

**Sandy Lane Productions and Long + Short Story Studio, the New Zealand Film
Commission in association with Celsius Entertainment**

JUNIPER

Written and Directed by

MATTHEW J. SAVILLE

Produced by

DESRAY ARMSTRONG

ANGELA LITTLEJOHN

Executive Producers

THIERRY WASE-BAILEY

HENRIETTE WOLLMANN

ANDREW MACKIE

RICHARD PAYTEN

MARK CHAMBERLAIN

Running time:

1hr 34min 34 sec

Website

[Juniper | Transmission Films](#)

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LOGLINE:

On returning home from boarding school, a self-destructive teenager discovers his gin-soaked grandmother has moved in. A battle of wills ensues which enables him to embrace life again, and her to face her own mortality.

TAGLINE: Life. Don't ever water it down.

SYNOPSIS:

Sam (17) has been on a self-destructive spiral that could lead to his death. He returns home from boarding school to find his wheelchair-bound English grandmother, Ruth, has moved in. Ruth is an ex-war photographer with a lust for life and a love of the bottle. Sam soon finds himself profoundly confronted by her alcoholic wit and chutzpah. Their first meeting is awkward; their second violent. Things get worse when Sam finds himself stranded alone with her and her nurse Sarah for the school holidays. Both strong-willed characters, a battle of supremacy ensues, enabling Sam to embrace life again and for Ruth to face her mortality.

WRITER AND DIRECTOR'S VISION

Juniper is a very personal story based on my experiences as a teenager. When I was 17, my alcoholic grandmother broke her leg and moved from Europe to live in New Zealand in the family home. Heather had lived an incredible life, she was in Spain during the Spanish Civil war, braved Africa, and drunk enough gin to pickle an elephant. In fact, when I knew her, she drank two-thirds of a bottle of gin every day. She was sharp, charming, funny, and rude. She brought all of us to tears, and also to fits of laughter, from her chair in the room we built for her. A chair she was confined to, as her broken femur never healed, and she never walked again.

Heather was rude and fearless, yet it was apparent that despite pushing us all away, she was desperately afraid of dying alone. She got her wish. I was lucky enough to hold her hand as she passed.

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At the time, I was going to boarding school in the suicide capital of New Zealand, Hamilton. In my five years there, three boys had taken their lives. Since then, I can name many more. There were many different stories and many different reasons. Different forms of shame and guilt played a large part in the choices these young men made.

So, in *Juniper*, I have unashamedly written a film that deals with some of the strongest dramatic themes we are confronted with as humans: Life, love, death, grief, shame and our own mortality. *Juniper* is a film about the choice we make as humans to live, and to die, how we handle grief and how we embrace life. While the themes are dark, its tone is humorous, and the drama doesn't have a touch of sentimentality.

It tells a transformative love story, in which a 77-year-old war journalist and her estranged suicidal grandson find true familial love with each other. In doing so an old woman is able to let go and die, and a young man deals with his grief, and lives.

Matthew Saville, November 2020

FILM'S STORY

Writer and director Matthew Saville's inspiration for *Juniper* was drawn from his own experiences growing up in New Zealand.

"Much like the character of Sam in my film, my grandma moved into our family home when I was 17. She broke her leg and dominated the house, drinking a bottle of gin a day. I didn't really know her at the time. She was a real character, and it was a crazy experience - but I was there with her until she died explained Saville.

Though confident he had a cinematic idea, it was when *Juniper's* theme developed from being a 'coming of age' tale, to a familial love story, that Saville knew he had unlocked something special.

Saville worked closely with Script Editor Katherine Fry and Producer Desray Armstrong, carefully crafting

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and refining the script for over a number of years before bringing on Miranda Rivers as casting director.

Littlejohn came onboard the film early 2019 on the strength of Saville's script and was excited at the opportunity to work with him on his feature film directorial debut. Littlejohn commented: *"It was one of the strongest most beautifully written scripts I had read in a long time and I connected immediately with the fraught family relationships and Ruth and Sam's ultimate love story."*

Saville wanted Charlotte Rampling for the role of Ruth from a very early stage: *"I was never sure we could get her, but I also felt confident that if she read the script, she might be interested."*

Travelling to Paris to meet with Rampling, Saville admitted to being nervous to meet her, but that they were quick to gel and build trust with one another.

