INGENIOUS MEDIA
The NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION
and
GFC Films
in association with
CORNERSTONE FILMS, TE MĀNGĀI PAHO, TRAUS MEDIA, WESTMARK PRODUCTIONS and IMAGES & SOUND
Present

WHINA

OPENING IN NZ CINEMAS JUNE 23

DIRECTED BY
James Napier Robertson & Paula Whetu Jones

PRODUCED BY
Matthew Metcalfe
&
Tainui Stephens

PRODUCER
Liz Adams

WRITTEN BY
James Lucas
And
Paula Whetu Jones & James Napier Robertson

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
Irenee Cooper

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Fraser Brown
James Napier Robertson

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Mark Gooder
Alison Thompson
Peter Touch
Daniel Negret

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Leon Narbey

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Chris Plummer
John Gilbert

PRODUCTION DESIGNER
Shayne Radford

COMPOSER
Dana Lund

COSTUME DESIGNER
Kristen Seth

MAKEUP DESIGNER
Deirdre Cowley

CASTING
Christina Asher

SOUND DESIGNER
Ben Sinclair

WHINA COOPER – Rena Owen
YOUNGER WHINA COOPER – Miriama McDowell
WILLIAM COOPER – Vinnie Bennett
GABRIEL – James Rolleston
FATHER MULDER – Erroll Shand
HEREMIA TE WAKE – Wayne Hapi
RICHARD - Richard Te Are
APIRANA NGATA – Matu Ngaropo

IT TAKES COURAGE TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP
RENA OWEN
MIRIAMA McDOWELL
JAMES ROLLESTON
VINNIE BENNETT
WHINA
FROM THE PRODUCERS OF
THE DEAD LANDS & DEAN SPANLEY
DIRECTED BY
JAMES NAPIER ROBERTSON & PAULA WHETU JONES
GFC
FIGHTERTOWN
INGENIOUS
TRANSMISSION

Hokianga Whakapau Karakia, tēnā koe.

Tēnei te ngākau iti e mihi ake nei ki a Hōhepa Cooper, Hinerangi Puru, Moka Puru, hui tahi atu ki te whānau Cooper, ki te whānau Gilbert anō hoki. Mei kore ake ngā mana o te hapori o Panguru me ō Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa. Ka mihi ake me te aroha noa ki ngā ringa tautoko katoa. Kei ngā rangatira o te ao Māori, kei ngā reo ō wheinga tēnā rawa atu koutou.

We offer our respects to Hokianga, the place
and its people.

With a grateful heart we acknowledge the family of William and Whina Cooper, and the descendants of Richard Gilbert. We thank the many supporters in Panguru and on the Te Rarawa Rūnanga. We offer our respects to the leaders of the Māori world, and to the voices of our shared ancestry

ONE LINE SYNOPSIS

The story behind the woman who changed a nation.

LOG LINE

A biopic of the trailblazing Māori leader, Dame Whina Cooper, whose extraordinary life saw her break gender boundaries, champion the rights of Māori, and fight for the land - all the while staying true to her heart and her beliefs.

He kiriata haurongo mō te wahine rangatira mō Whina Cooper. Koia te tātāriki koia te kaiarataki i ōna iwi, i tōna anō wā. Nāna te huarahi i para kia whai mana a Māori mā, a wāhine mā. Nāna ngā iwi i ara ake mō te whenua te take. Nōna te ngākau aroha.

TAGLINES

The Mother of the Nation
It Takes Courage to Take the First Step

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Hokianga, 1895. A baby is born, but isn't breathing. The father, a Māori chief and a Catholic catechist, sprinkles the baby with Holy Water, baptising 'Joseph'. But when the baby splutters to life and loudly proclaims herself, the family realise that it's a girl. Josephine. WHINA for short.

Whina grows to understand her leadership role in difficult times and believes in her own indomitable spirit. For nearly a century, she never stopped asserting the rights of her people – land rights, women's rights, education rights – and striving for unity between Māori and Pākehā.

In 1975, Whina, frail but still sharp as a knife, is roused to unite Māori to fight not only for their land, but for their very existence. Beginning at front Te Roopu O'Te Matakite, she leads a sacred hīkoi over six hundred kilometres, from the top of New Zealand to Parliament House in Wellington.

WHINA charts the tumultuous personal journey and unshakeable inner strength that led Whina Cooper to become one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most formidable leaders.

ONE PAGE SYNOPSIS

Hokianga, 1895. A baby is born, but isn't breathing. The father, a Māori chief and Catholic catechist, sprinkles the baby with Holy Water, baptising 'Joseph'. But when the baby splutters to life and loudly announces herself, the family realise that it's a girl. Josephine. WHINA for short. Her placenta is symbolically buried in the earth, and an unbreakable bond is formed with it.

