has since been named the most influential graduate of the decade by Sydney Magazine. Her work reflects her willingness to lay down the blueprint of new territories rather than simply follow what is already established.

Shannon has directed Australian productions for the Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir St Theatre, Griffin Theatre Company, The Darlinghurst Theatre, The Ensemble, The Seymour Centre and The Old Fitzroy Theatre. Internationally she directed *The One-Eyed Man is King* for the Schaubühne in Berlin. Her immersive interpretation of Gluck's chamber opera *Orfeo ed Eurydice*, staged at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, headlined the 2016 Spectrum Now Festival. Shannon won a Sydney Theatre Award for the Australian premiere of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*. She is a recipient of the Mike Walsh Fellowship and the Instyle and Audi Women of Style Scholarship. Shannon graduated from the Australian Film Television and Radi school (AFTRS) in 2013 with a graduate Diploma in Directing. Her graduating short film, *Kharisma*, has screened at festivals including Cannes, Toronto International Film Festival, Palm Springs, Flickerfest, and Berlin Interfilm and was nominated for an AACTA Award in the Social Shorts Comedy category.

Her latest short film, *Eaglehawk*, was selected for the Dendy Awards at the 2016 Sydney Film Festival and for the Melbourne International Film Festival 2016. Most recently Shannon has directed smash hit Australian series *Rake*, *Love Child*, *Offspring* and *Sisters*. Shannon was nominated for an Australian Director's Guild award for her role as the sole director of the Lingo/SBS four-part miniseries *On The Ropes*.



## ALEX WHITE - Producer

ALEX WHITE is a multi award winning short film producer and founder of Whitefalk Films. In 2014 Alex produced *Florence Has Left The Building* with writer/director Mirrah Foulkes which was awarded the 2015 Australian Academy of Cinema & Television Arts (AACTA) Award for Best Short Fiction Film. Her other film credits include *Trespass* also with writer/director Mirrah Foulkes which won the prize for Best Australian Short Film at the 2016 Melbourne International Film Festival and is had its International Premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival and *Measuring the Jump* which is loosely based on a short story by the American author Dave Eggers with writer/director Eden Falk.

Since 2009 Alex has worked with producer Jan Chapman at her development company Waking Dream Productions and in 2015 they were the recipients of Screen Australia's Enterprise People funding. Alex was also the Associate Producer on Simon Stone's debut feature film *The Daughter*. *Babyteeth* marks the debut feature for Whitefalk Films which is dedicated to the creation of unique, high quality stories.

## JAN CHAPMAN AO – Executive Producer

Jan Chapman has produced some of Australia's most critically successful and popular films - including Academy Award winner *The Piano*, Palme d'Or nominated *Bright Star* and AFI Best Film winner *Lantana*. Jan's most recent production (with Nicole O'Donohue) was *The Daughter* written and directed by Simon Stone. The film premiered in competition at the 2015 Sydney Film Festival and was selected to screen at the Venice, Toronto and London International film festivals. It was released in Australia in 2016.

Jan has supported and nurtured the careers of some of Australia's most talented filmmakers and was the executive producer on *Somersault*, *Suburban Mayhem*, *Griff the Invisible* and *The Babadook*. Her films have won many awards including co-recipient of the Palme d'Or at Cannes (*The Piano*, 1993), three Academy Awards (*The Piano*, 1994), Camera d'Or at Cannes (*Love Serenade*, 1996), over 38 Australian Film Institute/AACTA Awards, and have had numerous screenings and honours across the globe at the world's top film festivals including Venice, Toronto, Berlin and Cannes. In 2004, Jan was honoured for her outstanding contribution to the Australian film industry as the recipient of the Order of Australia.

## RITA KALNEJAIS - Writer

Rita Kalnejais is a Victorian College of Arts graduate who has worked extensively as an actor at Belvoir, Griffin, Malthouse and Sydney Theatre Companies.

