



He has her on a
tight leash.

BRENDA & BAXTER

AURORA BROWNE RODRIGO-FERNANDEZ STOLL AND MICHELA LUCI
COMPOSER CONAN KARPINSKI EDITOR ARIELLE SKOLNIK
PRODUCERS KEVIN DONG LEE MARSHALL LEAH JOHNSTON
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY LEAH JOHNSTON

Canada, 2023.
English, 7 mins.
Digital, Colour.
Sony Rinalto/ 1:33:1, DCP

PRODUCTION COMPANY:
Canadian Film Centre
2489 Bayview Ave,
Toronto, ON M2L 1A8

SALES & DISTRIBUTION CONTACT:
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logline & synopsis



AURORA BROWNE left and RODRIGO FERNANDEZ-STOLL right. Photo Credit: Cameron Roden

LOGLINE

Canadian comedy icon Aurora Browne (Baroness Von Sketch) stars in a portrait of a complicated woman as seen through the eyes of her adoring dog.

SYNOPSIS

Canadian comedy darling Aurora Browne (Baroness Von Sketch) stars in story about a woman named Brenda and her adoring dog Baxter. Life seems to be hunky dory for the two of them until Brenda's unresolved issues cause things to take an unexpected turn.

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

LEAH JOHNSTON (Writer/Director/Producer/Editor)

LEAH JOHNSTON an award-winning filmmaker from Nova Scotia, Canada. Her short film, INGRID AND THE BLACK HOLE, premiered at Fantasia Film Festival and was showcased at over twenty film festivals, winning eight awards, including Best Canadian Short at Edmonton International Film Festival. Her last short MOTHER'S SKIN was the only live-action film from North America selected to premiere in the Golden Goblet Competition at Shanghai International Film Festival. It took home two awards at Atlantic Film Festival, including Best Short and the Joan Orenstein Award for Outstanding Performance for her six-year old leading actress, Briar Ainslie. Leah is the recipient of the Corus Fearless Female Filmmaker Award (2015), the \$35,000 Bravofact/WIFT Prize (2015) and the National Screen Institute Drama Prize (2013). She graduated with a B.F.A. from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and is an alumna of Canadian Film Centre's Directing Lab, the National Screen Institute, the Reykjavik Talent Lab and the Academy of Canadian Cinema Inaugural Women's Directing program.



DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2022

Mother's Skin

Writer/Director/Producer/Editor

2016

Ingrid and the Black Hole

Writer/Director/Producer/Editor

2015

My Younger Older Sister

Writer/Director/Actor/Producer

2014

Some Things Won't Sleep

Writer/Director

2013

Another Man

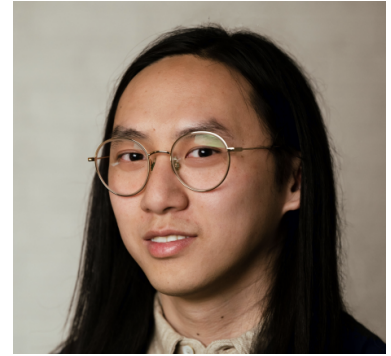
Writer/Director/Producer/Editor/Actor



KEVIN DONG (PRODUCER)

KEVIN DONG is a producer based in Calgary, Alberta. He produced the feature film *Events Transpiring Before, During, and After a High School Basketball Game* (2021), which premiered at Vancouver IFF. He has produced works in collaboration with Telefilm Canada, CBC, Canada Media Fund, and Canada Council for the Arts alongside directors and creators, emerging and experienced.

Kevin is currently a resident of the Canadian Film Centre's prestigious Norman Jewison Film Program in the Producers' Lab, and an alumnus of TIFF's Series Accelerator lab.



LEE MARSHALL (PRODUCER)

LEE MARSHALL produces stories that celebrate outsiders, interlopers, and misfits on the screen. Her first feature *Bleed With Me* (2021) was called "a tautly constructed work of psychological horror" by *The Guardian*, and her most recent short *Face* (2022) was selected by SODEC for Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival. She is developing a horror-comedy with support from Telefilm while also developing a dark comedy series with support from the Canada Media Fund and Independent Production Fund. Lee is a Resident of the 2023 Canadian Film Centre's Norman Jewison Program Producer's Lab.



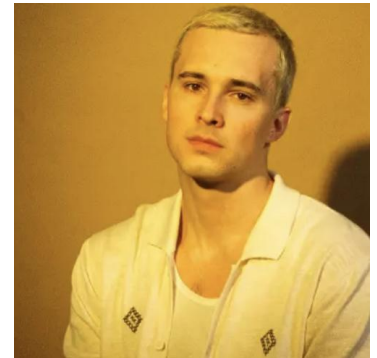
ARIELLE SKOLNIK (Editor)

ARIELLE STOLNIK is a Toronto-based editor with an interest in stories that present a unique perspective to the world. After graduating from the Post Production program at Humber College, she joined the DGC and worked as an assistant editor on tv series like *Baroness Von Sketch Show*, *Halo* and *Chapelwaite*. Arielle's notable editing credits include *It's Gonna Be Great*, a digital comedy series from musician Tim Baker and directed by Jordan Canning as well as CBC Gem's *True Dating Stories* for which she received a CCE Award nomination. In her free time, Arielle enjoys creating art and exploring the city on foot.



