

Light in the Dark Productions and Blueskin Films Ltd
in association with
Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga New Zealand Film Commission present

THE RULE OF JENNY PEN

DIRECTED BY:

James Ashcroft

WRITTEN BY:

Eli Kent, James Ashcroft

PRODUCED BY:

Catherine Fitzgerald
Orlando Stewart

Running time: 103 minutes 28 seconds

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LOGLINE

A misanthropic Judge confined to an aged care home finds himself set in deadly conflict with its resident tyrant.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Stefan Mortensen, a misanthropic judge, suffers a stroke forcing him into a retirement home, where Dave Crealy, has long terrorised the other residents, but Mortensen sets himself in deadly conflict with this tyrant.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Self-important Judge Stefan Mortensen suffers a near-fatal stroke at work, that leaves him partially paralysed and ignominiously placed into care in a retirement home, his personal idea of hell on earth. As he recuperates, he refuses to cooperate with the busy but disengaged staff or integrate with his affable roommate Tony Garfield, a former sports hero.

He soon discovers his nemesis in the seemingly gentle Dave Crealy, who has long held other residents in an after dark reign of terror with a sadistic game of wills called 'The Rule of Jenny Pen' executed with the aid of his dementia doll. When the ageing psychopath turns his attention to Mortensen and Garfield, the two residents find an unlikely and hard won bond. Mortensen's antagonism feeds Crealy's taste for petty power play. When Eunice is found drowned in the neighbouring wastelands, Mortensen deduces Crealy was somehow responsible and decides he must end the tyranny. As the violence escalates, Mortensen's pleas to staff are ignored, so Mortensen and Garfield take matters into their own hands to end the rule of Jenny Pen.

GENRE: Psychological Thriller

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Rule of Jenny Pen is a psychological thriller based on author Owen Marshall's short story of the same name. Marshall's story explores power dynamics and his characters are always very well observed and crafted. That appeals to myself and Eli Kent (co-writer).

As a father of three, I'm ever aware of the prospect of bullying in my children's lives. But I'd never considered it something that my ageing parents could face in the twilight stage of their lives. The concept of this taking place in a rest home environment, a place with a great deal of vulnerability, was an incredibly compelling notion for a film.

The Rule of Jenny Pen follows a high profile judge who is put into rest home care following a debilitating stroke. While there, he discovers a fellow resident is feigning dementia symptoms - and covertly menacing other residents. What starts off as childish torments soon escalates into much more serious, disturbing incidents, then deaths. But that's to be expected in rest home care, it's the last stop in many people's lives.

The Rule of Jenny Pen is a film about power, it's about tyranny in a place you least expect it. Tyrants grow quickly, like weeds when given the right conditions to thrive, and their actions often occur in private, behind closed doors, tucked away in the corners away from prying eyes. They are insidious in their intent – whether in the school yard, in corporate structures, governments, or in this case, a rest home. I think the worst villains – both fictional and factual - are usually the most craven, only capable of feeling powerful when keeping others down. Often they possess little to no imagination. A coward with a dull mind can be a dangerous thing. But, it's also a film about the choices we make in the face of oppression – whether to stand up to it or lay down before it, and how these choices are often less black and white than we would like to believe.

It was an incredible, once in a lifetime gift to have this extraordinary cast bring these characters to life. People often say 'be wary of meeting your heroes' but in this instance it couldn't have been further from that. The level of craft, artistry, generosity and bravery John Lithgow and Geoffrey Rush brought to the collaboration and their characters was inspiring to everyone involved. It was a truly joyful experience watching these two titans of stage and screen have at it; they've spoiled working with actors for me – or at least set the bar incredibly high.

I don't shy from what others call 'dark material'. I think it's important to work with challenging material in the arts because it allows us to unpack some of those more tricky conversations that can be hard to have via other avenues. There's a lot of nuance and duality to be found in material like *The Rule of Jenny Pen*. I believe there is real healing to be found in the dark - if we never look there, how can we move forward into a future with greater empathy and hope? I don't think dark stories equate to bleak, heavy, morose stories that lack in entertainment. On the contrary, there's a real energy and effervescent quality to this film that comes from unpacking the themes, the environment, and both the oppressor and the oppressed who fight back. There's genuine humour, delight and humanity to be found in the darkest corners of this story.

The Rule of Jenny Pen is an insidious psychological thriller with trace elements of black humour. It's got sharp teeth and doesn't pull its punches. And though at times horrific, it is absolutely not a horror film.

I believe it will appeal to a broad audience because tyranny is a universal and recognisable theme in today's world, it's something we all experience directly or indirectly. And no matter what our age or cultural make up, we are all susceptible to the oppression of tyrants. I hope audiences can have a fun time watching this story unfold.

James Ashcroft

Director/Co-Writer/Executive Producer

FILM'S STORY

BACKGROUND

In 2021, Director James Ashcroft released his debut feature film *Coming Home in the Dark*, based on a short story written by award-winning New Zealand author Owen Marshall (CNZM). It's a dark tale that explores how a random act of violence can alter someone's life forever. The film went on to premiere at Sundance and the NZ International Film Festival, has sold worldwide and been picked up by Netflix.

Five years on, another Marshall short story is the inspiration behind Ashcroft's new feature film ***The Rule of Jenny Pen***. Ashcroft optioned the work more than ten years ago after it was recommended to him by an author friend, Hamish Clayton.