Her first play, *B.C.* was directed by Simon Stone and was nominated for Best New Australian Play in the 2009 Greenroom Awards. Her short plays, *Whistling in Bed* and *How To Get Very Clean* were performed at Sydney Theatre Company in 2011. *Whistling* was later presented by Caryl Churchill at Theatre 503, London. In 2012, Rita's play *Babyteeth* premiered at Belvoir St Theatre and was subsequently produced by the State Theatre Company of South Australia in 2013. She was resident playwright at Sydney Theatre Company in 2011 and at Soho Theatre, London in 2014/2015 where *First Love is the Revolution* enjoyed a popular season. It has since been produced by Steep Theatre in Chicago, Apollinaire Theatre in Boston and has a season at Griffin Theatre in Sydney in December 2019. This *Beautiful Future* had two sellout seasons at the Yard Theatre in 2017. It was listed in the top ten critics' choices for 2017 in *The Guardian UK*.

In the TV world, Rita has written an episode of *The Spanish Princess* (based on Philippa Gregory's novel) with Emma Frost and Matthew Graham for New Pictures / Starz, to be shot in July 2019 and is attached to write an episode of *Dangerous Liaisons* with Harriet Warner (Starz/ Playground Entertainment).

In film, Rita is currently writing an existential sci fi with Sebastian Lelio (Film Nation) for him to direct; *Cook Sisters* about a pair of opera-obsessed sisters who became activists at the start of WWII (BBC Film and House Productions); and an adaptation of young adult novel *Under Rose Tainted Skies* for Stephen Garrett's company Character7. She is also working with director Cate Shortland on *Young Romantics* with See-Saw Films and Porchlight Films, and wrote *Surge* for director Anil Karia, to be produced in 2019 by Rooks Nest and BBC Film. *Surge* was at the top of the *Britlist* in 2018.



## ELIZA SCANLEN – Milla Finlay

Australian actress, Eliza Scanlen, previously starred as 'Amma Crellin' opposite Amy Adams and Patricia Clarkson in the HBO's drama series, *Sharp Objects*. Based off of the novel written by Gillian Flynn of the same name, the story centers on reporter Camille Preaker (Adams), fresh from a psychiatric hospital, who must return to her hometown to uncover the murders of two preteen girls. Directed by Jean-Marc Vallée and written by Marti Noxon, the eight-episode, limited series premiered on July 8, 2018. After receiving critical praise, the series has subsequently been nominated for a Golden Globes Award for Best Television Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television and a Critics' Choice Award for Best Limited Series.

In December 2017, Scanlen was included as one of *The Hollywood Reporter's* 10 Rising Television Stars slated to break out in 2018 for her up-and-coming role as 'Amma.' Additionally, in November 2018, Scanlen was included as one of *The Hollywood Reporter's* Next Generation Talent for her standout role in *Sharp Objects*.

In film, Scanlen can next be seen as 'Elizabeth "Beth" March,' in Director Greta Gerwig's upcoming drama, *Little Women*, in which she will star opposite Meryl Streep, Timothée Chalamet, Saoirse Ronan, Emma Watson and Florence Pugh. Adapted from the Louisa May Alcott classic novel of the same name, the coming-of-age feature centers on four sisters during the Civil War-era in Massachusetts, after leaving their family home.

She just wrapped production on Antonio Campos' adaptation of *The Devil All the Time*, which Netflix officially acquired, and the cast also includes Tom Holland, Chris Evans, Mia Wasikowska, Bill Skarsgard, and Robert Pattinson. Also, this year, she shot the Australian bittersweet comedy *Babyteeth* opposite Ben Mendelsohn and Essie Davis.

In July 2019, Scanlen will make her main stage debut in the Sydney Theatre Company's adaptation of *Lord of the Flies* alongside Mia Wasikowska.

Scanlen currently resides in Sydney, Australia.







## TOBY WALLACE – Moses

Continuing an exciting run of projects, Toby plays the key role of Moses in the upcoming feature film *Babyteeth* – an adaptation of the hit Belvoir Theatre play by Rita Kalnejais – alongside extraordinary company in Ben Mendelsohn, Essie Davies and Eliza Scanlen. He also recently made his US television debut playing Campbell in the popular Netflix YA drama series, *The Society*.

Toby played the lead role in feature film *Acute Misfortune*, from director Thomas M. Wright, which premiered at MIFF and will have a US festival run this year. He received fantastic reviews for his work on Stan's 2018 miniseries *Romper Stomper*, based on the original film by writer-director Geoffrey Wright.

Toby starred in two AACTA-nominated short fiction films in 2018: *Nursery Rhyme*, which won the Dendy Live Action Short Award for Best Director at the 2018 Sydney Film Festival, and *Tangles and Knots*. He also appeared in virtual reality short film *Dream Channel*, from Cobbstar Productions.

