

# *Whakatiki*

*A Spirit Rising*

WITH MABELLE DENNISON JIM MORIARTY JASON TE KARE STEPHANIE MATUKU ALYSSA MATAITI CHRISTIAN DENNISON  
DIRECTOR LOUISE LETTCH DOP MARTYN WILLIAMS ART DIRECTOR NICOLE SPACKMAN WDM SUPERVISOR KATE TRAFFORD BEGING GAFFER GRIP BYRON SPARROW GAFFER ADRIAN HEBRON  
EDITOR LALA ROLLS SOUND DESIGNER RAY BEENTJES COMPOSER TOM MCLEOD CASTING TINA CLEARY WRITER CO-PRODUCER BERNADETTE MURPHY PRODUCER MELISSA DODDS  
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INTERNATIONAL SALES BY NZ FILM



# WHAKATIKI PRODUCTION INFORMATION

Director Louise Leitch  
Producer Melissa Dodds  
Writer/Co-Producer Bernadette Murphy

Format: Originated 16mm: HDCam finish  
Duration: 12.48 minutes  
Aspect Ratio: 16:9  
Sound: 5.1 Surround  
Language: English and Maori

Filmed on location in Kaitoke Regional Park and Greater Wellington, New Zealand

Floodlight Film Productions Ltd  
PO Box 15467  
Miramar  
Wellington 6023  
New Zealand  
Tel: +64 4 387 8754 or  
Tel: + 64 272 224 082

[www.whakatiki.co.nz](http://www.whakatiki.co.nz)

Produced by Floodlight Film Productions Ltd in association with An MSD Production and Picture the Difference Ltd.

This film was made with assistance from the Independent Filmmakers Fund (a partnership between Creative New Zealand and the New Zealand Film Commission), the New Zealand Film Commission's Short Film Post-Production Fund and Women in Film Foundation Finishing Fund.

## INTERNATIONAL SALES

NZ Film: Lisa Chatfield  
PO Box 11546  
Wellington  
New Zealand  
Tel: +64 382 7686  
Fax: +64 384 9719  
[lisa@nzfilm.co.nz](mailto:lisa@nzfilm.co.nz)

## INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR *WHAKATIKI* FROM WOMEN IN FILM LOS ANGELES

*Whakatiki* was one of only seven films worldwide, and the only short film, to be awarded post-production funds in the 25th Annual Women In Film Foundation's Film Finishing Fund. 2010 was a record year with over 140 grant applications from 11 countries: the U.S., England, Spain, Finland, Philippines, South Africa, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, New Zealand, Canada and Australia. The cash grant awarded to *Whakatiki* was generously donated by Netflix, Inc.

### TAG LINE

A spirit rising.

### LOG LINE

A day at the river unexpectedly awakens the spirit of a woman held captive by years of broken promises.

### SYNOPSIS

Kiri, an overweight Maori woman, takes a trip to the Whakatiki River where she spent many summers as a girl. With her goes her husband Dan, his friend Seb and beautiful newcomer, Josie. The place awakens powerful memories for Kiri, and as tensions mount she draws on her spiritual connection to the river to rise up and reconnect with her true self.

### FILM MAKER BIOGRAPHIES

#### LOUISE LEITCH - DIRECTOR

Louise grew up in Australia and graduated from Canberra University with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Media. At the age of 23 Louise was running an in-house production unit for the Australian Commonwealth Government directing drama and factual programs on issues such as child care, homelessness, disabilities, Aboriginal health and community services for rural and outback settlements. Her programs won national and international awards including a Gold and Silver Mobie from the International Television Association and a Certificate of Creative Excellence from the US Film and Video Festival. "It was a fantastic training ground and it cemented two things for me - one, I loved making drama and was determined to make it my life's work, and two, I loved making films that mattered."

Louise then embarked on a successful television drama directing career, directing close to 200 episodes of some of Australia's most iconic dramas such as *Home & Away* and *Breakers*.

