

# **FIRECRACKERS**

a film by

**Jasmin Mozaffari**

Logline  
Director's Statement  
Cast Biographies  
Creative Team

## LOGLINE

Tough, proudly sexual, and often crude, Lou and her best friend Chantal are going to New York tomorrow. The meanness of their small town, the off-handed cruelty of the women in their lives and the pointed misogyny of boys and men have left them raw and hungry to escape. But Kyle, Chantal's sometimes boyfriend, reminds her in the most brutal way, that freedom isn't hers to take. Enraged by this injustice, Lou and Chantal seek revenge – the price may be their freedom.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 2012, I wrote and directed the short film *Firecrackers* which followed Lou and Chantal, two teenage friends, determined to escape their small town and move to New York. The film instantly resonated with young women who had longed to see bold and unapologetic female characters on screen. Four years later, I set out to expand this story into a feature length version that also focuses on the restrictions placed on the freedom of women and girls.

One of the first scenes I wrote for the feature was inspired by one of many dangerous and frightening moments from my youth. I was 15, in the basement of my friend's boyfriend's house when he took out a handgun and started waving it around in drunken stupor. Later that night, with my friend out of the room, he sexually harassed me. From this I devised a critical scene in *Firecrackers* in which Chantal consents to have a loaded rifle in her mouth while two men eagerly film the action on their cell phones. In both my own experience and the one I created for the film, I found myself asking – how does one arrive at this moment? It became obvious that over time, I – like Chantal – had learned to normalize both overt and subtle misogynistic acts. I had begun to unravel the incredibly intricate and difficult layers of this system of patriarchal oppression, and my struggle to exist within it.

The characters of Lou and Chantal echo teenage girls I knew growing up in a small city north of Toronto. They were tough, proudly sexual, and often crude. I looked up to these young women for challenging the status quo. They defied social stereotypes of femininity. This proved threatening not only to men, but also to women who had learned to internalize misogyny as a means of survival – much like Lou's mother, Leanne.

Like Lou and Chantal, the more my teenage friends pushed back against patriarchal ideals, the more they were shamed, slandered, and ultimately punished. I encountered this pattern of shame and punishment myself well into my twenties, and still do today. Lou and Chantal represent two sides of myself, and, perhaps, of many women. When to be submissive, and when to challenge misogyny? The film looks at the consequences of this struggle.

Sexual assault is one of the most obvious forms of oppression. I wasn't interested in focusing on the details of an assault, but rather the far-reaching reverberations of such a violation. Even though Kyle is the perpetrator, it is Chantal and Lou who are punished, leading their friendship to fray and threatening their chance of ever escaping.

Lou and Chantal are not the only victims of societal 'norms'. I wasn't interested in painting men as the sole enemy – quite the opposite. In *Firecrackers*, patriarchal oppression and misogyny hurt the male characters as well. Josh, first seen as an ally, ultimately abandons the girls in favour of upholding his fragile sense of masculinity – but not without considerable guilt. A recovering addict, Leanne's boyfriend Johnny is at the transition point of becoming painfully self-aware. While

his vulnerability is celebrated by Leanne, it mocked by his old army buds, and abused by Lou. Jesse, Lou's younger brother is punished for refusing to conform to Leanne's idea of masculinity. Many of the characters are victims of the trauma that accompanies oppression. They are doing their best to navigate patriarchy.

It was important for me to distil these ideas into a comprehensible film language. The film's style is a mix of free-flowing realism and moments of heightened reality. The vibrant optimistic palette and mobile camera at the start of the film makes way for a darker colour scheme and more static framing as the girl's hope begins to fade. I took months to rehearse with the actors, opting to blend scripted dialogue with careful improvisation to ensure that scenes felt tangible, visceral and grounded in realism. The end result is a film that I believe finds its roots in a social realist approach, while merging immersive stylistic sequences that transport the audience into Lou's surrealist headspace.

*Firecrackers* is a film that is relevant now more than ever. With the rise of the #metoo and Time's Up movements, there is a clear scrutiny of misogyny and a call to dismantle patriarchal oppression. Like Lou and Chantal, women of all demographics are angry, emboldened and finding strength in one another to fight for freedom.

Standing against a vibrant sky in Lou's red jacket and pink lipstick, Jesse looks out defiantly as the girls speed into an unknowable future. In these last moments of *Firecrackers*, there is fear, trepidation, and sadness, but there is also a fierce determination to *persist*. In the end, Lou and Chantal realize that freedom is hard won, but the fight for it must continue - no matter what the cost.