In 2016, Toby played the lead in Nicholas Verso's coming-of-age feature *Boys in the Trees*, which premiered at both the Venice and Toronto International Film Festivals.

Other film credits include the adaptation of Tim Winton's book *The Turning: Cockleshell* (directed by Tony Ayres); *Galore*, from director Rhys Graham, which premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival; and *Return to Nim's Island*, opposite Bindi Irwin.

In his professional debut in Kriv Stenders' *Lucky Country* (aka *Dark Frontier*), Toby was honoured with an Australian Film Institute Award Nomination for Best Young Actor, at only 13 years old.

Other credits include the young Michael Hutchence in the INXS miniseries *Never Tear Us Apart*; *Surviving Georgia*, *It's A Date*, *The Man that Got Away* and several short films including *The Last Time I Saw Richard*, which was one of the Dendy Short Film Finalists in 2013.

Originally from the UK, Toby emigrated to Australia as a child. His professional stage debut was in Opera Australia's production of *Capuletti* and in 2016 he performed in the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *Skylight*.



## ESSIE DAVIS – Anna Finlay

Multi-award-winning Essie Davis is known for her versatility, from her 'unforgettable' performance in *The Babadook*, to her key role of 'Lady Crane' in series six of the HBO phenomenon *Game Of Thrones* and her much-loved turn as 'Phyrne Fisher' in ABC's *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* (Indiewire).

She has recently completed filming on the heartbreaking comedy *Babyteeth*, starring opposite Ben Mendelsohn as well as *True History Of The Kelly Gang* alongside Russell Crowe, Nicholas Hoult and George MacKay, based on Peter Carey's novel telling the story of Australian bush-ranger Ned Kelly and his gang as they flee from authorities during the 1870s. Essie has also recently finished filming on the feature *Miss Fisher & The Crypt Of Tears* which will be due for release later this year.

Prior to this, she completed filming the landmark event drama series *Lambs Of God* for Foxtel Studios Australia. A dark, gothic tale adapted from the novel by Marele Day, which is due for release later this year. The story tells of three nuns, each a generation apart, living in an isolated convent by the coast when an unwelcome visitor enters their lives and changes their world forever. Essie stars alongside Ann Dowd and Jessica Barden.

For film, Essie was highlighted by *TIME* magazine as an Academy Awards contender and in their top ten performances of the year for her performance in *The Babadook*. She was nominated for multiple awards such as the AACTA Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role and an AACTA International Award for Best Actress. Her further film roles include Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* alongside Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman, *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*, *Girl With A Pearl Earring*, *Burning Man* and *Legends Of The Guardians*, *Assassin's Creed* and *Mindhorn* alongside Andrea Riseborough and Julian Barret.

For television, Essie is best known for her internationally loved and hugely popular title role in ABC's *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*. Her performance in the first series earned her an AACTA Award nomination for Best Lead Actress in a Television Drama and by the second series she earned Silver and Gold Logie nominations. Essie's further vast and varied credits include the leading role opposite Bryan Cranston, in Philip K. Dick's *Electric Dreams*, a co-production between Channel 4 and Amazon Prime, based on short stories by the award-winning novelist. She also took on the key role of 'Dowager Queen Elizabeth' in the Starz historical mini-series *The White Princess*, following on from the hugely successful *The White Queen*, the series based on the acclaimed novel by Philippa Gregory. She was also seen in *The Last Post* for the BBC directed by BAFTA winner Peter Moffatt, Australian ABC's *The Slap*, Showtime's *Cloudstreet*, *Sweeney Todd* for the BBC, *The Silence* and the BBC television movie *A Poet In New York*.

Essie is also an established stage actress. In 2003 she won the Laurence Olivier Award for her performance in the Tennessee Williams play *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the National Theatre London and in 2004 she starred in a National Theatre, West End and Broadway production of Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers*, for which she earned a Tony Award nomination. For the Sydney Theatre Company, she starred in *Tot Mom* directed by Steven Soderbergh, *The Cripple Of Inishmaan*, *The School For Scandal* and the Melbourne Theater Company's *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* which earned her a nomination for a Green Room Award for Best Female Performer. She has also appeared in multiple productions for the State Theater Company of South Australia and the Bell Shakespeare Company.