An "undiscovered gem", the story was unlike anything Ashcroft had read before: "Owen Marshall's characters are incredibly potent, well observed and crafted. I was immediately struck by the banal terror ***The Rule of Jenny Pen*** conjured up, and the originality and treatment of its setting and characters."

Ashcroft and his writing partner Eli Kent were drawn to the story's characters first and foremost, but note the themes, plotting and tone are equally important to them. Ashcroft explains: "Whatever the material, it begins and ends with the duality and complexity of the characters."

The Rule of Jenny Pen is set within the confines of an aged care facility, a location that writing collaborators Ashcroft and Eli Kent were drawn to.

"As a father of three, I'm very aware of bullying in schools. But the concept of bullying in a space that society considers to be safe and quiet, really piqued our interest," says Ashcroft.

Tyranny is a key theme in ***The Rule of Jenny Pen***, notes Ashcroft: "Tyranny can be insidious. The worst villains are often the most cowardly ones, with a lack of imagination. And those two things can be a deadly combination when given the right amount of rope to run with."

CAST

Ashcroft, a Toi Whakaari graduate, was inspired to become an actor from the work of John Lithgow and Geoffrey Rush. The acting greats were in the script's DNA right from inception.

"Eli and I were adamant that for an audience to go on this adventure, our two lead characters had to be played by actors with an acute sense of joy, playfulness and irreverence to their work," explains Ashcroft.

Producer Catherine Fitzgerald says Ashcroft's US agency CAA were extremely helpful in getting the script and James' first feature film in front of Rush and Lithgow. "I was blown away when both of them took less than a week to respond with an unequivocal yes to the invitation to come on board," says Ashcroft.

“I sat and read the script, and by page six I was calling my agent to say I want to be in this,” says Geoffrey Rush. “My mum and my wife’s mum had both been through aged care very recently. There was a certain immediacy there. But being in aged care is really only a metaphor for living a life anywhere, and that appealed to me very much.”

John Lithgow says it was a script to challenge an actor: “I certainly appreciated what a terrific piece of storytelling it is. It just simply scared me so much. But I’ve learned in my career that the things that scare you are the things you should have the courage to do.”

Lithgow says the more he read the script, the more he loved it. “Geoffrey and I are both character actors and these are delicious roles for character actors,” says Lithgow. “It’s great to work in tandem with Geoffrey. We’re both dogs with a bone, and in many ways, we work the same way.”

Ashcroft says it was a gift to have such an extraordinarily experienced cast help bring this story to life: “The level of investigation Lithgow and Rush gave to their characters was incredible, mining the script for every nuance and intention. It’s an emotional script at times, but the detailed prep, understanding and rehearsal meant the actors could very quickly access the required emotions and playfulness when it came to the shoot. This enabled us to keep exploring moments as they happened during the scenes, something the pair were very up for.”

Ashcroft continues: “John and Geoffrey are actors who kick the door in with their performances - they effortlessly demand your attention on screen. They’re also two of the funniest people I’ve ever met. They love to laugh. They enjoy themselves and relish everything they do, no matter how extreme.”

The casting of Tony Garfield was important to balance out the ensemble cast, notes Fitzgerald: “George Henare wowed us by taking Tony Garfield right off the page in his very first audition tape. He showed us the utmost potential of who this character could be.”

When assembling the support cast, Ashcroft met with each actor to explore the character the very fine screenplay inspired. “The old adage ‘there are no small parts’ is true in this film,” says Fitzgerald. “James handpicked individuals who have taught him, mentored him, and forged who he is as an actor and director.”

Rush notes that the support cast were the “crème de la crème” of New Zealand actors in their 70s, 80s and 90s. “We were shooting on location in a home together, getting a glimpse at our future lives,” laughs Rush.

Ashcroft’s background as a trained actor and theatre director made him the “dream director for actors”, says Fitzgerald. “James understands the art and craft of how to elicit the very best performances. Every day on set was a directing and acting masterclass - the alchemy of great actors and such a skilled director was truly magic. The utterly uncensored and brave performances in this film show what enormous trust and respect the cast had for James as a director.”

PRODUCTION AND LOCATION

Fitzgerald believes it is a great tribute to Ashcroft that from his first ambition in film, he assembled a core creative team around him, including long-time collaborators Director of Photography Matt Henley, writer Eli Kent and Composer John Gibson with extraordinary talent in the arts of cinematography, writing and composing.

Many of the crew from *Coming Home in the Dark* reassembled to be a part of ***The Rule of Jenny Pen***. “It was wonderful to bring a great team back together - a reunion of sorts, but adding so many more talent into the mix,” explains Fitzgerald.

Shooting took place on location in New Zealand’s North Island Taupō region, at the Wairakei Resort, with support from Film Bay of Plenty, Love Taupō and Amplify with studio scenes then captured in capital city Wellington.

“Our location in Wairakei was a once in a lifetime find. The script required some very unique location features, but we instantly fell in love with this location and what it offered,” says Ashcroft.

Ashcroft says that living and working on set at the Wairakei Resort allowed a unique focus from the cast and crew: “Working immersively helped to speed up the cast and crew’s collaboration, enabling us to get to the heart of the work faster.”