While television drama is a fantastic discipline, Louise hankered to make projects for the big screen, so when love beckoned from across the Tasman Sea, Louise was not entirely unhappy about walking away from her Australian television career and moving to New Zealand. The move to New Zealand has been the impetus to act on her passion for film. *Whakatiki* is Louise's second short film. Her next short film, *Blankets*, has received funding from the New Zealand Film Commission and she has other short and feature length projects in development.

## MELISSA DODDS - PRODUCER

Melissa has produced numerous short films including Patrick Gillies' *Kitty* which was selected for over fifteen international film festivals including a world premiere at the Montreal World Film Festival. In addition, she was Associate Producer on Patrick's digital/16mm feature, *Offensive Behaviour*, which premiered at the 2006 Cannes Marché du Film.

She was a production manager at Weta Workshops and has produced and/or production managed various commercials and television productions including thirteen episodes of arts program, *The Gravy IV*, for TVNZ 7.

In 2010 Melissa was awarded a Women in Film and Television Producer Mentorship. She subsequently line produced Paul Campion's feature, *The Devil's Rock* and is currently producing the feature film, *Existence*, which was one of only three films selected from over 250 applications in the New Zealand Film Commission's inaugural "Escalator" scheme.

## BERNADETTE MURPHY - WRITER/CO-PRODUCER

Born in the Hutt Valley, just north of Wellington, New Zealand, Bernadette is of English/Irish/Maori descent with her ancestors belonging to the Te Ati Awa tribe of Taranaki.

With a background in freelance journalism, Bernadette undertook a Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand and found herself progressively drawn to the Shakespearean drama papers. It took her three applications, and three rejections over as many years before she was finally granted admission to the limited entry 'Writing for Stage & Screen' course. This piqued her passion for screenplay writing and *Whakatiki* followed.

Bernadette is writing her first feature-length screenplay.

Photos below from left to right: Bernadette Murphy, Melissa Dodds, Louise Leitch



## LOUISE LEITCH - DIRECTOR'S NOTES

### ATTRACTIONS AND CHALLENGES

*Whakatiki's* themes are powerful and universal, yet at the same time the story is firmly rooted in New Zealand and the characters are all Maori. I met and worked with a lot of Kiwis in Sydney, but before moving to New Zealand I didn't know much about Maori culture.

*Whakatiki* combined my passion for strong narrative with a desire to learn more about Maori culture - relationships and responsibilities within whanau (family), beliefs and values, traditions versus modern day pressures, connectedness to place and past. All relevant to Kiri's story and how I wanted to tell it. The cast were a huge resource in my developing knowledge and I am grateful to them for the generosity they showed me.

From the outset I felt a strong sense of responsibility to Kiri and her story. I wanted to do it justice. I wanted to create an intimate, authentic portrayal of a woman held captive, as much by herself, as by her external circumstances. Within the constraints of the short film medium my challenge was to create a believable set of characters with a sense of history and context. It was important to me that I handled the film's themes, characters and relationships with a light touch and an absence of sentimentality. While Kiri's journey is a challenging one, it is also uplifting, and I hope that audiences will share the joy I feel when the fiercely independent spirit of young Kiri is awakened in Kiri the woman.

The lyrical, almost spiritual nature of the river setting had instant appeal in terms of story and character and the opportunities it afforded DOP, Marty Williams, and myself to create two very different worlds - the world above water and the world below.

I knew from the start that sound was going to be hugely important to creating a strong sense of place as well as deepening the audience's understanding and involvement with character and I was fortunate to work with sound designer, Ray Beentjes, and composer, Tom McLeod, in realising the soundscape for the film.

### CASTING

Our greatest challenge was always going to be casting the role of Kiri. We needed an obese Maori woman who could not only act, but who could meet the physical and emotional challenges of the role.