## BEN MENDELSON – Henry Finlay

Ben Mendelsohn is a critically acclaimed and award-winning actor who won the Emmy in 2016 as Best Supporting Actor for his role in the Netflix series *Bloodline*. He was also nominated for a Golden Globe and Critics Choice award for his role in the first season.

In 2010, Ben starred opposite Guy Pearce in David Michôd's highly acclaimed feature *Animal Kingdom* (winner of the Sundance Film Festival World Cinema Jury Prize). His performance in the film earned him both of Australia's top awards - an AFI Award and an IF Award for Best Lead Actor. He was also given the 2013 British Independent Film Award for his performance David Mackenzie's *Starred Up*.

Following his lauded performance in *Animal Kingdom*, he landed three starring roles in coveted films: Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* opposite Christian Bale and Anne Hathaway, Derek Cianfrance's *The Place Beyond the Pines* with Ryan Gosling and Bradley Cooper and, Andrew Dominik's *Killing Them Softly*, opposite Brad Pitt.

His other work includes Rachel Ward's feature debut *Beautiful Kate* alongside Rachel Griffiths (for which he received an AFI Award nomination for Best Lead Actor), David Caesar's *Prime Mover*, Alex Proyas' *Knowing* starring Nicolas Cage and Rose Byrne, Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*, Scott's *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, and *Slow West* co-starring Michael Fassbender and in Ryan Gosling's directorial debut *Lost River*.

In 2015, Mendelsohn co-starred opposite Ryan Reynolds in the A24 film *Mississippi Grind* for which he received a nomination as Best Lead Actor from *Film Independent*.

In 2017, he starred opposite Rooney Mara in the Benedict Andrews directed *Una* based on the Broadway play *Blackbird* and was recently seen as Director Orson Krennic in *Star Wars: Rogue One*. He also co-starred opposite Gary Oldman in the Joe Wright directed feature *The Darkest Hour* for Focus Features. Additional credits include the recently released *Captain Marvel*, the Steven Spielberg directed *Ready Player One*, the Netflix film *Land of Steady Habits* and a role in the upcoming feature *The King*.

Mendelsohn is currently starring and producing the upcoming HBO series *The Outsider*, based on the Stephen King novel which is scheduled to air in the Fall of 2019.





Director SHANNON MURPHY  
Writer RITA KALNEJAIS  
Producer ALEX WHITE  
Executive Producer JAN CHAPMAN  
Director of Photography ANDREW COMMIS ACS  
Editor STEVE EVANS  
Production Design SHERREE PHILIPS  
Costume Design AMELIA GEBLER  
Hair and Make Up Design ANGELA CONTE  
Music AMANDA BROWN  
Supervising Sound Editor ANGUS ROBERTSON  
Line Producer VANESSA BROWN  
First Assistant Director JOHN MAGEE  
Casting Directors KIRSTY MCGREGOR CGA, CSA  
STEVIE RAY CGA

## CAST

**Eliza Scanlen**  
**Toby Wallace**  
**Emily Barclay**  
**Eugene Gilfedder**  
**with Essie Davis**  
**and Ben Mendelsohn**

DEVELOPED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF WAKING DREAM PRODUCTIONS & THE SCREEN AUSTRALIA ENTERPRISE PROGRAM  
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FINANCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH FULCRUM MEDIA FINANCE AND MEDIA SUPER  
DEVELOPED AND FINANCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH CREATE NSW  
DEVELOPED WITH ASSISTANCE FROM AURORA INTENSIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR AUSTRALIAN SCRIPTS  
PRINCIPAL PRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT FROM SCREEN AUSTRALIA

BABYTEETH is a Whitefalk Films production with major production investment from Screen Australia in association with Create NSW, and was financed with the support of WeirAnderson.com, Whitefalk Films, Jan Chapman Films and Spectrum Films. It was developed by Whitefalk Films in association with Katherine Slattery and Jan Chapman with the assistance of Screen Australia, Create NSW and Waking Dream Productions

BABYTEETH

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

January 2018

Shannon Murphy

## **OUR WORLD**

Welcome to inner City Sydney, where the middle class live comfortably next door to those struggling in community housing and where our story is set. Just moments away from Kings Cross, the hub of Sydney's fading nightlife but where the drug scene is still strong and addicts, immigrants, dog groomers, concert pianists, therapists, young pregnant single mothers and students live side by side. This collision of worlds and diverging characters are the thrilling backdrop for the life of 16-year-old Milla, our protagonist, who is at the precipice of being the most alive she's ever felt while facing her struggle with cancer.