EDIT

Ashcroft notes that a film can evolve during every stage of the process, from the script, to the shoot, to the edit suite, grade and mix, but that the original intention and vision of the work should remain the same. Ashcroft says the edit process was incredibly fun, filled with a lot of laughter, challenge and exploration.

“Editor Gretchen Peterson and I have similar sensibilities and tastes but she isn't a 'yes' person and I really value that rigour in the edit,” explains Ashcroft. “My most valued collaborators are those who are curious about the work in its entirety, not just the area they are charged with executing. They are curious about the work as a whole - what it could be, wants to be. The film has evolved in the edit, as it has at every stage of the production, but it feels exactly like the film I always intended to make.”

Fitzgerald adds: “This is Gretchen Petersen’s first dramatic feature but it will be the first of many.”

TONE AND AUDIENCE

Ashcroft is no stranger to dark material: “If we never look behind the curtain, we’re not able to unpack the important facet and move forward to a better future.”

It’s also Ashcroft’s belief that dark material does not need to be bleak, heavy or lacking in entertainment. “Even though we are dealing with an insidious villain in ***The Rule of Jenny Pen***, we’re

able to see things from his perspective, and for our protagonist Crealy, this is a success story. For the first time in his life he is experiencing a genuine sense of purpose and joy.”

“That’s of course utterly terrifying, but he’s having so much fun!” continues Ashcroft. “Don’t get me wrong, this isn’t a comedy, but there’s an absurdity in the nuanced dynamic between the characters. There’s an energy and effervescent quality to the film from both the oppressor and the people fighting back. In order to unpack some of the darker elements, the humour is what helps get us there.”

The Rule of Jenny Pen is a psychological thriller and it is the filmmakers hope the audience appeal will be wide with its relatable themes. “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” says Fitzgerald.

“You’ve never seen a film like this,” says Lithgow.

Ashcroft adds: “The film’s key themes of bullying and tyranny are universal to everyone. I hope audiences can have a fun time watching this story unfold.”

ABOUT THE CAST

John Lithgow (Dave Crealy)

John Lithgow has long been regarded as one of America’s most distinguished performers. He has made an indelible impression on audiences with his work in film, television and the theatre. He is a prolific actor with two Tonys, six Emmys, two Golden Globes, three SAG Awards and two Oscar nominations. Lithgow has appeared in a long list of critically acclaimed films, as far back as *The World According to Garp* and as recent as Martin Scorsese’s *Killers of the Flower Moon*. He will soon be seen in *Conclave* with Ralph Fiennes, and he’ll be heard in the animated film *Spellbound* along with the voices of Rachel Zegler, Nicole Kidman, and Javier Bardem.

Lithgow has starred in the hit TV shows *3rd Rock from the Sun*, *Dexter*, *The Crown*, and the recent *The Old Man* on FX. On stage, he has appeared on Broadway twenty-five times, including award-winning appearances in *The Changing Room*, *M. Butterfly*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, and the musicals *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* and *The Sweet Smell of Success*.

At the start of his theatre career, Lithgow directed several major productions in regional theatre. Recently he returned to this role, staging *Everything’s Fine*, a solo play written and performed by the late Douglas McGrath, at New York’s Daryl Roth Theater.

For children, Lithgow has written several best-selling picture books for Simon & Schuster. His recordings for kids have landed him four Grammy nominations, and he has appeared with a dozen major American orchestras in children’s concerts that feature many of his own songs. He wrote the narration for the New York City Ballet’s *Carnival of the Animals* in 2003 and even danced the role of The Elephant.

In 2011, a warm reception greeted Lithgow's memoir *Drama: An Actor's Education*, published by Harper Collins. Since 2019, he has written and illustrated the *Dumpty Trilogy*, three books of political satire from Chronicle Prism which achieved the remarkable feat of landing Lithgow on the *New York Times* nonfiction bestseller list for three consecutive years.

Lithgow recently completed his term as co-chair of the Commission on the Arts of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, producing authoritative reports on America's creative workforce and arts in education. The Commission's deliberations also spawned *Art Happens Here*, a PBS documentary which highlights the importance of all the arts in the lives of young people.

Geoffrey Rush (Stefan Mortenson)

Geoffrey Rush is an internationally acclaimed actor who started his career in Australian theatre and has appeared in over 70 theatrical productions and more than 30 feature films. The multiple award winning actor was catapulted to international fame in 1996 with his starring role in director Scott Hicks' feature *Shine*, for which he won the Academy Award for Best Actor, in addition to the Golden Globe, SAG, BAFTA, Film Critics' Circle of Australia Award, Broadcast Film Critics, AFI and New York and Los Angeles Film Critics' Awards.

In 2009, Rush won the Tony Award for Best Leading Actor in a play for his acclaimed performance as the ailing king in Ionesco's comedy *Exit The King*. One letter shy of joining the 19 illustrious EGOT winners globally, Rush describes himself as a humble TOE.

In 2023 Rush received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Transilvania International Film Festival. The previous year Rush received the Award for Outstanding Artistic Contribution to World Cinema at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. On stage, Rush was recently seen in 2019 alongside Al Pacino for *Simply Shakespeare: The Merchant of Venice*, a one-night only staged benefit reading to support the Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles.

The same year he was seen in 2019's *Storm Boy*, based on the 1964 novella by Colin Thiele of the same name. Other recent films include Olive Productions' *The Final Portrait* which premiered at the 2017 Berlin Film Festival and the fifth instalment of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*. On television he was recently seen in National Geographic's highly acclaimed first season of their first scripted series *Genius*, in which he starred as Albert Einstein. The highly acclaimed role brought Emmy, SAG and Golden Globe Awards nominations for his performance.

