

4248 PRODUCTIONS in association with FISHBOWL FILMS  
present:

# ALASKA IS A DRAG

A film by Shaz Bennett

**Starring:**

Martin L. Washington Jr.  
Maya Washington  
Matt Dallas  
Christopher O'Shea  
Jason Scott Lee  
Margaret Cho  
John Fleck  
Kevin Daniels  
Nia Peeples  
Adam Tomei

**Official Selection**

Frameline  
Outfest  
Urbanworld  
Philadelphia International  
Palm Springs International

**TECHNICAL INFORMATION**

Shooting Format: Alexa  
Aspect Ratio: 1:85  
Sound: 5:1, Stereo  
Running Time: 89 min

**FILMMAKER CONTACT:**

Shaz Bennett  
alaskaisadrag@gmail.com

**Official Website:**

<http://www.AlaskalsADrag.com>

## LOGLINE:

Tough, but diva fabulous, Leo, an aspiring drag superstar, is stuck working in a fish cannery in Alaska. He and his twin sister are trapped in the monotony of fist fights and fish guts. Out of necessity, Leo learned to fight back, which catches the attention of the local boxing coach. When a new boy moves to town and wants to be his sparring partner, Leo has to face the real reason he's stuck in Alaska.

## SYNOPSIS:

ALASKA IS A DRAG is a Fish out of water story – literally. Our hero Leo is an aspiring superstar (Martin L. Washington Jr.) stuck working in a fish cannery in Alaska. Leo sees disco balls in the scales of the fish he slices. Everyone who slices fish all day, daydreams – Leo's are glamtastic. Most of the time, Leo and his twin sister Tristen (Maya Washington) are left to fend for themselves. To escape the monotony of fist fights and fish guts, they create their own magic – the Northern Lights follow them. They hang out at the one gay bar in a hundred miles, owned by their surly surrogate mom – Jan (Margaret Cho). Their real mom (Nia Peeples) left years ago and their dad George (Kevin Daniels) preaches on the side of the road. After years of getting beat up by his former best friend, Kyle (Christopher O'Shea), Leo has learned to fight back – his skills catch the eye of his cannery boss, an amateur boxer (Jason Scott Lee) who offers to train him to be a fighter. And when the new kid in town, Declan (Matt Dallas), wants to be his sparring partner – Leo's world turns upside down. When Tristen enters Leo in a drag competition – he's never performed for anyone but her – his worlds collide – the drag audition falls on the same day as the qualifying round for boxing and Leo has to face the real reason, he's afraid to leave Alaska.

*Jury Mention from URBANWORLD for "beautiful acting from the ensemble cast, exquisite directing and breath-taking cinematography".*

*Best Narrative Feature Chattanooga Film Festival Shindig.*

*Every film festival has a few hidden gems, and the most notable one at PFF (Philadelphia Intl. Film Festival this year was ALASKA IS A DRAG, a winning drama directed by Shaz Bennett... it's going to be compared to MOONLIGHT, for obvious reasons. But ALASKA IS A DRAG is a fine, enjoyable achievement in its own right. -- Steven Silver / Today Philadelphia*

*In her enchanting feature debut writer/director Shaz Bennett spares no punches in showing how brutal and isolated Alaska can be especially if you are anything different than the norm." -- Queerguru*

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT FROM SHAZ BENNETT:

The process of making ALASKA IS A DRAG has been unwieldy, demanding, glamtastic and wildly fulfilling – just like a day in a fish cannery.

It all started from my own daydreams – while working in a cannery. I grew up a mutt in Salt Lake City, Utah. I felt trapped and dreamed of living in Paris in the 20s or PARIS IS BURNING – somewhere else. Leo is very much me. But so are all the characters. I think we all can relate to the daily struggles and feeling stuck. Leo is a fighter and I like to think I am too.

When, I finally got out and moved to NYC, I performed in a drag sister act with a 7 foot tall black drag queen. Once, after a show, walking home dressed in matching fabulous outfits – we were attacked by two homophobic jerks. I'm a pacifist and a wimp and immediately cowered but my sister was fearless – she ran straight at them throwing hard punches and they ran away. She saved me. I asked her where she learned to fight like that and she said, "A girl picks up skills along the way."

On some level the film is the distillation of those memories, but when Martin, the actor who plays Leo and I met (he also stars in my short film), we talked a lot about his character and Martin felt that I had written him as a young man growing up in Philadelphia, there is so much of Martin in Leo. We discovered his drag persona together, with heaps of Grace Jones.

It's more of an origin story that Hedwig, I wanted to explore the first time someone performs in front of an audience on stage. Throughout the film, Leo is drawing on that power, building inside of him. Drawing on the northern lights and memories of his mother and the strength of his sister.

I love the power of drag – there's great strength and energy in tapping into and subverting the norms. Leo is just learning to harness that power. I wanted to explore the collision of gender and the pageantry of boxers and drag queens.