Milla meets Moses, a 23-year-old sometime drug dealer, frequent drug user on a railway platform. Moses would normally be a forbidden entity by her family but with her current prognosis, he is allowed. Electric and dangerous, he opens up her mind to new experiences and not just sexually, everything about her surroundings feel different with him and she begins to take risks about how she exists in her world.

In contrast, her parents, Anna and Henry, are in a state of delusion, seeing the world through a fog of prescription medication. They are struggling to accept what it means to let go, to keep up with their ever-changing daughter whose departure will bring a new beginning to their lives. They are striving to make her life normal when it's anything but. The dramatic tension lies in Anna and Henry being forced to shift their moral boundaries to accept Moses into their already dysfunctional family. Confronted with how happy he makes Milla, comedy springs from their unpredictable and erratic drug induced moods mixed with their attempts to function normally as a mother, father, therapist and ex concert pianist.

This is a story about how hard it is for parents to deal with the untimely yet invertible loss of their teenage daughter. It explores the discomfort and grief of a story we don't like to discuss in our everyday lives. It delves even deeper into the reality of loss through dark humour, this topic opens us up to a world where we can sit comfortably together and feel embraced by this dysfunctional family who, in one way or another, are all using medication to get through these strange times.



Rita's writing goes beyond the superficial tropes by creating beautifully understated and closely observed contemporary characters, easily recognisable, all dealing with this timeless meditation on death. The lives of all the characters are unpredictably intertwined and it is the relationships and moments between them that are moving and intriguing.

Reflections of life through death are how we define what spirituality is. Most importantly, this film is a celebration of life. The audience will be absorbed into Milla's unique universe, a place on a higher frequency, where life and living has a vivid lucidity and which another soul is saved.

## **VISUAL STYLE**

Babyteeth is a triptych story with three separate POVs, Milla's being the primary perspective that we follow throughout the film and Anna and Henry being our secondary entry points into this world. There will be two distinctive shooting styles to separate Milla's view from her parents. Anna and Henry's POV is more formal, controlled, traditional, floating while Milla's is more sensory, energetic, chaotic and grounded. This will be interpreted through camera lens choices as well as the level of movement within a frame depending on the characters emotional state. Milla's framing will shift between close ups of minute detail throwing us into her emotional state and creative mind, as well as extreme long shots taking in the expanse of all she is feeling and seeing, and how she is placed in her world. Examples of other directors who work using similar techniques are Andrea Arnold and Xavier Dolan whose films *Fish Tank* and *Mommy* are staggering accounts of teenage vitality.

Anna and Henry will be shot using a combination of long takes and wide-angle lenses to let the scene evolve within the take, rather than cut. Mimicking the realtime that they are traversing and allowing their natural dynamic to play out, immersing the audience in their experience as witness to Milla's transformation. This shooting style also offers an element of the surreal and allows comedic moments to have a hint of the absurd. An example of a director who uses this technique is Ruben Östlund, whose film *Force Majeure* humorously explored the explosive emotions and complexities of familial bonds. Long takes are a choice I feel incredibly comfortable with having directed theatre for 10 years. The recent work of Luca Guadagnio's film *Call Me By Your Name* is inspiring to me for its commitment to authenticity in capturing the raw feelings of a young teenager and beautifully interweaving comedy and heartache in every scene.

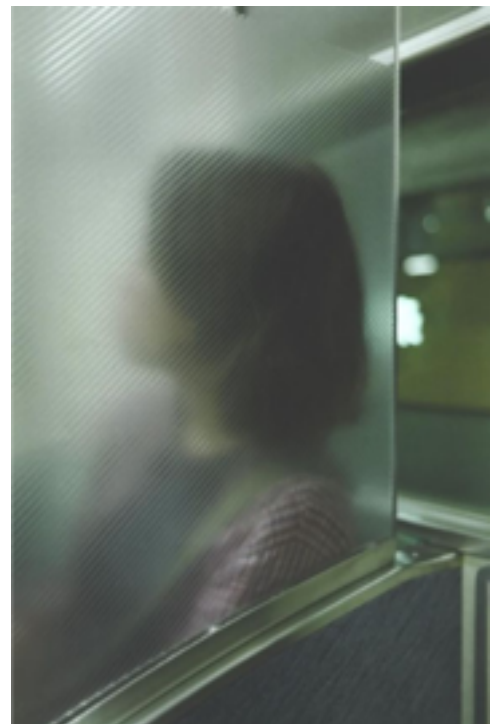
Lighting will complement the different characters' outlooks. Milla's lighting will be natural, luminous, bright and raw, her parents more artificial, soft and subdued, hazed by the veil

they're hiding their emotions behind.