With a background in children's television, **Mabelle Dennison** was not the obvious choice but she is so perfect for the part of Kiri that the role could well have been made for her. During auditions Mabelle left us speechless with the scenes she prepared and the thought she had already given to the broader themes of the story. This positive start blossomed during rehearsals and I knew that we had made the right casting choice. Mabelle is a real pleasure to work with. Absolutely comfortable in her own skin. Generous, intelligent, intuitive. I feel very proud of her and the work she did on our film. Mabelle's television credits include a lead role in the Gibson Group television drama, *Paradise Cafe*, a dialogue role in the 2010 *Cervical Smear Television Advertising Campaign* and roles in the telefeatures, *The Tale of Tangiwai*, *Clear*, and drama series, *The Strip*. Mabelle is fluent in Te Reo Maori and enjoys mentoring young people.

For the role of Kiri's husband, Dan, I needed a senior actor with the gravity to match Mabelle. I wanted to create an authentic married couple and quickly convey a sense of history between them. Short films always present a challenge in terms of establishing relationships and portraying a sense of history but I knew that this was really important if I was to create a

believable set of circumstances in which to tell Kiri's story. It was also imperative to me that characters were three-dimensional - I wasn't interested in creating a stereotypical bad guy. Friend and fellow film maker, Costa Botes, having directed **Jim Moriarty** in the feature film, *Saving Grace*, approached Jim (a notoriously difficult man to track down) with the script for *Whakatiki* and what turned out to be a good sell on me! Jim is an actor and theatre director who has worked on stage and screen since the 1970's. He is well known for his performance as a Vietnam War veteran in John Broughton's *Michael James Manaia*, which toured New Zealand and played at the Edinburgh Festival. After I talked with Jim about my vision for the film, and we got to know each other a little better, Jim agreed to play the role of Dan. I was delighted! He brings great presence to the film.

Mabelle and Jim are supported by the talented **Jason Te Kare** as Dan's friend Seb, and **Stephanie Matuku** plays Seb's cousin, Josie. Jason has appeared in various theatre, television and film roles since graduating from New Zealand Drama School, Toi Whakaari, in 2001. In 2006 Jason won "Best Newcomer" at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards. Stephanie's screen experience includes the 2008 Gibson Group telefeature, *Aftershock*.

The children play pivotal roles in *Whakatiki*, particularly young Kiri and Boy. They are potent symbols of hope and innocence.

Young Kiri presented another casting challenge as we needed to find a "water baby" who was a good match for adult Kiri. It was unlikely that conventional casting sessions were going to uncover a perfect match so we turned to local schools. I picked **Alyssa Mataiti** from a talented bunch of eight year old girls from St Joseph's Primary School in Upper Hutt - the same school that our writer, Bernadette, attended! She is a beautiful little girl, with a depth and self-containment to her that I knew was perfect for young Kiri. Like her character, Alyssa spends a lot of time getting lost in the wonder of the river and the native bush in Upper Hutt.

Boy is played by Mabelle's son, **Christian Dennison**, seven years old at the time of filming. An obvious, perfect choice.



Photo left to right: Actor Jim Moriarty, 3rd Camera Simon Oliver, Director Louise Leitch

*Whakatiki* also features several boys from **Terakau Trust**, including Daarian in the role of young Kiri's brother. Committed to theatre as a tool for change, **Jim Moriarty** was a founding member of Terakau Trust, established in 1989. Te Rakau is the longest surviving Maori Community Theatre and Theatre in Education company in New Zealand. Te Rakau utilises the unique form of 'Theatre Mara'e' to work in marginalised and mainstream communities. Te Rakau also delivers a residential therapeutic recovery program for at risk Rangatahi (youth). The boy's surnames have been omitted from the film for privacy reasons.

## MELISSA DODDS - PRODUCER'S NOTES

Bernadette maintains that *Whakatiki* has a way of attracting the right people at the right time and this has been borne out on several occasions, including Louise's and my introduction to the project.