Alaska seemed like the perfect setting for it, I spent a summer working in a fish cannery and Alaska is surreal and intense with the ethereal Northern Lights painting the sky, in stark contrast to the monotony of cannery life and the violence of isolation, where standing out in a crowd isn't a good thing. I dove into the moments of where and how those worlds collide, intertwine and break away – the gay and the straight, the masculine and feminine, violence and non-violence, harsh reality and escapist fantasy.

I wanted the fights and the drag sequences to have overlapping elements and all occur in the real locations i.e.: the cannery or the makeshift gym, a woodsy path or the RV.

I'm drawn to and obsessed with the flamboyance and bravado of boxers and drag queens – they are the fun house mirrors of each other. One is wholly female and the other wholly male – in a way that doesn't always exist in real life. The actors and I talked about the innate sensuality and vulnerability of two men boxing that informs the relationship of Kyle and Leo and later Declan and Leo. At its core, the film is about survival and friendship.

The feature script was developed through the Naked Angels Development program "Angels in Progress". And was selected for labs at Sundance and Film Independent, IFP Narrative Lab -- the short film was made as one of eight projects as a part of the prestigious AFI Directing Workshop for Women.

## MAIN TITLES:

Written & Directed by:  
SHAZ BENNETT

Produced by:  
SHAZ BENNETT, JEAN-PIERRE CANER, MELANIE MILLER, DIANE BECKER

Executive Producers:  
P. DAVID EBERSOLE, TODD HUGHES, MAYA WASHINGTON, MICHAEL  
PAOLILLO, RYAN SMITH

Director of Photography:  
ALISON KELLY

Production Designer:  
MICHAEL FITZGERALD

Costume Designer:  
LAUREN SILVESTRI

Editors:  
JEAN-PIERRE CANER, LEX BENEDICT, BROOKE SEBOLD

Music by:  
MACIEJ ZIELINSKI

Additional Music:  
ALEXIS MARSH, SAMUEL JONES,

Casting by:  
CHANELLE DESAUTELS & JOHANNA WEIRAUCH

## CAST:

Leo:	Martin L. Washington Jr.
Tristen:	Maya Washington
Declan:	Matt Dallas
Kyle:	Christopher O'Shea
Diego:	Jason Scott Lee
Jan:	Margaret Cho
George:	Kevin Daniels
Lucy:	Nia Peeples

Hal/Mystique:	John Fleck
John:	Adam Tomei
Tim/Fight Coord:	Dan Lemieux
Drunk Dan:	Tim Holmes
Slim:	Mark Colson
Young Leo:	Dontae Hokes
Young Tristen:	Nevaeh Ashanti Crawford
Miss Orientated:	Jeigh Madjus
Boxing Ref:	Wayne David Parker
Zoe:	Julie Klein
Angel:	Ethan William Watkins
Boxing Woman:	Jennifer Jelsema
Frat Boy:	Jeremy Bruce
Pregnant Teen:	Ashley Croft
Kyle's Bro:	Dredan McFall
Kyle's Friend/Stunts:	Travis Russell
Kyle's Girl:	Shivani Bhagwan
Drunk Fisherman:	Robert Jollie
Boxing Judge:	Matt Hudson
Workout Woman:	Connie Kincer
Nurses:	Debra Davidson
	Sue Pinsler
Drag Competitors:	Brett Hammond
	Brandon Shafer
	Joshua Rozonows
	Angel Abcede
Cannery Workers	Sean Carrier
	Jake Mogck
	Solina Warren
	Rick Ory

## DIRECTOR/WRITER SHAZ BENNETT BIO:

Shaz Bennett currently works on Amazon's acclaimed series BOSCH. Before that on Lifetime's UnREAL, and was a writer on A&E's hit show THE GLADES.

ALASKA IS A DRAG is her feature debut film, based on the short film of the same name – made through the prestigious AFI Directing Workshop for Women, Shaz was selected as one of Fox's Top 20 Directors, Sundance Screenwriting Labs 2017, and Fox's inaugural Franchise Directing program.

The Feature ALASKA IS A DRAG, is based on the award winning short film by the same name. It's a black comedy lovechild of HEDWIG and ROCKY. The short screened in over 150 festivals including: AFI FEST, Nashville, Sarasota, Torino, Melbourne, Palm Springs, Frameline, Provincetown and Los Angeles. It sold in the US, UK and France to Vimeo, iTunes, and several VOD platforms.

Shaz's performance pieces and other acclaimed short films (TOP OF THE CIRCLE, MARTINI and TUNNELS) have been viewed in numerous festivals and museums across the United States, Mexico, Canada, South Africa and Europe including: AFI FEST, Cinevegas, The Los Angeles Film Festival, True West Festival, Silverdocs, Nashville, Philadelphia, Lunafest, the Berkley Photographic Museum and the International Women's Museum.