CONAN “CON THE ARTIST” KARPINSKI (Composer)

CONAN KARPINSKI is a South African multi-instrumentalist, composer, songwriter and director based in Vancouver, BC. He is the lead songwriter and frontman of Canadian Rock band Soul Push, an acoustic folk artist known as Conan Jurek, and a record producer. Most recently, he composed original music for the award-winning feature Portraits from a Fire (dir. Trevor Mack)



CAMERON RODEN (Cinematographer)

CAMERON RODEN is a cinematographer and filmmaker from Toronto. At an early age he bore witness to his grandfathers love for photography; spending time at his side developing film in his dark room, Cameron's journey into the realm of cinematography began with a childhood fascination for storytelling through the lens. Early on, Cameron displayed an innate talent for capturing moments on film, experimenting with his first camera at the age of 10. Creating home movies and stop motion animations. Cameron's distinct visual style, characterized by a harmonious blend of light and shadow, caught the attention of established filmmakers. He soon found himself collaborating with renowned directors on music videos, independent films, documentaries, and commercials. He has worked with the likes of Canadian singer/songwriter Serena Ryder to the winner of Canada's Drag Race Season 1; Priyanka. Cameron's calm demeanour and selective eye has proven successful in the feature world as well, his fourth feature is expected to be completed in early 2024.



DARIEN GOMEZ (Production Designer)

DARIEN GOMEZ is a visionary in production design and art direction, has crafted his artistic journey from a young age. His passion for the arts sparked at four when he received his first camera, igniting a lifelong love for visual storytelling. By 17, he delved into interior design, graphic design, and carpentry, honing a multifaceted skill set that formed the foundation of his career. His artistic prowess shines through in his collaborations with esteemed brands like Hallmark and Lifetime, where he has lent his creative touch to numerous projects. Alongside these major productions, Darien has also dedicated himself to independent ventures, infusing his distinctive style and expertise into each project he undertakes. His portfolio stands as a testament to his dedication, talent, and unyielding passion for bringing captivating visual narratives to life.

SARAH LANG (Production Designer)

SARAH LANG is a production designer. She holds a degree in Theatre and Film from Queens University in Kingston, ON. She has production designed for numerous TV movies, including Hallmark's HOME FOR THE ROYAL HEART, CHRISTMAS ON MISTLETOE LAKE, A CANDLELIT CHRISTMAS and THE PERFECT PAIRING.



BELLA THE DOG. Photo Credit: Cameron Roden

CAST (in order of appearance)

AURORA BROWNE (“Brenda”)

Aurora is an actor, improviser, writer, director and producer best known for co-creating and starring in *Baroness Von Sketch Show* (CBC,IFC) Other credits include: *Orphan Black*, *Newborn Moms*, *Run the Burbs*, *The Great Canadian Baking Show*, *The Drop*, *The Kids in the Hall*, *Odd Squad*, and *Robocop*.



RODRIGO FERNANDEZ-STOLL (“Greg”)

An actor, director and comedian based out of Toronto, Rodrigo has worked in the film/tv industry for 15 years. Notable acting credits include recurring guest star on CBS comedy *Ghosts*, *Star Trek Discovery*, cult Canadian hit *Kim's Convenience*, *Blackberry* and Sofia Coppola's feature *Priscilla*. As a director, credits include Rakhee Mozaria's CBC digital series, *Note to Self* and YouTube star Charlotte Dobre's TV pilot *The Swipe Life*. Rodrigo also specializes in writing and directing sketch comedy, including his own *Shitburger* which has over 2.5 million views on TikTok.



MICHELA LUCI (“Jessica”)

Michela Luci is a Canadian actress and singer. Michela won the 2019 Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding Performer in a Children's Program for her starring role as "Dana" in *Dino Dana*. Michela has been nominated three times for a Canadian Screen Award and was nominated for her first Daytime Emmy in 2018. Michela is no stranger to voice-over, having voiced the lead roles in the Netflix animated series *True and the Rainbow Kingdom*, *Go Dog Go!*, *Blues Clues & You*, and *PJ Masks*, to name a few.





AURORA BROWNE. Photo Credit: Cameron Roden

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Brenda and Baxter is a story about a dog named Baxter and his owner, Brenda told through the perspective of the dog. Life seems to be hunky dory as the two of them cruise around the city on extravagant shopping trips... save for the fact that Brenda has a few outstanding debts. But when Brenda's bills finally catch up with her, she winds up losing everything -- her house, her marriage, her family -- everything except Baxter, her only remaining companion. The film explores the way our consumer culture endorses materialism as a means of pacifying pain and the way we turn to animals for connections we can't find in the human world.

The film is inspired by my mother who has a rather... *intense* relationship with both her credit card and her dog. She is a force-of-nature who rose up from the ashes of a traumatic childhood by taking charge of her life in the only way she knew how. For my mother, shopping isn't a pass-time, it's a vocation – and a trip to the mall isn't a pit stop, it's a marathon – one which she approaches with the ferocity of a seasoned athlete. While it's easy to write-off my mother's shopping habits as trite, it became clear to me as I grew older and began to understand her troubled past that this was my mother's preferred way of escaping her demons. It's easy to ignore your problems under the spectre of fluorescent lights and flashing sales signs.

Brenda and Baxter explores the dark side of consumerism through a satiric lens. At the outset, both Brenda and Baxter are similarly naive - both living in a happy-go-lucky fantasy of reality. But only Baxter can maintain this state of innocence, as Brenda is rudely awakened to the harsh realities of the human world and the painful consequences of her denial.

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