"Collaboration with an actor is so important, especially with someone like Charlotte who has so much to offer outside of being in front of the camera. Charlotte is iconic, with a unique beauty, sophistication and power that came through in her portrayal of Ruth, allowing the character to be authentic and believable, something that was very important to me," commented Saville.

Rampling was attracted to the "beautifully crafted script" and the fact *Juniper* is an auteur film. *"I like making films with a smaller production team too. You feel like you can go on an adventure in a way you can't with a big production."*

Márton Csókás was then cast as Robert, with Saville noting that he brought a certain intelligence and European sensibility to the role.

Csókás was impressed with the *"well-structured and beautiful"* script, particularly the masculine and feminine principles. *"I was interested in the psychology around masculine and feminine principles and its context in the familial sense of what it is to be in a family that falls apart. And to then see the possibility of transformation and healing out of grief,"* expanded Csókás.

Fresh Kiwi talent George Ferrier stood out for the role of Sam, impressing Saville right from the get-go: *"We auditioned George with self-tapes and he impressed us immediately. He's an incredibly talented*

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young actor, I feel like he's a real discovery."

Charlotte Rampling agreed, noting Ferrier has "extraordinary potential." It was acting coach Miranda Harcourt's suggestion that Ferrier write a handwritten letter to Rampling ahead of production commencing, an old-school, romantic gesture, that helped build a lovely connection and chemistry between the pair.

Ferrier related to the script as soon as he read it: *"Sam's mother passed away of cancer, and my father passed away from cancer - so there were a lot of things that connected and resonated with me in this story. I'm sure everyone will be able to relate to Juniper's story on some level."*

Juniper is scored by award-winning musicians Marlon Williams and Mark Perkins, a first for the pair, but a challenge they relished. Perkins commented that there is a subtlety in the movie with the dialogue and the characters that they were keen to keep with the score.

Williams added: *"There's so much beautiful, natural acoustic space in the film - it's set-in wide-open country, and it was important to let that breath. Mark and I wanted to find natural sounds that sit alongside the world Juniper is set in. It's our hope audiences can explore the complexity of the characters through that approach."*

Saville believes that *Juniper's* story is universal, with stories of human connection more important than they've ever been: *"It's my hope Juniper is a transformative experience for audiences. The film contains dark themes, but I think people will walk away with a sense of hope and belief that we can get past the things that separate us."*

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ABOUT THE CAST

CHARLOTTE RAMPLING (OBE) (Ruth) is an Oscar-nominated actress with a career spanning more than 50 years. Charlotte's career began as a model, before being cast in a number of films in the 1960s. Her vast film credits include *The Night Porter*, *Stardust Memories*, *The Verdict*, *Swimming Pool*, *Angel*, *Night Train to Lisbon*, *Never Let Me Go*, *45 Years*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Red Sparrow* and the upcoming film adaptation of *Dune*. She received her Academy Award nomination for *45 Years*, a role that won her numerous Best Actress awards at film festivals around the world. She has also appeared in the television shows *Dexter* and *Broadchurch*. In 2019, Charlotte received the Honorary Golden Bear Award for lifetime achievement at Berlin Film Festival.

MÁRTON CSÓKÁS (Robert) Marton Csokas is a New Zealand actor of Hungarian descent. He has worked with some of the top filmmakers including Ridley Scott, Darren Aronofsky, Paul Greengrass, Peter Jackson, Jim Sheridan and Tim Burton. His feature credits include *MARK FELT* with Liam Neeson, Jeff Nichols' Oscar-nominated film *LOVING*, *THE EQUALIZER* with Denzel Washington, John Madden's *THE DEBT* with Jessica Chastain and the lead of David Mackenzie in *ASYLUM* with Natasha Richardson and Sir Ian McKellen.

