

BALLOON ANIMAL

PRESS KIT 2022





RUNTIME: 1:27:54

LANGUAGE: English

COUNTRY: USA

Genre: Coming-of-Age, Drama

Website | www.ballooonanimalfilm.com

Instagram | [@balloonanimalfilm](https://www.instagram.com/balloonanimalfilm)

STILLS

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MAIN CREDITS

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Em Johnson | WRITER, DIRECTOR |
| Katherine Waddell | POPPY, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER |
| Ruvi Leider | PRODUCER |
| Monica O'Hara | PRODUCER |
| Ben Plotkin | LINE PRODUCER |
| Ilia Volo | DARK VALENTINE |
| Erin Li | SADIE |
| Dani Baez | LALA |
| Michael David Wilson | DREW |

LOGLINE

A young circus performer, Poppy Valentine, is stuck under the harsh demands of her father and their community's expectations. But while on a quick night out to let loose and have some fun with her friends, she finds herself captivated by small-town America, which then forces her to question everything.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Poppy Valentine, a young circus performer who has grown up in her family's traveling circus, has never dreamed of what life would be like outside of its fences. However, now in her mid-20's and with more unwelcomed responsibility weighing her down, she's desperate to figure out if this life is for her. As she slowly begins to take time for herself, finding independence and even love, she strains her relationship with those around her in the tight-knit circus community. In the end, amidst her overprotective father, stressful circus expectations, and her blossoming curiosity for a life of her own, she must find a way to be happy.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Poppy Valentine is a 24-year old balloon animal artist, whose one-of-a-kind creations are one of the traveling circus' main attractions, aside from her father's nightly magic show. Dark Valentine, her father, who's spent the majority of his life running the circus that was handed down to him, has now become disillusioned with its shortcomings. Stopping the show for the off-season, the Valentines and their circus community must now pack up and head to their newest location, which is currently undecided.

This time of limbo causes Dark to add unnecessary pressure and responsibility onto Poppy's shoulders. Unsure of how to meet her father's expectations, Poppy starts to wonder what life would be like without them.

The opportunity to explore her feelings further arises when she runs a late-night errand, picking up gas at a local station nearby.

There, she runs into Drew, a cute and friendly local who is a few years older than her and talks too much. Taking him up on his offer, she accepts a ride from him back to her circus location. They quickly build a mutual connection and Drew gives her his number before departing.



LONG SYNOPSIS Cont.

Distracted from her interaction with Drew, Poppy accidentally leaves the front gate of the circus unlocked and open, allowing for a late-night vandalization to destroy some of their tents and equipment. Putting two and two together, Dark discovers it was Poppy's fault the gate was not locked. With that information, he forces her to clean the mess up by herself in the blazing heat. From this, she becomes fed up, choosing to have a night out away from the circus with her closest friends, Sadie and Lala. Towards the end of their fun, eventful night, they run into Drew once more. The energy between Poppy and Drew continues to blossom into something more intimate, and by the time they arrive back at the circus,

Poppy has a taste of what happiness and independence might feel like.

She continues to go out, but alone now, and she eventually gets caught by Dark. Their argument pushes Poppy further away and makes Dark more desperate to keep Poppy close.

However, the weight of her actions causes the community to ostracize her. Feeling the isolation, she seeks a chance to find that happiness again and attends a party Drew invited her, Lala, and Sadie to. At the small party, consisting of just them, Drew, and two of Drew's friends, Poppy finds what she is looking for and the connection between her and

Drew builds into something more physical. When they return to the group, however, miscommunications and a reveal of Poppy's decision to leave the circus cause the foundation of her friendships to become unstable. Sadie puts up a fight, with Lala behind her, backing Poppy into a corner. With things starting to fall apart, Poppy shifts and knows what she needs to do.

Poppy returns to the circus, having decided it's time to start a new life for herself. She and Dark confront each other and their roles in the dissolution of their family. Feeling hurt and betrayed by Poppy's confrontation, Dark doesn't give her more time to work things out and leaves her in tears. He leaves her with the guilt of how she's chosen to abandon everyone and everything.

Poppy, totally alone now, makes her way back into town, stopping at a cheap motel to sleep. For the first time in her life, she's anxious and has no idea what's to come next, however, the motel owner sees Poppy's distress and offers a helping hand. And while it doesn't solve all of Poppy's problems, she feels a sense of hope.