- Jasmin Mozaffari | Writer & Director

## CAST BIOGRAPHIES

### MICHAELA KURIMSKY - Lou

Michaela is Toronto-based actress, award-winning filmmaker on the rise and is a formerly trained singer through the world-renown Royal Conservatory of Music. Her eclectic background in music and filmmaking has allowed her to collaborate with Canada's new wave of independent filmmakers. Michaela was featured as the lead in Scott Cudmore's award-winning music video for Wintersleep, entitled "Amerika." It was this very nuanced and devastating performance that caught the eye of Toronto-based filmmaker Jasmin Mozaffari, who cast Michaela as the unapologetically bold lead in her first feature, *Firecrackers* (fall 2018). From here, Michaela's talent and voice have been sought out for numerous film and commercial opportunities. Most recently, Michaela was cast as the lead in the Chapters Indigo Christmas campaign, "Every Gift Tells a Story", where she played a lead singer of a band, requiring her to sing live on stage. The ad was released on television, YouTube, and movie theatres nation-wide.

### KARENA EVANS - Chantal

Karena Evans is an actor, director, and writer. She is a regular on Season 2 of the popular Lifetime/eOne series *Mary Kills People*. She appeared in the acclaimed feature *Every Day* (MGM). Based on David Levithan's acclaimed New York Times bestseller, *Every Day* tells the story of a 16-year old girl who falls in love with a mysterious soul named "A" who inhabits a different body every day

In 2018, Evans was presented with the Lipsett Award which recognizes a Canadian music video artist for their innovative and unique approach to music video art. She has skyrocketed into the public eye putting her cinematic stamp on videos for artists including XO's Belly, Sza and more recently Drake's God's Plan and Nice for What. Evans has also worked with CBC Arts on the series Heartbreak to Art, Nike's Air Max campaign and a Black Lives Matter social commentary piece.

### CALLUM THOMPSON - Jesse

Twelve year-old Callum Thompson is from London, Ontario. He has been a competitive dancer for five years and has been acting for three years in theatre, commercials, TV, film and music videos. Highlights include playing the role of Ralphie in a stage version of *A Christmas Story* (Grand Theatre), episodes of *Ponysitter's Club* (Brainpower Studio), a commercial for Amazon and a music video for the Canadian band Nikki's Wives. *Firecrackers* is Callum's first film role. He is currently taking vocal, acting and dance lessons and hopes to expand his experiences in the future.

## CREATIVE TEAM

JASMIN MOZAFFARI      Writer/Director,

Jasmin graduated from Ryerson University's Film Studies Program in 2013. While attending Ryerson she was a recipient of various awards including the HSBC Filmmaker Award for Best Director, and Norman Jewison Award for Best Film Production. Her student thesis film *Firecrackers (2013)* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and went on to screen at the Air Canada enRoute Film Festival, Vancouver International Film Festival, and numerous other festivals across Canada and Europe, as well as the TIFF Film Circuit. *Firecrackers* was subsequently sold to the CBC as a part of their Northern Reflections Program.

Jasmin's next short, *Wave*, screened at the Vancouver International Film and Aesthetica Short Film Festival in 2015 and received an honourable mention at the Breakthroughs Film Festival in June 2016. Jasmin was also a recipient of the Irving Avrich Fund at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2015, awarded to 10 emerging Canadian filmmakers.

CAITLIN GRABHAM      Producer

Caitlin graduated from Ryerson University's Film Studies program where she received the Norman Jewison Award for Excellence in Filmmaking. During her final year she produced Jasmin Mozaffari's short film *Firecrackers*. The film premiered at Toronto International Film Festival and played across Canada and internationally at numerous other film festivals, including Vancouver International Film Festival and Festival der Filmhochschulen Munich. The short can now be seen on the CBC through their Canadian Reflections Program.

Caitlin also produced the short film *Wave*, which had its world premier at Vancouver International Film Festival and its international premier at the BAFTA qualifying Aesthetica Short Film Festival.

KRISTY NEVILLE      Executive Producer

Award-winning producer and partner at Wildling Pictures, Kristy Neville has quickly developed a reputation as one of the top producers emerging out of Canada's next generation of filmmakers. In a short time, Neville has had films screen at TIFF, Sundance, SXSW, Tribeca and Hot Docs, picking up two Sundance Special Jury Prizes along the way. In 2017 she won the CMPA Indiescreen Emerging Producer Award at TIFF alongside Wildling partner, Matt

Code. Her first feature film, *Cardinals*, written and directed by Grayson Moore and Aidan Shipley, premiered at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival. The same year Molly McGlynn's *Mary Goes Round*, on which Neville served as co-producer, also had its premiere at TIFF.

MATT CODE          Executive Producer

Matt Code is an award-winning producer of films and television and founding partner of Wildling Pictures, a Toronto-based production company. Code produced the award-winning *Mary Goes Round* from writer/director Molly McGlynn, which premiered at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival. He was also executive producer of Grayson Moore and Aiden Shipley's *Cardinals*, which premiered at TIFF 2017 as well. Most recently, Code produced Christy Garland's latest feature documentary, *What Walaa Wants*, with Anne Köhncke. The film will had its world premiere at Berlinale 2018. Code is an alumnus of the Canadian Film Centre (Producers' Lab) and was the 2017 recipient of the Canadian Media Producers' Association's Emerging Producer Award (shared with Wildling partner, Kristy Neville).