In Australia, for his performance in the *Eye of the Storm*, Rush received the 2012 AACTA nomination for Best Actor and an FCCA Award nomination. Rush starred in and served as Executive Producer of the worldwide hit film *The King's Speech*. He won the BAFTA award for Best Supporting Actor and earned nominations from the Academy Awards, Golden Globes and SAG Awards. The film won the Academy Award for Best Picture.

For his captivating performance in 2004 as the title character in HBO Films' *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* Rush won the Emmy, a Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild Award.

Rush earned an Academy Award nomination for his performance in 2000 in Philip Kaufman's *Quills*, in addition to the Academy Award nomination and Golden Globe nomination in 1998 for his beloved role in *Shakespeare in Love*.

Other film credits include Australia's Screen NSW's *The Daughter*, 20th Century Fox film, *The Book Thief*, Giuseppe Tornatore's *The Best Offer*, Universal Pictures' *Minions*, *The Warrior's Way*, *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole*, *Munich*, *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*, *Candy*, *Intolerable Cruelty*, *Finding Nemo*, *Ned Kelly*, *Lantana*, *Frida*, *The Tailor of Panama*, *House on Haunted Hill*, *Mystery Men*, *Les Misérables*, *A Little Bit of Soul*, *Children of the Revolution*, *On Our Selection*, *Twelfth Night*, *Oscar and Lucinda*, *Starstruck*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*.

Rush received a degree in English at the University of Queensland, then studied at the Jacques Lecoq School of Mime, Movement and Theater in Paris. Returning to Australia, he starred in the theatre production of *King Lear*. He also co-starred with Mel Gibson in *Waiting for Godot* in a 1979 production at the Jane Street Theatre.

Other stage performances include in Shakespeare's *King Lear* with the Sydney Theatre Company, *The Diary of a Madman* at The Brooklyn Academy of Music, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* at Her Majesty's Theatre in Melbourne, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, all of which received rave reviews.

He was a principal member of Jim Sharman's pioneering Lighthouse Ensemble in the early 1980s playing leading roles in many classics. His work on stage was honoured with the Sydney Critics Circle Award for Most Outstanding Performance, the Variety Club Award for Best Actor and the 1990 Victorian Green Room Award for his performance in Neil Armfield's *The Diary of a Madman*. He also received Best Actor nominations from the Sydney Critics' Circle Awards for his starring roles in Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and Mamet's *Oleanna*. In 1994 he received the prestigious Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award for his work in theatre.

In 2010 Rush founded the Australian Academy Cinema Television Arts Awards for which he served as President; the awards are considered the Australian Oscars. The voting is decided by members of the Australian Academy, making them the highest achievements in Australian screen society.

In 2012 Rush was named Australian of The Year for his contribution to the arts, in addition to being part of the 'big 4' in Australia, the four living Oscar Winners. Rush was a nominee for the 30th Annual Green Room Award. Rush is an ambassador for the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and UNICEF Australia, as well as patron of the Melbourne International Film Festival. He lives in Melbourne with his wife, actress Jane Menelaus, with whom he shares two lovely adult children.

George Henare (Tony Garfield)

George Henare was born in Gisborne in 1945, the third youngest in a family of ten children. He spent the first 12 years of his life on a sheep and cattle farm in the Whakaangi Valley, 15 Kilometres inland from Te Araroa on the East Coast of the North Island. He attended Gisborne Boys' High School and then

Ardmore Teachers' College. Henare became involved in theatre in his late teens after brief stints as a postie and trainee teacher. He abandoned his teaching career in 1965 after a successful audition with the New Zealand Opera Company where he sang chorus in productions as Porgy and Bess and Il Trovatore. George was extremely adept at "pulling faces" and getting noticed, so began to be offered small acting roles.

From 1965 Henare worked with the New Zealand Opera Company, the Māori Theatre Trust, Wellington's Downstage Theatre, Radio Drama and fledgling television, until joining Mercury Theatre, Auckland, in 1971 at the age of 25. Since then George has played dozens of parts, from Ratty, Dracula, Toad of Toad Hall, Snoopy to more serious characters such as Lear, Lenin and Caesar. His television and film work includes *Rapa Nui*, *Crooked Earth*, *The Silent One*, *Once Were Warriors* and *Potiki's Memory Of Stone* (written by Laureate Briar Grace-Smith). After Mercury's demise in 1992, George worked extensively in Australia with Melbourne Theatre Co, Sydney's Ensemble Theatre and Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney, and toured with *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Phantom of the Opera* and guested on many television series.

For the Auckland Theatre Company Henare has performed in *Who Wants To Be 100? Goldie*, *Wind In The Willows*, *Cabaret* and *Into the Woods*. Other highlights include the 2000 New Zealand International Festival of the Arts production of *Haruru Mai and Purapurawhetu*, which toured New Zealand and internationally.