Bernadette wrote the script but didn't know who she could trust it to, so it sat in her bottom drawer for two years before she decided to enter it in the Screen Canterbury pitching competition. She won runner-up at that event, but perhaps more significantly, Bernadette was introduced to Louise by one of the judges. At last, a possible director for her project. After a couple of long sessions over coffee and chamomile tea, the pair decided they could work together and went full steam ahead developing *Whakatiki* for the New Zealand Film Commission's prestigious Executive Shorts Funding Scheme. *Whakatiki* was shortlisted by this Scheme in 2008 (one of nine projects from 212 applications) but not green lit. Undeterred, Louise and Bernadette submitted the film the following year to the Independent Filmmakers Fund (a joint initiative between Creative New Zealand and the New Zealand Film Commission) and found success!



Director of Photography, Martyn Williams, on location in Kaitoke Regional Park, Wellington, New Zealand

At this point, I was introduced to the project by fellow producer, Costa Botes, who was unable to continue assisting Louise and Bernadette on the project. I am drawn to strong women's stories and I loved the script on first reading. It gave me goosebumps and I knew that I wanted to be involved. When it initially seemed that the dates would conflict with a feature film I was line producing, I was gutted, but serendipity was again to play its part when production on the feature was delayed and I was able to start work on *Whakatiki* right away.

*Whakatiki* is a great story and a great journey - pure and simple. It draws people to it. Just about everyone we spoke to wanted to be involved.

On meeting Louise I was impressed with the clarity of her vision for *Whakatiki*. She has a lot of drama experience behind her and fantastic attention to detail. Everyone knows where they stand with Louise and it was a happy, productive shoot despite the challenges of working with children, variable weather and underwater cinematography!

*Whakatiki* is a hugely ambitious film relative to its budget. It really is testimony to the enormous generosity and commitment of the cast and crew, that we were able to produce such a high quality film on the funds available.

Alyssa Mataiti as Young Kiri



## BERNADETTE MURPHY - WRITER'S NOTES

### *WHAKATIKI* - WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Whakatiki (pronounced fa-ka-tickee) is a Maori word. The film is named after the Whakatiki river in which I spent so many summers as a girl. I knew that river intimately. I knew where it tripped lightly over sun-filled shallows and where it sucked down deep in a whirlpool to the darkness below, where eels waited to bite my toes. I knew its smell and I knew its sound, below the surface. And it knew me, from my very insides out. It filled my ears and nose and I swallowed it and absorbed it through the pores of my skin. Something like that – and the sense of belonging and oneness it brings – never leaves you. Even if you leave it. And my memories of this undoubtedly created the intensely lush and tactile images of *Whakatiki*.

It wasn't until some time after I'd written the script that I made the discovery that Whakatiki means 'to rise up' or 'to lift with enthusiasm.' It was the summary of not only Kiri's fierce inner struggle and ultimate break to freedom, but mine. Despite our physical differences, there were distinct similarities between Kiri and me. This was when I understood that *Whakatiki* isn't a film for 'fat people.' It's a film for all people, because, to some degree or other, many of us are carrying, in our own way, the 'baggage' Kiri carries around and I believe that each of us yearns for the 'weightlessness' Kiri experiences in the water, whether we're aware of it or not. This is why *Whakatiki* holds appeal for audiences worldwide. No matter what the language or culture, as human beings we all long for the freedom we had before we became weighed down with the baggage of life.

It's my hope that *Whakatiki* changes lives. It's my hope that the courage of Kiri gives the audience the courage to make changes in their own lives – to make a stand, to strive for something better, to be kinder to themselves and to be free.

In this way the spirit is still rising. And gives so much to the name. Whakatiki.

### WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

I consider myself fortunate to be one of very few writers in New Zealand who has the pleasure of seeing their work finished and up on the big screen. It has been an amazing experience, however, the highlight for me has been working with Louise.