To keep the energy and comedic spontaneity alive on the screen I want to shoot with a lot of freedom to play with the performances. In my TV work I allow room for different versions of moments to play out so that the actors feel loose and never locked into an imposed interpretation but instead feel inspired by the guided offers that I provide and the interplay with other performers. This keeps the energy fresh and unpredictable by creating a climate of authenticity that will be felt on exchange with the audience. Having directed 10 hours of television in the last 2 years I am confident in being able to realise the fragile combination of comedy and tragedy in a time-efficient manner when up against a challenging budget and schedule.

## **DESIGN/AESTHETIC**

The design world is inspired by the photography and aesthetic of William Eggleston, whose work is often described as 'poetic character studies'. Best known as a master of colour photography I am drawn to his avant-garde yet timeless treatment of colour. His images are both banal and brilliant, reflecting the world of *Babyteeth* which combines domestic details with memories captured for the very last time. His work is mischievous, delightful, considered and fascinating, paintings of everyday life that when viewed for long enough, become more visible and visceral. I want to use this approach to examine this space between words and thought, how images can activate contemplation within each frame.







## TOPE

Rita's unconventional comedic instincts allow a story that could have been overly weighted with loss to be crafted with scenes that explore the liveliness and humour of intimate family dynamics. There is also comedic tension that plays out when the underlying forces shift as an outsider gets to peek in to their previously protected family unit. This is a story about the wonder and hilarity that can ripple out to all those affected by the vibrant personality of a young person injected into lives.

The humour in this story comes from the interactions between generations as well as Milla's POV. For her this is not a sad set of circumstances, this is the only life she's ever known. Her parent's great hurdles are having to change and adapt as they allow new and unpredictable behaviour into their home because it brings a longed-for distraction and pleasure to their only child. This conflict brings much humour to the world of the film. Ultimately, the tone of the film is a joyous tribute to the beauty of being alive.

Other films that have tackled dark themes with a peculiar comedic tone include *The Last Days Of Chez Nous*, *Her Love Boils Bath Water* (Japanese), *Short Term 12*, *The Kids Are Alright*. These films sustain a refined tender emotionality whilst being classified as comedies. They have sentiment as opposed to sentimentality and an off-centred refreshing perspective on their topics. Rita has a unique eye for capturing everyday moments and interactions at an odd angle.

## **CASTING**

This story is a very personal insight into a family's experience of their teenage daughter in her last chapter life. An intimate and restrained approach will be taken with the performance, carefully exploring the explosive emotions and complexities of these familial bonds. In order to compliment the emotional intelligence and dark humour of the characters I will cast actors who encompass the duplicity of being able to perform authentically both comedy and drama.

Milla is ferocious in her appetite for life, a teenager who fluctuates between being wise beyond her years and still needing her mum to comfort her. We follow Milla through her journey of desire experiencing the power of her impulses towards her first and last love.

The strength of the script comes from the tension between Milla and Anna. They fight and they love hard. Essie Davis will play Anna, whose greatest dilemma is how to love her daughter with all her might while giving her the space to grow up and to leave them forever. It is a crushing dilemma that involves internal bargaining and medication to help her process it. At the same time Anna has lost another dream, that of being a concert pianist. This loss is felt by her family and it looms largely in her approach to parenting and her sense of inefficacy. Anna is a woman full of discord who is split between the two sides of herself that have always been battling one another, the mother and the artist. As the mother of two young girls, Essie understands Anna's tension of a divided heart. She is a masterful performer and I can't think of any other actress I would rather go on this journey of discovery with.