Henare received an OBE in 1988 for his services to theatre; Best Theatrical Performance Award at The Entertainer of the Year Awards for his role in *Jesus Christ Superstar*; in 2000 he was named Best Actor at the 2000 TV Guide New Zealand Television Awards for *Nga Tohu - Signatures*; 1992 and 2001 George was named Talking Books Narrator of the year; and in 2006 he won a Chapman Tripp 'Best Actor' Award for his portrayal of Willy Loman in Circa Theatre's *Death of a Salesman*. In 2008 George received the Te Waka Toi, Te Tohu Toi Ke, Award for his outstanding contribution to Māori theatre and in 2009 he was the recipient of an Arts Foundation Laureate Award.

In 2010 Henare was awarded Best Actor for his role in the fantasy series *Kaitangata Twitch* written by Margaret Mahy and screened as a television series. Henare played the role of 'a tormented soul' Lee Kaa. He was also awarded a CMNZ (Companion of the said Order of New Zealand) in the New Year's honours list.

Henare's film and television credits also include *Darwin and Newts*, *Fisk*, *The Dead Lands*, *Reset*, *Waitangi: What Really Happened*, *Stolen*, *Mercy Peak*, *Ocean Girl*, *Flying Kiwi*, *Shortland Street* and *Outrageous Fortune*.

ABOUT THE CREW

James Ashcroft (Director and co-writer)

Ngā Puhī / Ngāti Kahu / English. James Ashcroft formed Light in the Dark Productions in 2014, specialising in contemporary screen adaptations from New Zealand's literary canon. His feature film directing debut *Coming Home in the Dark* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival 2021 to great

acclaim, followed by a global festival tour. He is currently working on a slate of features in the US including Max Brook's *Devolution* and Grady Hendrix' *How To Sell A Haunted House*, for Legendary Studios and Sam Raimi's Ghost House Pictures, *The Whisper Man* for the Russo Brother's AGBO Productions/Netflix and an adaptation of the graphic novel *Old Haunts* for AWA Studios. He attended the Venice Biennale Cinema College as one of 12 teams selected worldwide. He was also one of 15 director/producers selected for the Torino Film Festivals inaugural Up & Coming Programme, showcasing talent from around the world. From 2006-2013, Ashcroft served as Artistic Director and Chief Executive of national Maori theatre company Taki Rua Productions, developing and touring New Zealand works both nationally and internationally. Ashcroft is a graduate of Victoria University and Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. He has served internships with acclaimed theatre company The Wooster Group in New York. He is represented by CAA and GRANDVIEW MANAGEMENT in the United States.

Eli Kent (Co-writer)

Eli Kent is a screenwriter, playwright and actor. His first full length play *Rubber Turkey* was written when he was just 19 and earned him the Peter Harcourt Award for Outstanding New Playwright of the Year at the 2008 Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards. His third play *The Intricate Art Of Actually Caring* won Best Theatre in the NZ Fringe Festival 2009, the Montana Award for Most Original Production at the 2009 Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards and was nominated for Outstanding New New Zealand play and Production of the Year.

In 2010 Kent completed a Master of Arts in Scriptwriting with the Creative Writing programme at Victoria University, Wellington. Kent has written with James Ashcroft on James' debut feature *Coming Home In The Dark* (Sundance 2021), the upcoming feature *Devolution*, and ***The Rule Of Jenny Pen***. He recently co-wrote *Millie Lies Low* (Berlinale, SXSW) and is working on developing a number of feature film projects with James Ashcroft.

Catherine Fitzgerald (Producer)

Catherine Fitzgerald, ONZM, founded Blueskin Films in 2002 and has produced an extensive, international award-winning slate of features, shorts and documentaries that have screened worldwide, including selection at the Berlinale, Venice, Cannes, Sundance, Toronto Film Festivals and the Academy Awards, alongside subsequent releases in multiple territories. Films include Tusi Tamasese's *The Orator* (Venice Orizzonti) and *One Thousand Ropes* (Berlinale Panorama), both NZ's nominees for Best Foreign Film at the Oscars. James Ashcroft's *Coming Home In The Dark* premiered in the Midnight Section at Sundance 2021 and Welby Ing's *Punch* launched at Tallinn Black Nights 2022. Blueskin Films has a record of making films by women, Māori and Polynesian and other underrepresented voices and has worked extensively as a creative developer for stage and screen.

Fitzgerald has a background in strategy, policy and governance. She is the Immediate Past Chairs of both the NZ Film Festival Trust and Playmarket, and has consulted for the Berlinale for their NATIVE strand, served on Generation, NETPAC, Asia Pacific Screen Academy Development Fund, and Adelaide Festival juries. Her other governance roles have included membership of the NZ Film Commission Board, the Dunedin College of Education Board, the founding Chair of WIFT NZ, and membership of the Screen Producers Association Board, among others.

Orlando Stewart (Producer)

Orlando Stewart is an award-winning producer based in Auckland. He recently produced and directed the factual series *When Bob Came* for TVNZ and produced *Ahi & The Stars*, director Angela Cudd's episode for TVNZ's supernatural anthology series.

In 2019 he produced the theatrical feature *Bellbird*, a critical and box office success that screened in competition at SIFF, HIFF, and Macao and has won a number of international awards. That same year Stewart was the recipient of the SPADA Independent Producer of the year for his work on *Bellbird* and the series *Who Killed Lucy The Poodle?* In 2019, he produced the animated series *Welcome To Cardboard City*, the winner of the best Children's Series at the 2019 NZTV Awards.