Csokas starred on Broadway in Beau Willimon's (*HOUSE OF CARDS*) *PARISIAN WOMAN* opposite Uma Thurman. In addition to a recurring role on HBO's comedy *DIVORCE* alongside Sarah Jessica Parker, he starred in AMC's *INTO THE BADLANDS* for 2 seasons and *BURN YOUR MAPS* with Vera Farmiga and Jacob Tremblay as well as *VOICE FROM THE STONE* with Emilia Clarke. He was most recently seen in the BBC's mini-series *THE LUMINARIES* with Eva Green and just finished shooting Ben Affleck's and Matt Damon's feature *THE LAST DUEL* directed by Ridley Scott. Csokas received the Joseph Jefferson Award for playing Astrov in Anton Chekov's *UNCLE VANYA* at the Goodman Theatre, Chicago, directed by Bob Falls.

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GEORGE FERRIER (Sam) is a New Zealand actor who has appeared in *Kiwi Christmas*, *Dirty Laundry* and *Power Rangers Beast Morphers*. He attended Julliard Summer School - Geneva, Switzerland in 2018 and is currently studying at the Stella Adler Academy of Acting in LA. *Juniper* will be his first lead role in a feature film. He is repped by Odd Management in NZ and Circle of Confusion in the US.

EDITH POOR (Nurse Sarah) has worked in theatre, television and comedy throughout her career. In television, she appeared in *Super City*, *Underbelly NZ: The Land of the Long Green Cloud*, and *Mean Mothers*. She has performed in theatres across the world, including at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival for *This Was The World* and *Mule*, which also toured across Northern Ireland. She also performed in *Fanfiction* and *Expecto Patronum* at the NZ International Comedy Festival in 2011. *Juniper* will be her first feature film.

ABOUT THE CREW

MATTHEW J. SAVILLE (Writer and Director) has worked extensively as a writer, director, and actor across the film, theatre, and television in New Zealand for the last 17 years. His television credits include *Super City*, *Aftershock*, *Go Girls*, *The Most Fun You Can Have Dying*, *Sparticus*, and *The Almighty Johnsons*. Throughout Matthew's film career, he's worked on *Scarfies*, *Lord of the Rings*, *The Water Horse*, and *Rage*. Matthew's writing credits span *Shortland Street*, *The Insiders Guide to Love*, *Hitch Hike*, *Emu*, *The Blue Rose*, and *Dive*, which premiered at the Telluride Film Festival and won Best Short Film at 2014 Show Me Shorts Film Festival. *Juniper* is his first feature film as a writer and director.

DESRAY ARMSTRONG (Producer) is an award-winning independent producer with an extensive background in physical production. Her short films and web series' have screened in competition and won awards at multiple prestigious festivals around the world including Cannes, Berlin and SXSW. She produced Dustin Feneley's bold art house debut, *Stray*, which premiered at Moscow in 2018 and went on to win Best Actor before enjoying a successful festival run and nationwide theatrical release in NZ. Her second feature, James Ashcrofts' thriller *Coming Home in the Dark*, premiered in the Midnight Madness section at Sundance 2021. Alongside *Juniper*, also set for release in 2021 is Michelle Savill's comedy drama *Millie Lies Low* and Chelsea Winstanley's feature documentary *Toi Tū, Toi Ora: Visual*

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Sovereignty.

Her production company Sandy Lane Production's film and television development slate has a strong indigenous focus, with a number of projects with Māori women at the helm.

ANGELA LITTLEJOHN (Producer) is a seasoned international Screen Producer and Executive who has worked in the film and TV industry for the past 30 years. Her early career was spent in the UK working as Film & Drama Executive for Film4 at Channel4. Films made during her tenure included *Trainspotting*, *Secrets and Lies*, *Brassed Off* and Ken Loach's *Carla's Song*.

Since returning to NZ she has produced *Show of Hands*, *Apron Strings* and *Separation City*. She was part of the producing team on John Maclean's *Slow West* starring Michael Fassbender, Kodi Smit-McPhee and Ben Mendelsohn which won the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival in 2015. She was development & executive producer on Miranda Harcourt and Stuart MacKenzie's debut feature *The Changeover* in 2017. In 2019 she travelled to Australia to produce Ivan Sen's *Loveland* and Leah Purcell's *The Drovers Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson*. She recently teamed up with Desray Armstrong to produce Michelle Savill's *Millie Lies Low*, scheduled for release in 2021.