Henry is a repressed man with secrets who is complicated and hiding behind a mask of drugs, loneliness and fear. Henry has the capacity for compassion, tenderness and vulnerability alongside humour and determination. I have spent my life surrounding myself with actors that I think are unusual, atypical and can offer a deep emotional world and an intellectual interpretation of their roles. Ben Mendelsohn is the pinnacle of this kind of performer. I never know what he is going to do in a role which is why I'm always compelled



to go to the cinema and watch his performance. Unpredictability is a strong motivation for my casting choices on Babyteeth, the characters' behaviours in this film are surprising to one another and therefore the casting should reflect this anarchy.

I believe Essie and Ben as a couple is an inspired combination that would crackle and spit. I saw Sia live in concert in Sydney, to my surprise Ben's face appeared on the huge screens in Allianz Stadium to the song Breathe Me. It was a sight to behold. I was moved to tears by his complete openness and vulnerability and swept away by his raw and exposing dance of pain...it was an experience I felt deep in my bones.

Moses represents a departure from the safe, middle-class environment that Milla has grown up in. It is a brutish world full of dogs chasing cars, trains moving at high speed and bats flying to feed. It is a world that is coming into sharp focus now that she is living day to day. Moses needs to be played by an actor who offers a fresh perspective on a troubled mid-twenties young man, someone who is believably dangerous and thrilling. A young actor with the essence of Michael Pitt or Jack O'Connell.

Gidon is a cultured, worldly and mysterious man. It is essential to me that Gidon is played by someone who is truly a gifted violinist. Richard Tognetti and Warren Ellis are musicians who I would like to approach for the role. They both have a gravitas that would ground the story in a definite musical reality.

## **APPROACH**

With McGregor Casting we will be looking to find a prodigious 16-year-old actress. In order to give her the most support I will set up an environment on set where we can move quickly and efficiently between minimal lighting setups in line with Milla's aesthetic which has an emphasis on natural lighting. This has the combined advantage of keeping her world grounded whilst allowing a fluid form of filmmaking which gives us the freedom to respond instinctively to an inexperienced actor's natural instincts as they unfold.

I want to make work that is fresh, and by establishing a strong production methodology with a collaborative crew in pre-pre production it will give the actors the space to work in a creative and supportive environment in which they are able to play freely without being infringed by long set ups.

I will surround myself with visionary but experienced heads of department.

## **TREATMENT OF SOUND/SCORE**

Music plays an important part in the film as Anna is a concert pianist and Milla has been taking violin lessons for years from Gidon. The two of them have been in a duet together for all of Milla's life, until now. Anna is the central nervous system of the film and through her we experience losing Milla. Gidon's role is as the Oracle of the story detecting what the family needs before they are aware themselves. He understands that music knows the desires of our heart and soul and tried to persuade Anna to return to music as a way of dealing with what is to come.

The score will be imperative in unearthing this repressed passion of Anna's in a simple and understated way. My dream would be to have musicians such as Meghan Washington or The Presets to compose the main theme of the film. The composition needs to be charged with vitality and yet be hauntingly beautiful. I think the score should be contemporary in contrast to the classical music that the characters play as a point of difference.



## **FESTIVAL AND AWARDS**

### **VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Marcello Mastroianni Award for Best Young Actor or Actress to Toby Wallace

### **VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL COLLATERAL AWARDS**

Soundtrack Stars Award, Special Jury Prize ; Bisato d'Oro Award for Best Film ; Adele and Christopher Smithers Award ; SIGNIS Award ;

### **PINGYAO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Public's Choice Award

### **MOSTRA DE SAO PAULO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Jury Prize at the New Filmmakers Competition.

### **MARRAKECH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Best Actor for Toby Wallace.

### **FESTIVAL SELECTIONS (in chronological order)**

La Biennale Venice Film Festival 2019- Marcello Mastroianni Award for Toby Wallace

BFI London Film Festival - First Feature Competition Award

Zurich International Film Festival 2019

Hamburg International Film Festival 2019

Filmekimi Istanbul 2019

Pingyao International Film Festival 2019 : People's Choice Award

Festival international du film de la Roche-sur-Yon 2019

Warsaw International Film Festival 2019

Chicago International Film Festival

Mumbai Film Fest

Mostra de Sao Paulo : Jury Prize Award

Thessaloniki International Film Festival

Minsk International Film Festival

Zagreb Film Festival

Ljubljana International Film Festival

Los Angeles AFI FEST

Castellinaria Film Festival

Goa International Film Festival

Around Films Award (Berlin)

Singapore International Film Festival

Marrakech International Film Festival

Rotterdam International Film Festival