Over the past two decades, Stewart has worked as a producer, writer, and director across a broad range of genres and is passionate about telling authentic New Zealand stories and celebrating the diverse voices of our nation in entertaining and engaging ways, on screens of all sizes.

Frankie Karena (Hair & Makeup Designer)

Frankie Karena is an accomplished hair and makeup designer who has more than 20 years experience working on some of Aotearoa New Zealand's most critically acclaimed films including *River Queen*, *King Kong*, *Avatar*, *The Hobbit* and *One Thousand Ropes*. Most recently she was makeup designer on Rachel House's debut feature *The Mountain*, key hair artist on Ti West's *X*, background hair and makeup supervisor on *Avatar: The Way Of Water* and makeup designer on *Daffodils*, *The Changeover* and popular local series *Wellington Paranormal*.

Gabrielle Stevenson (Costume Designer)

Gabrielle Stevenson boasts over 15 years of expertise as a costume designer across film, television, and theatre. Her impressive portfolio includes major international productions like *Ghost In The Shell*, *Mortal Engines* and *The Hobbit*, as well as notable New Zealand projects such as *After The Party*, *Millie Lies Low* and *Coming Home In The Dark*. Currently, Stevenson holds the role of costume designer for *The World Of Wearable Arts*, New Zealand's premier theatre production, where she brings her creative vision to life through costumes tailored for headliners, dancers, and aerialists.

Throughout her career, Stevenson has had the privilege of collaborating with exceptional artists and professionals across various entertainment mediums, enhancing performances by crafting inspiring costumes. Witnessing performers evolve into their characters is her greatest joy, as she deeply understands the profound impact costume has on performance and the intricate visual language it communicates.

Gretchen Peterson (Editor)

Gretchen Peterson's 20+ year screen editing career has seen her hone her craft across film, feature documentary and television. This Australia-based Wellingtonian has worked on projects in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, London and LA. Highlights include ABC true crime series *The Black Hand*, NZ drama *The Gulf* and feature documentary *She Shears*. She recently completed editing the definitive Midnight Oil theatrical feature *The Hardest Line*, Gretchen is currently working on the Australian drama series *Black Snow* season 2.

John Gibson (Composer)

John Gibson composed his first major work at the age of 16. By the age of 24 he had done time as musical director at theatres in Dunedin and Auckland, and acted on-screen as one of the musical quartet in TV drama *Heroes*. Since then Gibson has composed music for a wide range of mediums, including television, theatre and contemporary dance. He co-composed *Rain Of The Children*, which earned him an Achievement in Original Music for Film at the 2008 Qantas Film and Television Awards and he composed James Ashcroft's *Coming Home In The Dark*, which premiered in the Midnight Section at Sundance 2021. Last year he received an "Out of the Limelight" Award for his contributions to theatre composition and sound design.

Matt Henley (Director of Photography)

Matt Henley is an accomplished cinematographer whose short films, including Judah Finnigan's *Workshop* and *Charmer* have screened at Locarno, Melbourne, Clermont-Ferrand, Camerimage and NZIFF. His first feature film as Director of Photography *Coming Home In The Dark*, directed by James Ashcroft, premiered at Sundance 2021, and screens worldwide. His second, Welby Ing's *Punch* premiered internationally at Black Nights, Tallinn in the first feature competition, then at Palm Springs 2023. His latest feature is Alice Englert's *Bad Behaviour*, which premiered at Sundance World Cinema 2023. Henley has been working in the film and television industry for more than a decade and is an experienced director of photography. Over the last few years, he has been shooting a large amount of documentary, commercial and TVC work.

Owen Marshall (Author)

One of New Zealand's leading fiction writers, Owen Marshall held the Katherine Mansfield Memorial Fellowship in Menton, France in 1996 and won the Deutz Medal for Fiction at the Montana New Zealand Book Awards in 2000 for his novel *Harlequin Rex*. In 2000 he received the ONZM for Services to Literature in the New Year Honours and the CNZM in the Queen's Birthday Honours of 2012. He received the Prime Minister's Award for Fiction in 2013. Marshall has published or edited 35 books, including novels, short stories and poetry. His interest is in mood and character more than plot and action, and a search to capture the fragrance of experience, rather than experience itself. What he looks for in all the arts, is some insight into the business of living.

Paul Lewis (Puppeteer / Puppet Designer)

Although his background is as an actor and singer, Paul Lewis has been steadily building a career as a puppeteer and puppet-maker since 2017. He was one of the puppeteers in residence for over four years at Auckland's Whoa! Studios, as well as designing, fabricating and performing numerous new puppet characters. Mentored by veteran Muppet performer Peter Linz, Lewis's work at Whoa! Studios can be seen in season one of the TV show *Custard's World*, and in the follow up season, *Custard's World: Kea Kaha*, on TVNZ On Demand.

Subsequent credits as a puppeteer and puppet-maker include Stu, the mascot for New Zealand telecommunications company Slingshot; the two cheeky cows on season one of *Pio Terei Tonight*; the wellness brand No Ugly; music videos for Ha the Unclear, Fat Freddy's Drop and the YouTube channel Busy Beavers. Lewis designed, built and performed the puppets in the forthcoming short films, *The Sea Inside Her* and *Growing Still*. He was on the puppeteering team for the animatronic puppet version of *M3GAN* in the Blumhouse Studio hit movie of the same name, and was the lead puppeteer for the

adorable gopher boy hybrid, Bobby, in the Netflix adaptation of *Sweet Tooth*, in addition to puppeteering other characters that appear throughout all three seasons. Lewis is currently filming the movie version of *Minecraft*.

