



a short film

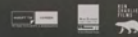
directed by VEA MAFILE'O

written by LUCIANE BUCHANAN

Lea Tupu'anga

MOTHER TONGUE

A Run Charlie Films Production in Association with the New Zealand Film Commission and Script to Screen
Featuring: Luciane Buchanan, Albert Bonaldi, Mikey Fabiani, Michael Robb, Elizabeth Thomson
Directed by Vea Mafile'o. Written by Luciane Buchanan. Produced by Alex Lovell and Eldon Booth.
Executive Producer: Frankie Adams. Associate Producers: Ian Leape & Samuca Rambo. Cinematographer: Maria Ines Manchege
Edited by Lisa Greenfield and Anastasia Doumian. Art Director: Emily Mafile'o. Costume Design: Frankie Leleka. Composer: Stephen Gallagher.



LEA TUPU'ANGA / MOTHER TONGUE (SHORT FILM) PRESS KIT (EPK)

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TECHNICAL DETAILS:

Title: LEA TUPU'ANGA / MOTHER TONGUE
Type: Short Film
Duration: 16 minutes 42 seconds
Genre: Drama
Country of Production: Aotearoa New Zealand
Language/s: English & Tongan (with English subtitles)
Date of Release: 20th January 2024
Shooting Format: Arri Alexa Mini (Colour)
Aspect Ratio: 2:1
Sound: 5:1
Screening Format/s: DCP, ProRes



Albert Rounds and Luciane Buchanan in *Lea Tupu'anga / Mother Tongue*

LOGLINE:

A young speech therapist disconnected from her Tongan heritage lies about her Tongan language skills to get a job. Out of her depth, she must find a way to communicate or risk her patient's life.

SYNOPSIS:

Katherine, a young speech therapist of Tongan and European heritage has lied about her Tongan language skills to work with Siasosi – an elderly Tongan patient with aphasia who has lost his ability to speak English.

Siasosi resents Katherine's presence and is resistant to her speech therapy sessions. Anxious for progress, Katherine enlists her Tongan boyfriend Maka to translate. During this exchange, Katherine unwittingly offends Siasosi, who sternly tells them to exit – jeopardising her work and causing tension with Maka. Katherine is left feeling disconnected and insecure about her identity.

Under pressure to complete her report, Katherine returns to Siasosi's house. When Siasosi catches Katherine trespassing on his property, he berates her and Katherine breaks down in tears. Katherine's vulnerability catches Siasosi off-guard and an amusing miscommunication leads to a heart-warming moment.

Katherine bonds with Siasosi and just as they start to make progress in their speech therapy, Siasosi suffers a medical emergency. Panicking and out of her depth, Katherine must find a way to communicate with her patient, or risk Siasosi's life and have her professional mistruth revealed.



Luciane Buchanan in *Lea Tupu'anga / Mother Tongue*

TEAM INFORMATION:



VEA MAFILE'O (DIRECTOR)

Veia Mafile'o is a director of film and television who has worked extensively throughout the Pacific. *Lea Tupu'anga / Mother Tongue* is Veia's first drama-based film, premiering at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2024.

Her debut feature documentary *For My Father's Kingdom* (2019) had its world premiere at Berlinale, placed 3rd in the People's Choice Award at Melbourne International Film Festival and was awarded the Special Jury Prize at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival. It was the first Tongan feature documentary for cinema; the first directed by a Tongan female in the world.

In 2021, Veia directed two episodes of the primetime New Zealand television drama *The Panthers* and was nominated for Best Director at the 2022 New Zealand Television Awards. *The Panthers* broke domestic streaming records with the strongest-ever opening week for a local drama. The miniseries also screened at Toronto International Film Festival's Primetime section in September 2021.

Veia is the co-founder of Taro Patch Creative. Based in South Auckland, the initiative encourages storytelling with marginalised Pasifika and Māori communities with the goal of finding ways to thrive and heal. The organisation brings together collective skills in filmmaking, storytelling, tutoring, production design, public programming, arts facilitation and occupational health therapy in the mental health and disabilities sector. Veia is also co-founder of PISA (Pacific Islands Screen Artists), the Nuku'alofa Film Festival in Tonga and the founder of the Okalani Film Festival.

SOCIAL:

Instagram: [instagram.com/vea_mafileo](https://www.instagram.com/vea_mafileo)

X (Formerly Twitter): twitter.com/malosipictures

TEAM INFORMATION (CONTINUED):



LUCIANE BUCHANAN (WRITER / LEAD ACTOR)

Born in Aotearoa New Zealand, Luciane Buchanan is of Tongan descent. An experienced actor in film and television, Luciane has recently performed leading roles in the hit Netflix series *The Night Agent* and the forthcoming Apple TV+ series *Chief of War* opposite Jason Momoa.

Previously, Luciane starred as 'Tripitaka' in the Netflix series *The New Legends of Monkey* and as a core cast member on *Filthy Rich* for BBC.