From very early on I had a strong sense that Louise was the right director for *Whakatiki*. Right from the outset, Louise was committed to preserving the integrity of the story. My opinions have always been valued, and on the rare occasion when we didn't agree about a point, it was ironically comforting to hear her say, 'Well, we'll just have to agree to differ on that one.' She has always been very clear about her artistic prerogative and I trust that when she has a conviction about something, she's probably right.

It is this mutual respect, underpinned by a quiet confidence in our respective crafts, that makes for an awesome team and ultimately an awesome production. For which I'll be eternally grateful.

## END CREDITS

Kiri	Mabelle Dennison
Husband Dan	Jim Moriarty
Seb	Jason Te Kare
Josie	Stephanie Matuku
Boy	Christian Dennison
Young Kiri	Alyssa Mataiti
Young Kiri's Brother	Daarian
River Extras	Dylan, Nathan, Tyronne, Harley - Te Rakau Trust, Krystal Meyrick, Ariana McCormack, Clarisse Harman

Director	Louise Leitch
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Producer	Melissa Dodds
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Writer/Co-Producer	Bernadette Murphy
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Director of Photography	Martyn Williams
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Editor	Lala Rolls
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Composer	Tom McLeod
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Sound Designer	Ray Beentjes
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Sound Recordist	Ken Saville
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Boom Operator	Joe Fraser
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Picture & Sound Services by Park Road Post Production, Wellington, New Zealand

Facilities Manager	Nina Kurzmann
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DI Editor	Tim Willis
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Colourist	Matthew Wear
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Sound Mixer	Gilbert Lake
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Taperoom Supervisor	Victoria Chu
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Tape Operator	Steve Duburguet
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Sound Mix Supervisor	Hassan Lehrech
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Titles and Credits	Brendan Dee
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Offline Edit Assist	Nathan Hickey
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Additional Sound Facilities	Outpost
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Score Supervisor	Sarah Lineham
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Featured Musicians	Sarah Lineham - vocals
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	Nick Granville - guitars
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	Tom McLeod - ukuleles
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First AD	Jules Lovelock
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Script Supervisor	Pete Wellington
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Production Assist/3 <sup>rd</sup> AD	Tom Kelly
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Casting	Tina Cleary, St Joseph's School, Upper Hutt,
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Angela and Paul Murphy

Art Director	Nicole Spackman
Art Assist	David Hewitt
Art Assist	Tom Southall
Make Up/Wardrobe Supervisor	Kate Trafford
Make Up Assist	Azure Ellis
Wardrobe Standby	Alex Boyd
Wardrobe Assist	Cam Putt Jessica Murphy
Focus Puller	Graham MacFarlane
2 <sup>nd</sup> Camera Assist/Stills	Tammy Williams
3 <sup>rd</sup> Camera/Lx Assist	Simon Oliver
Gaffer/Grip	Byron Sparrow
Gaffer	Adrian Hebron
Lighting/Grip Assist	Chris Murphy
Lighting Assist	Hansel Verkerk
Unit Location Manager	Gabriel Page
Unit Assistants	Akira, Jarryn
Safety Officer	Brent Sylvester
Runners	Heather Cottam Melanie Murphy Emma Murphy
Chaperones	Tania Milne, Pare-Kotuku Porter-Samuels, Aniwaniwa Porter-Samuels, Michaela Gemmel
Camera	Metro Film
Freight	Xtreme Forwarding
Film Stock	Fuji
Grip/Lighting	Gunmetal
Radios	Portsmouth – Leonne Wireless Warehouse
Catering	Billionaires Catering – Billie Lusk
Coffee	c4 Christchurch
Insurance	Crombie Lockwood

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Taisia Mishevich, Lily Cartwright and family, Rose Markholm, Felicity Markholm and Samantha Markholm, Melissa Billington/Myoga, Peter Tonks, Mary & Glenn Rangi, Juliette Veber, Nick Keller, Jason Naran, Wellington Photographic Services, Splash Gordon, Sigi Spath, Bettys Function House, Cancer Society of New Zealand, Island Bay Butchery, Bill Giannakakis ENIGMA FILMS