TRAILER



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



Balloon Animal is a story grounded in fantasy and realism set against the backdrop of a lackluster circus and a vibrant small town. While the circus evokes feelings of whimsy and excitement, this film challenges those notions in a visual and thought-provoking way. By presenting the perspective of a woman who has fallen out of love with the circus because she's seen behind its curtains, we give our audience context and reason as to why the fantasy no longer exists there.

Balloon Animal plays with themes of identity, independence, familial expectations, and sacrifice. Throughout Poppy's journey of rebellion, love, and self-discovery, we are introduced to the burdens that lead her to sacrifice close relationships to take back the power to create her own future and find her own freedoms.

As a writer and director, my films all draw from personal experience, which is in no way unusual. For the last five years, I've been driven by my love of the human condition, touching on how tragic, yet beautiful, it can be. In particular, I focus on love and heartbreak, gender inequality, and family dynamics. Each character is flawed. They are their own protagonist and antagonist in any story. My goal is to study those types of characters, analyzing everything about them to build an infinite amount of depth, showcasing them on the screen in an authentic, yet cinematic way.

With all this said, I will continually hold this film close to my heart. It's my second feature and a story that can be universally understood, highlighting my strengths as a director, but also adding a new perspective into the world of a young woman coming-of-age.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES



EM JOHNSON

Writer, Director



@gotemma

Em Johnson is the writer and director for *Balloon Animal*, which is her second feature narrative in those roles. During the two and a half years of development, filming, and post, she worked closely with every department to accurately bring her vision to life. Throughout her career so far, she's had the opportunity to work internationally, on widely diverse sets, experiencing the world on an intimate level and learning more and more about the human condition. Her work tends to focus on the flaws and strengths of each individual and how tragic, yet beautiful, they can be. She holds *Balloon Animal* very dear to her heart and is proud of how much she has grown, both as a writer and director.

KATHERINE WADDELL

Poppy, Executive Producer



@katg.waddell



Katherine Waddell is a 29-year-old actress and producer who grew up in São Paulo, Brazil, and has studied fine arts for over 18 years, spanning two continents. Her first producing credit came from her role as Associate Producer on *Six L.A. Love Stories*, featuring Matthew Lillard, Alicia Witt, and Carrie Preston. Her latest credits comes as Co-Executive Producer on *Dinner in America* starring Kyle Gallner and Emily Skeggs, from PSH Creative and Ben Stiller's Red Hour Productions. *Dinner in America* was officially selected to compete in the US Dramatic Competition at Sundance 2020. She is also an executive producer on *We Need To Do Something*, a horror film that premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. Now residing in Los Angeles, in 2020 Katherine started the production company First Bloom Films alongside writer and director, Em Johnson, and they recently completed their companies first feature, *Balloon Animal*.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES



MONICA O'HARA

Producer



@monica_ohara

Monica O'Hara, a producer on Balloon Animal, joined the team early on in development working to bring this film to life over two years. Working predominantly in commercial production in the fashion, beauty, and luxury sectors, Monica loves working on narrative films with her passion for story and style. Monica is currently in development with two features and continues working in the commercial space across the country. Working with the Balloon Animal team was such a pleasure combining her love of good people and making beautiful art.



RUVI LEIDER

Producer



@ruvileider

Ruvi Leider, a producer on Balloon Animal, supervised physical production through post and final delivery. Ruvi typically produces everything from social content, multi-camera live stream, and TV commercials for national and international broadcast. Balloon Animal marks the first narrative feature produced by Ruvi. He is currently in development on a feature titled FREI, a coming-of-age story about Chassidic teens, loosely based on his own experience. He also continues to support his commercial clients, producing freelance between NY and LA.

ACTOR BIOGRAPHIES



ILIA VOLOK

Dark Valentine



@volokilia

Ilia Volok is known for his work on Gemini Man opposite Will Smith for director Ang Lee, Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull directed by Steven Spielberg; Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol with Tom Cruise; Air Force One opposite Harrison Ford directed by Wolfgang Peterson, The Curious Case of Benjamin Button opposite Brad Pitt, directed by David Fincher, Water For Elephants opposite Reese Witherspoon, Swordfish opposite John Travolta and Hugh Jackman and The Immigrant opposite Marion Cotillard, Joaquin Phoenix and Jermeý Renner directed by James Grey.