Lea Tupu'anga / Mother Tongue is Luciane's first screenplay and it was an opportunity to write (and act) very personal material connected to her Tongan heritage, distinct from the stories and characters she has previously been associated with.

Luciane was an associate producer on primetime New Zealand drama *The Panthers*. The miniseries broke local domestic streaming records and also screened at Toronto International Film Festival's Primetime section in September 2021.

In addition to her screen work, Luciane holds a Bachelor of Arts in Drama and Psychology from The University of Auckland.

SOCIAL:

Instagram: [instagram.com/lucianebuchanan](https://www.instagram.com/lucianebuchanan)

TEAM INFORMATION (CONTINUED):



ALEX LOVELL & ELDON BOOTH (PRODUCERS)

In 2015, Alex Lovell (left) and Eldon Booth formed Run Charlie Films as a brand to develop and produce narrative content. Through this collaboration, Alex and Eldon have produced the short drama *My Friend Michael Jones* (2018) and the short documentaries *Mister Sunshine* (2016) and *The Kid Who Could Dance* (2018).

Mister Sunshine screened at several festivals including Sheffield Doc/Fest, and achieved online success through Vimeo Staff Pick recognition and The Atlantic Selects platform.

My Friend Michael Jones won numerous awards domestically and overseas — including the Moon Jury Prize at ImagineNATIVE, the Best Shorts Audience Award at New Zealand International Film Festival and qualification to the 2020 Academy Awards by winning Best Film at Show Me Shorts Film Festival.

Lea Tupu'anga / Mother Tongue is their most recent release, premiering at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2024.

Upcoming projects include *The Return* (directed by Marina Alofagia McCartney) and the independent feature film *Finding Honk*.

SOCIAL:

Instagram: [instagram.com/runcharliefilms](https://www.instagram.com/runcharliefilms)

Facebook: [facebook.com/runcharliefilms](https://www.facebook.com/runcharliefilms)

X (Formerly Twitter): twitter.com/runcharliefilms

KEY CREDITS:

Cast: Luciane Buchanan, Albert Rounds, Mikey Falesiu, Michael Koloï, Elizabeth Thomson

Director: Vea Mafile’o

Writer: Luciane Buchanan

Producers: Alex Lovell & Eldon Booth

Executive Producer: Frankie Adams

Cinematographer: Maria Ines Manchego

Art Director: Emily Mafile’o

Editors: Lisa Greenfield & Anastasia Doniants

Costume Design: Frankie Lolohea

Composer: Stephen Gallagher

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IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION AND SCRIPT TO SCREEN

AWARDS / NOMINATIONS / SELECTIONS:

WORLD PREMIERE — Sundance Film Festival (January 2024)

WINNER — People’s Choice Award for Best Short Drama, Māoriland Film Festival (March 2024)

WINNER — Special Jury Mention Narrative Short, Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival (May 2024)

FINALIST — First Nations Award, Sydney Film Festival (June 2024)

FINALIST — Best International Short, Palm Springs International Shortfest (June 2024)

WINNER — Best Short Film Award, New Zealand International Film Festival (August 2024)

SELECTION — Melbourne International Film Festival (August 2024)

SELECTION — Edinburgh International Film Festival (August 2024)

SELECTION — BendFilm Festival (October 2024)

SELECTION — Hawai’i International Film Festival (October 2024)

FINALIST — Best NZ Film, Show Me Shorts Film Festival (October 2024)

SELECTION — Adelaide Film Festival (October 2024)



Albert Rounds, Luciane Buchanan and Mikey Falesiu in *Lea Tupu’anga / Mother Tongue*

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My father is Tongan and my mother is Palangi (New Zealand European). As a hafi kasi, what interests me most about this story is it presents prejudice from a unique viewpoint – highlighting the cultural judgement that hafi kasi face from full-blooded Pacific Islanders and the negative attitudes towards an identity that teeters on the edges of two cultures.

This external judgement around cultural identity is an issue that has presented itself in my life in different ways. As hafi kasi women, myself and writer Luciane Buchanan have drawn heavily on our own lived experience in relation to how the character "Katherine" is perceived and insecurities surrounding her identity.

What is it that makes someone Tongan? Or any culture for that matter?

This project explores contemporary issues related to cultural identity through the concept of language. If language is a vital connection to our culture, our traditions and principles – how can we find cultural acceptance if we can't speak the language? Where do we fit in?

Generational differences and loss of language is a common issue relatable to all cultures. The way language is addressed in this film is especially relevant to anyone with indigenous ties, who were born in a western society or migrated to one.

Katherine's identity and self-worth relies heavily on how other people perceive her Tongan-ness. Ultimately, her greatest desire is to feel acceptance and connected to her culture. It speaks to that universal struggle as humans to find out who we are, what our place in the world is and more importantly, where we belong.

– VEA MAFILE'O





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