Shaz is a mutt – she was raised in Salt Lake City, Utah. She spent her summers camping and hiking in Zion, Arches, Canyonlands and learned to drive in the Salt Flats on the Utah/Nevada border. On her way to becoming a writer/director, Shaz worked in a fish cannery, bartended at a mafia bar, peddled liquor undercover, developed films for actor Giancarlo Esposito and was Cher's stand-in for a day. She was also a film programmer at Sundance, LA Film Festival and AFI FEST. Shaz relocated from Utah to New York to study with Spaulding Grey, where she wrote and performed four award-winning shows: "The Shaz Show," "Abrasive Fairy Tales," "Eyes, Lips, Legs," and "Hungover Angel." These shows were performed extensively around the world, including spoken word festivals sponsored by MTV, Comedy Central, Hennessey and NOW. Shaz performs regularly with Sit n Spin at the Comedy Central Stage, The Moth and Third Saturdays; she is a regular contributor to KCRW's UnFictional.

## **CREW BIOS:**

### **MELANIE MILLER (Producer)**

Melanie Miller has over two decades of experience in the entertainment industry as a producer, acquisitions & marketing executive, festival programmer, and music supervisor. During her tenure at Gravitas Ventures as Vice President of Acquisitions & Marketing, she played an integral role in the growth of the new paradigm of independent distribution. Prior to Gravitas, Miller was the Artistic Director at the Jackson Hole Film Institute and in 2009 co-founded production company Fishbowl Films with producing partner Diane Becker. The company's first feature, DETOUR by William Dickerson received a day & date theatrical release. Their latest collaboration is Shaz Bennett's directorial debut ALASKA IS A DRAG. Miller is currently Executive Vice President at Samuel Goldwyn Films. She is responsible for their distribution, marketing and PR strategy for all films. In addition, she works closely with President Peter Goldwyn and Executive Ben Feingold on ways to expand the Goldwyn footprint, in both long form and episodic content with existing and new partners.

### **DIANE BECKER (Producer)**

Diane is an award-winning photojournalist, graphic designer, and graduate of the American Film Institute. She has successfully bridged her producing career into the feature and documentary film worlds. Diane has worked with Passion Pictures (LISTEN TO ME MARLON) and Motto Pictures (LIFE, ANIMATED, WEINER) on Greg Barker's last four films for HBO, including the award-winning, SERGIO, and MANHUNT, chronicling the search for Osama bin Laden, which won the 2013 Emmy Award for Outstanding Documentary. The team's newest, HOMEGROWN: THE COUNTER TERROR DILEMMA premiered on HBO in early 2016. She produced Stephen Kijak's WE ARE X, about Japan's legendary rock band. It premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival and won a special jury award for Best Editing in the World Cinema Documentary competition. Other credits include JACO, about bass guitar legend Jaco Pastorius, directed by Kijak and Paul Marchand which can currently be seen on Netflix and CHICKEN PEOPLE, which premiered at SXSW and will be broadcast on CMT Television in the fall.

## **JEAN-PIERRE CANER (Producer/Editor)**

Jean-Pierre Caner is first generation American. Half French and half Spanish, born in New Orleans, growing up, he moved a lot because of his father's job as an Executive Chef. Arriving in a new city every few years exposed him to a lot of different cultures and characters. After graduating from UCLA Jean-Pierre started working in Film and Television full time. He's worked on HBO's "DOLL & EM", David O. Russell's "THE FIGHTER," Morgan Freeman's "THROUGH THE WORMHOLE", Curtis Hanson's "IN HER SHOES", Azazel Jacob's "TERRI," Miranda July's "THE FUTURE, and National Geographic's "HUNTER AND HUNTED" and more. In the last decade, Jean-Pierre has worked with short form storytelling – creating short documentary work for Urban Outfitters profiling Tavi Gevinson, Petra Collins, and Hattie Stewart, commercial work for Orly Beauty and Hudson Jeans, and fashion video work for publications including Dossier Journal, Rookie, Foam Magazine, So Chic, and Remember Paper. Jean-Pierre has also created a series of short documentaries profiling artists like Anthony Lister and Milo Reice.

## **ALISON KELLY (Director of Photography)**

Alison Kelly was born and raised in Cleveland Ohio. She studied Cinematography at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles. Since then he has shot over forty eight feature films, single camera TV-shows pilot to series and countless short films; including Marti Noxon's DIETLAND on AMC, Judy Greer's A HAPPENING OF MONUMENTAL PROPORTIONS, TRACES, SHADY NEIGHBORS, THE SQUAD, SPLIT, FINDING CARTER, BLUE. Many of her films were shot on location all around the globe and her films have premiered at the most prestigious festivals and major television networks.

## **MICHAEL FITZGERALD (Production Designer)**

Michael's credits include: Katie Holmes' ALL WE HAD, Richard LaGravenese's LAST 5 YEARS, SWELTER, Judy Greer's A HAPPENING OF MONUMENTAL PROPORTIONS, LIFE OF A KING, GBF, DRONES, AROUND THE BLOCK, SUPREMACY, FRANKIE GO BOOM, I DO, DEEP DARK CANYON, LIVE AT THE FOXES DEN, 6 MONTH RULE and over 50 more features and television and hundreds of short films.