Zahra Archer Minogue (Production Designer)

Zahra Archer Minogue began her career in Aotearoa's film and television industry as a camera assistant before finding her home in the art department. She honed her knowledge through work as a scenic artist, props painter, set decorator, graphic designer and set designer, on projects ranging from *The Hobbit; The Light Between Oceans* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: The Sword Of Destiny* to *Mulan*, *LOTR: THE RINGS OF POWER* and *AVATAR 2*. Minogue's most recent credits have been as an assistant art director on *Minecraft* and *Our Flag Means Death*, and she has just completed her first feature film as production designer on the James Ashcroft-directed *The Rule Of Jenny Pen*.

MAIN CREDITS

IFC / AMC / Shudder

Rialto

Charades

NZFC

THE RULE OF JENNY PEN

DIRECTED BY

James Ashcroft

STARRING

John Lithgow Geoffrey Rush
and
George Henare

SCREENPLAY BY

Eli Kent James Ashcroft

BASED ON THE SHORT STORY 'THE RULE OF JENNY PEN
BY Owen Marshall published by Vintage NZ Ltd

PRODUCED BY

Catherine Fitzgerald
Orlando Stewart

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

James Ashcroft Eli Kent

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

John Lithgow Geoffrey Rush

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Emily Gotto Nicholas Lazo Samuel Zimmerman

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Matt Henley

EDITOR

Gretchen Peterson

COMPOSER

John Gibson

SOUND DESIGN

John McKay Matthew Lambourn

MUSIC SUPERVISOR

Aminé Ramer

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

Zahra Archer Minogue

COSTUME DESIGNER

Gabrielle Stevenson

MAKEUP DESIGNER

Frankie Karena

Light in the Dark Productions Blueskin Films

In association with the New Zealand Film Commission

present A James Ashcroft Film

THE RULE OF JENNY PEN

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

STEFAN MORTENSEN

COURT MOTHER

DR NEELS

TONY GARFIELD

CARER GRACE

CARER TANIA

HOWIE WICKER

DAVE CREALY

MUSICIAN

GEOFFREY RUSH

NIKKI MACDONNELL

MAAKA POHATU

GEORGE HENARE

FIONA COLLINS

YVETTE PARSONS

IAN MUNE

JOHN LITHGOW

RICHARD CHAPMAN

PETER LLEWYN	BRUCE PHILLIPS
OLIVE SHAW	IRENE WOOD
MOIRA SPENDER	ANNIE RUTH
TOBIAS POPANOVICH	NICK BLAKE
SONNY AUSAGE	NATHANIEL LEES
CARER MAY	ARIADNE BALTAZAR
EUNICE JOYCE	HILARY NORRIS
MADELEINE SHEPARD	HOLLY SHANAHAN
SEAN DUNN	LUTZ HALBHUNBNER
SALLY PILE	GINETTE MCDONALD
COMFREY HAILS	JANE WADDELL
PHYSIOTHERAPIST	CATIE NOBLE
CARER JASMINE	ANAPELA POLATA'IVAO
CARER MIKE	THOMAS SAINSBURY
CARER JOY	HANNAH LYNCH
COACH	SEMU FILIPO
PSYCHOLOGIST	PAOLO ROTONDO
NURSE ANITA	RASHMI PILAPITIYA
GARFIELD'S GRANDDAUGHTER	SYLVIE ASHCROFT
PLUTO	MARBLES

RESIDENTS (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

MARY ANDREWS	RANGI ANDREWS
DOREEN BEER	TREVOR BEER
MARGARET BLAKE	ADRIENNE GORDON
WENDY GREEN	WINSTON GURNELL
LYNN HARRIMAN	VIVIENNE HUTCHISON
BARBARA ILES	PETER JUDGE
JANICE KOSTERMAN	DAPHNE LECOUEUR
CHRISTINE LESTER	STEPHEN LESTER
ISOBEL MCALPINE	JUDI MCGREEVY
KEVIN MCPAKE	JEAN MILLS
CONNIE MITCHELL	FAYE MOORE
ROBIN MOORE	ADRIENNE NAIRN
TIM NORMAN KARL PERIERA	
LORRAINE PHILBEY	STEVE PUNTER
SARAH SIMMONDS	AUDREY SWANN
DEBORAH TAYLOR	JOHN WAKELIN
PEARL WAKELIN	MICHAEL WARD
WAYNE WILSON	

CARERS (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

VEE HODGSON	MELISSA ISAACSON
LORMAR KARAUTI	HUIRANGI LAW
ANNA LOPEZ	CHARLOTTE MANN
DERVLA MURTAGH	JESSICA RUCK-NU'U
LINDSEY SEATON	LIAN SONG

TEEN RUGBY PLAYERS

**BAYLEY RAKEI
DAVID LEWAI
JED WALKER
KANE MASON
OSCAR MCDUGALL
RILEY WILLIAMS
ROMEO MCILVRIDE
SASHA PARIZE-BAKER
TOMÁS GREEN CAMARGO
TAWHIRI WANOA
ZACH HARRISON**