MARTY WILLIAMS (Director of Photography) Subjects that have gone before cinematographer Marty Williams' lens range from landscapes to South Auckland Shakespearian's *The Black Friars*.

Williams was a prolific shooter for arts shows *The Living Room* and shared a Best Cinematography Qantas Award for maverick lawyer documentary *Lost in Wonderland*.

Sometimes credited as Martyn Williams, he has also framed many short films *Day Trip*, *The World in Your Window*, *Ballad of Mad Dog Quinn*, *Hitchhike* along with acclaimed work on adverts (often collaborating with director Mark Albiston) and music videos (Phoenix Foundation, Little Bushman).

"Marty's backbone in documentary has given him an eye to shape light in a raw, beautiful fashion that feels achingly authentic. He can light a set to look a million bucks without emptying the lighting truck, and that's something cinematographers can only achieve with experience and talent."

Director Louis Sutherland

PETER ROBERTS (Editor) began his career as an editor in the UK before moving to New Zealand in 1985.

His credits are extensive, and include films like *50 Ways of Being Famous*, *The Most Fun You Can Have*

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Dying, The Dark Horse, Hip Hop-Eration, Into the Rainbow and Vermilion.

Throughout his career he has also worked on a number of television shows, such as *Cleverman, Legend of the Seeker* and *Jean* which he won Best Editor at the NZ TV awards. Peter is lead editor on the 2020 feature film *Savage*.

CHRIS ELLIOT (Production Designer) has been involved with the New Zealand Film and Television industry for over twenty years in a variety of roles from Costume Designer on Peter Jackson's *Dead Alive* to onset art director on Jane Campion's *Holy Smoke* – set decorator on location in Nigeria on *Half of the Yellow Sun* and production designer on several telefeatures *How to Murder Your Wife, Siege* and *Safe House*. Other projects include *Spartacus, The Piano, Xena, Underworld 3* and *Underbelly*. Most recently he was the production designer on Sam Kelly's debut feature film *Savage* released in 2020.

JANE HOLLAND (Costume Designer) has worked on an extensive number of screen productions during her career. Her feature film credits include *The World's Fastest Indian, Sione's Wedding, Boogeyman, The Legend of Johnny Lingo, Wendy Wu: Homecoming Warrior, 30 Days of Night, Matariki*.

She has also worked on numerous television series such as *Young Hercules, Jack of All Trades, Xena: Warrior Princess, Legend of the Seeker* and *The Shannara Chronicles*.

She is currently Costume Designer on the Netflix series *Cowboy Bebop* shooting in New Zealand. 12

MARLON WILLIAMS (Composer) New Zealand's Marlon Williams possesses one of the greatest voices of his generation. His effortlessly distinctive tone and heartstring-plucking vibrato have garnered widespread love around the world.

Williams is on a stellar career ascent: from singing duets with Florence Welch and Lorde, winning New Zealand's most coveted awards for Album of the Year and Song of the Year, and selling out global tours in support of his second album *Make Way for Love* out on Dead Oceans. He also made his Hollywood debut in 'A Star is Born'. In December of 2020, he released a collaboration album 'Plastic Bouquet', with Canadian duo Kacy and Clayton, to rave reviews.

MARK PERKINS (Composer) Born in Tauranga, New Zealand, producer and artist Mark Perkins began his musical career in 2014 as an intern at Neil Finn's legendary Roundhead Studio in Auckland. Mark learnt the ropes of recording and producing with Finn, who gave him after-hours studio access, during which

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Mark made his first songs under his own solo project, Merk.

In 2016 Mark was invited to attend the revered Red Bull Music Academy in Montreal. Shortly after graduating, he released his acclaimed debut album *Swordfish* under the Merk project. Written, recorded, produced and mixed by Mark, *Swordfish* exemplified Mark's virtuosity as an artist and engineer, and it won him New Zealand's coveted Taite Award for Best Independent Debut Album. Having built a reputation as one of the most exciting artists and producers to emerge from New Zealand's indie scene, Mark now operates out of his own studio in Auckland.

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