ERIN LI

Sadie



@erinnnli

Erin is a Los Angeles-based Chinese American actor, activist, and all-around creative spirit. While in college, she performed in undergraduate and graduate productions as well as productions in regional theatres all over San Diego County. She is continuing her acting training with Craig Archibald and Stephen Book and has worked on play readings and workshops at the Chance Theater and Cygnet Theatre, as well as independent short films. Her most recent short film HOME, written and directed by King Lu, was featured at the 2020 Los Angeles Asian American Pacific Film Festival. She plays Sadie in the 2022 feature narrative, Balloon Animal.

ACTOR BIOGRAPHIES



DANI BAEZ

Lala



@danibaez

Born and raised in Whittier, CA, Danielle found her passion for acting early on in school and community theater. She has recently studied at the Groundlings School for Improv, On-Camera auditioning technique with Robert Da'Vanzo, and Scene Study with Benjamin Mathes. Danielle is currently in ongoing Scene Study classes at Anthony Meindl's Actor Workshop and voice lessons with April Lindsey. In her spare time, Danielle enjoys running, painting, singing, and playing Tennis. She plays the role of Lala in Balloon Animal.



MICHAEL DAVID WILSON

Drew



@themichaeldavidwilson

Michael David Wilson plays the role of Drew in Balloon Animal. A classically trained actor who originally hails from the east coast, MDW has always sought meaningful collaboration with other passionate artists. After a meeting with Em and Katherine discussing their hopes and vision for the film, he was deeply excited about their potential. When offered the role shortly thereafter, he considered the opportunity to work with Em and Katherine a "no-brainer." Having loved the process of working on the film he now hopes everyone who sees it is equally, uniquely impacted.

FULL CREDITS

Written & Directed by
Em Johnson

Produced by
Monica O’Hara

Produced by
Ruvi Leider

Produced by
Katherine Waddell

Line Producer
Ben Plotkin

Executive Producers
Katherine Waddell
Lillian Todd
Gene Hasek

Casting by
Adrienne Stern, CSA

Katherine Waddell

Ilia Volo

Michael David Wilson

Danielle Baez
Erin Rae Li

Director of Photography
Megan Stacey

Production Designer
Krista Thomas-Scott

Edited by
Greg Tuzin

Costume Designer
Megan Lian

Music by
Alexa Borden & Connor Cook

Production Manager
Lindsay Rappaport

First Assistant Director
Nick Ryan

Second Assistant Director
Kelz Morgan

Poppy Valentine
Katherine Waddell

Dark Valentine
Ilia Volo

Sadie
Erin Rae Li

Lala Dean
Danielle Baez

Drew
Michael David Wilson

Jessi Dean
Karla Alfonzo-Smith

Bobby
Lawrence Calhoun Jr.

Vanessa
Beccy Quinn

Motel Owner
Meggan Taylor

Beau
Matt Pasini

Jay
Byron Brown JR.

Verone
Verone Massie

Cashier
Caitlin Oden

Waitress
Sam Frontera

Ticket Booth Worker
Sean Gunnell

Cab Driver
Bentzion Shemtov

Background Casting by
Burbank Casting
Susan Turner
Michelle Gabriel

Production Coordinator
Anna Langston

Script Supervisor
Liam Hooper

Set Decorator
Shannon Sweeney

Set Dresser
Drew DeGurian

Set Dresser
Brandon Crowder

Prop Master
Timmy Willy

1st AC
Travis Shannon

2nd AC
Kalea Calloway

Steadicam
David Baldwin

Unit Stills
Jessica Perez

DIT
Dave Eaves

Gaffer
Albert Gonzalez

Best Electric
Ryan Jansen

Electrician
Junfu Wei

Electrician
Logan Wade

Key Grip
Marco Gonzalez

Key Grip
Marco Gonzalez

Best Grip
Silvestre Hernandez

Grip
Abel Zarate

Grip
Steven Miller

Sound Mixer
Dave Rosenburg

Boom Op
LaRon Cooper

Set Costumer
Megan Bright

Hair & Makeup Department Head
Denise R. Valentine

Hair & Makeup Assistant
Brittany Thomas

Makeup Assistant
Bianca Lopez

Production Assistants
Lynley Ehrlich
Dominic Poniac
Zaliyah Quant
Adrian Javila
Taylor Griffin
Daniel Jaffe
Kennedy Cascio