STRING QUARTET

**CELIA GRIFFITHS
HIJIRI YAMAMOTO
JACK MOYER
TALIESIN AMOORE**

VISITORS

**HARPER ASHCROFT
INDIA ASHCROFT
NINA WILLIAMS
STELLA WILLIAMS
MANDY THOMAS**

**POLICE OFFICERS KURT JOHNSON
LOVELY GOMONIT**

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TALKING CLOCK
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SUSAN HOLT
JAYASUDHASRI JAIGANESH
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CALLUM SCOTT
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JOHN LITHGOW DIALECT COACH
CHOREOGRAPHER/MOVEMENT COACH**

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STUNT BURN MASTER & ADDITIONAL COORDINATOR
STUNT BURN SAFETY
STUNT UTILITY/VIDEOGRAPHER
STUNT PERFORMERS**

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ONSET PA

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KEY CAST DRIVER
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HANNAH HOSKINS
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GRIP**

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CHAD KAHUKIWA SMITH**

**GAFFER
BEST BOY
GENE OP
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	YONG-LE CHONG
DIALOGUE EDITORS	LEE HERRICK

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ANGUS WEBB

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ADR Recorded at the College of Creative Arts Massey, Wellington & Department of Post, Auckland

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POW Studios Wellington, New Zealand

Dolby Atmos Mix Department of Post, Auckland, New Zealand

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FIONA BARTLETT

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KATHRYN BURNETT

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Lighting Equipment supplied by

Portsmouth Rentals

Grip Equipment supplied by

Filmtec

Video & DIT equipment supplied by

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NZFX

RT's supplied by

Wireless Rentals

Unit equipment supplied by

Craft Services

Unit Generator supplied by

Electrical Generation Services

Production vehicles supplied by

DCR Rentals

MUSIC SUPERVISOR

AMINÉ RAMER

"A FAREWELL TO ARMS"

written by

Ernest Hemingway

courtesy of

The Estate of Ernest Hemingway

represented by

The Gersh Agency

"FERN HILL"

written by

Dylan Thomas

with thanks to

The Dylan Thomas Trust

"KA MATE"

composed by

Te Rauparaha

courtesy of

Ngāti Toa Rangatira

thanks to

**Ihaia Ropata, Te Rauparaha Horomona, Taku Parai,
Anahera Parata**

Original Music composed by John Gibson

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Musicians

Steve Roche

Gerard Crewdson

Joe Lindsay

Kingsley Melhuish

Jeff Henderson

Chris O'Connor

Rod Cooper

Music Recorded at

The Audio Foundation and Plan 9

Music Produced & Mixed by

Plan 9

Thanks to

The Audio Foundation

"CHORALE"

Composed by

John Gibson

Performed by

Steve Roche

"IF I ONLY HAD TIME"

written by

Pierre Delanoe, Michel Paul Fugain, Jack Fishman

performed by

Gene Pitney

courtesy of

**Gusto Records, Inc. & Universal Music Publishing
Group**

"THE LIGHTNING TREE"

written by

Stephen Francis

performed by

The Settlers

courtesy of

Speakeasy Recordings

"KNEES UP MOTHER BROWN"

written by

Lee/Weston

licensed Courtesy of

**Peter Maurice Music Co Ltd
BMG Rights Management (Australia) Pty Ltd**

performed by

John Lithgow, Janet Roddick

"I'VE GOT A LOVELY BUNCH OF COCONUTS"

written by

Box,Cox,Dash

performed by

Richard Chapman

licensed courtesy of

**(C) Dash Music Co Ltd, BMG Rights Management
(Australia) Pty Ltd**

"AND YOU SMILED"

written by

Jan Stoeckart, Melvyn David Taggart

performed by

Matt Monro

licensed courtesy of

**Warner Music New Zealand Limited & De Wolfe
Music**

"DON'T LEAVE ME NOW"

written by

Carl Coccomo and Louis Castellucci

performed by

Carl Coccomo

courtesy of

Nice Rights Pty Ltd & Fervor Records

"MISERY MISERY MISERY"

written by Waine Lynn Mincy

performed by Jimmy Gilmer

courtesy of Norman Petty Studios

by arrangement with Mutiny Recording

Archive courtesy of

Howard Hall Productions / NatureFootage

TVNZ via Getty Images

BBC Motion Gallery via Getty Images

Lead cast accommodation thanks to QT Muesum Hotel Wellington

Filmed on location in Taupō at Wairakei Resort & Spa

New Zealand Studio Facilities provided by Stone Street Studios, Wellington NZ

Made with the support of Film Bay of Plenty, Amplify and Love Taupō

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Distribution Advisory Services: CAA Media Finance

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Completion Guaranty – Film Finances, Inc.

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WITH THANKS

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Poppy Dowle

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Wairakei Resort Taupō & Bayview Hotels	Sir Peter Jackson
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Fuiono Ropati	Bronson Tamahaka
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Kaine Thompson	Ruth Harley
Katherine Baxter	Olga Rodriguez-Aguirre
Greg Thompson	Dr. Julia Slark

VERY SPECIAL THANKS

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Brian & Kitty Ashcroft	Elric Kane
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Scott Henderson

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Nick Ogiony

Billy Lazarus

Tara Shaghafi

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The characters and events depicted in this film are fictitious. Any similarities to any persons, living or dead, are purely coincidental.

COMBINED NZFC LOGO

BLUESKIN FILMS LOGO

LITD PRODUCTIONS LOGO

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