Balloon Animal Artist
Teresa Harding

Shaka’s Trainers
Mandy May
Christine Claes

Studio Teacher
Jean Erickson

FULL CREDITS

COVID Compliance Officer / Medic
Xochitl Lira

Assistant Editor
Michael Osborne

Assistant Editor
Dave Eaves

Supervising sound editor / re-recording mixer
Dave Robertson

VFX
Thermonuclear

VFX Executive Producer
Sherif Higazy

VFX Producer
Karim Higazy

Colorist
Stephen Derluguian

ADR
Anarchy Post

ADR Mixer
Kyle Lane

Title Design
Paige Smith

Camera
Alternative Rentals

G&E
CAM Lighting and Grip

Catering
Full Moon Pickles

COVID-19 Testing
Modi Safe Set

Insurance provided by
Athos

Payroll
ABS

Production Accountant
Michael Miller

Production Vehicles
Galpin Hollywood

Special thanks to Chester Cable, Wini McKay, Kiyomi Hara, the LA Circus and City of Jurupa Valley.

Circus Crew:
Kevin Gardner
Randy Aguilar
Grant Cable
Paul Maniaci
Cheryl Weber
David Weber
Glenn Gray

The director and producers wish to thank:
Levi Smock
Damian King
Scott Saslow
Alex Coffey
Rachel Dengiz
Roan Bibby
Suzanna Reez
Seth at Madcap Balloons
Council Thrift Shops
Middleton Ranch
Santa Clarita Studios
Steve Martin

“Balloon Animal – Opening Titles”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“Circus Life”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“The Valentines' Magic Show”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“Poppy's Missing Part”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“The Ferris Wheel”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“Can I Have Your Number”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“Last Night”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“The Crocodile and the Elephant”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“The Teddy Bears of the Trees”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“Poppy's Night Out”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“House Tour”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“Return to the Ferris Wheel”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“Poppy Quits”
Composed by Alexa L. Borden & Connor Cook

“Son of a Beach”
Written by The Polarity
Performed by The Polarity
Licensed Courtesy of Artlist.io

“Sleeping Dogs”
Written by Tyler Tholl
Performed by Maple & Beech
Licensed Courtesy of Artlist.io

“Push Me Out To Sea”
Written by Benjamin Palmer
Performed by Be Brave Benjamin
Licensed Courtesy of Artlist.io

“Arrow Flies”
Written by Paper Planes
Performed by Paper Planes
Licensed Courtesy of Artlist.io

“New You”
Written by Ryan Settles
Performed by Far West
Licensed Courtesy of Artlist.io

“Tempted”
Written by Shira Z. Carmel, Yifeat Ziv, Anat Moshkovski
Performed by The Hazelnuts
Licensed Courtesy of Artlist.io

“Patiently Waiting”
Written by Kyle Cox
Performed by Kyle Cox
Licensed Courtesy of Artlist.io

“Anyway”
Written by Kyle Cox
Performed by Kyle Cox
Licensed Courtesy of Artlist.io

“Call You Up”
Written by Johnny Green

CONTACT INFORMATION

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KATHERINE WADDELL

EM JOHNSON

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ABOUT FIRST BLOOM FILMS

First Bloom Films is an independent production company based out of Los Angeles that was founded by Katherine Waddell and Em Johnson in 2020. The company is set to make its name by consistently producing poignant, distinctive films made by women, for women. Their goals focus heavily on creating opportunities for women, be it in front of the camera or behind it. With the percentage of women's influence inside of Hollywood at an alarmingly low number, First Bloom is pushing a narrative that normalizes the female experience, and also extends a chance for women of all backgrounds and ways of life to step into the exclusivity of the film industry fully supported and encouraged. "Blush," co-written and directed by Em Johnson and produced by Katherine Waddell, was the first narrative feature that First Bloom assisted in producing. "Balloon Animal" is its first full production, with Em at the helm of writing and directing, and Katherine producing and starring in the film. The company has four new projects currently in development.