For nearly a century, Whina's voice never stopped proclaiming the rights of her people and striving for unity between Māori and Pākehā.

In 1975, eighty-year-old Whina, frail but still sharp as a knife, is roused to action – to unite Māori to fight not only for their land, but for their very existence. She inspires a land rights movement Te Roopu O te Matakite, and leads a sacred hīkoi over six hundred kilometres, from the top of New Zealand to Parliament House in Wellington.

The arduous march interweaves with some of the dramatic events that shaped Whina's extraordinary life. The story reveals the forceful spirit and human imperfections that made her one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most formidable leaders.

As a young woman, Whina marries RICHARD, also a tribal leader, but when she meets Land Consolidation Officer WILLIAM COOPER, there is an instant attraction. William is drawn to Whina's determination and heritage, she sees him as an agent who can help her people. After Richard's death, and bearing a child with William out of wedlock, Whina goes into exile.

Whina's chance for redemption comes when the great Māori leader ĀPIRANA NGATA invites her to cater the centennial Waitangi Day celebrations. During the hui preparations, she gatecrashes a sacred kawanga ceremony, but is permitted to be the first woman to consecrate the new meeting house. She is chastened by the controversy but is soon forgiven by Ngata. Whina and William are married and return to Panguru to start afresh.

After William's death, Whina moves to Auckland. She sees the suffering of Māori displaced from their land and now living in cities, where accommodation and jobs are scarce. She is offered the leadership of the Māori Women's Welfare League and a chance to better the lives of impoverished urban Māori.

Nearing eighty, Whina is a key figure at the inaugural Te Roopu O te Matakite meeting, motivating the people with her vision and oratory. They will march 640km on a sacred Hīkoi from Northland down to Wellington, to present the government with a 'Memorial of Rights' that declares Māori land belongs to Māori. Māori and Pākehā will march together, and a carved Pouwhenua symbolizing the lost land will be carried at the front, never once touching the ground.

The marchers face obstacles and tribal uncertainty, including divisions between Whina and younger activists that put the unity of the vision at risk.

As the stories of Whina Cooper's past and present meet, the Land March reaches parliament. Whina has fulfilled her destiny and helped to shape the future of our nation forever.

AN ICONIC IMAGE, AN ICONIC NAME

Seared into the collective memory of New Zealanders is a black and white photograph, taken in 1975, of an elderly woman walking purposefully along a dirt road.

The woman, leading what would become a groundbreaking march for Māori land rights, faces away from camera. She wears a long skirt, her head covered by a scarf. In one hand she holds a tokotoko, which she leans on for support, in the other she clasps the hand of a young girl who walks beside her.

The woman's name – Dame Whina Cooper – is as iconic as the image itself, but the story of the woman in the image and behind the name, is less known.

WHINA is the story of a great leader, a Māori woman, a warrior, a politician, a wife, a mother, a grandmother. Her voice was a voice that would not be stilled from her birth to her very last days.

Born at a time when women were the legal property of their husbands and fathers, and when Māori, despite the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, were continually losing land, Whina Cooper continually challenged and questioned the status quo in the Pākehā and Māori worlds, in an unwavering fight for equality and unity.

For the film's producers, MATTHEW METCALFE and TAINUI STEPHENS, Whina's story was one that had to be told at a time when New Zealand as a nation was ready to tell it, and when New Zealand and the world were ready to hear it.

Stephens (Te Rarawa) explains: "For a long time, there's been a sense of uncertainty for New Zealanders about telling our history and telling stories in film of our heroes. New Zealand is at a stage now as a nation when it is more willing to investigate its past. We knew that *now* was the time to tell the story of Whina Cooper, one of the great leaders of the 20th century, who stands alongside other giants of the Māori world like Apirana Ngata and Te Puea Hērangi."

Throughout his career, Metcalfe has always looked to iconic New Zealand stories as a way to examine the country's collective sense of self. Whether it be Sir Edmund Hilary and the conquering of Everest (*Beyond the Edge*), Formula One champion Bruce McLaren (*McLaren*), the landings at Gallipoli during WWI (*25 April*) and the rise of South Auckland hip hop label, Dawn Raid Entertainment (*Dawn Raid*), Matthew has always sought to hold a mirror to the national identity.

Speaking to the resonance the film may have both in New Zealand and abroad, Metcalfe notes "I have always had a really powerful and deep interest in telling our stories, and taking our stories to the world.

“From an early age, I was aware of Dame Whina Cooper, and inspired by what she had achieved, her message, and the legacy of what she had achieved for both current and future generations.”

Metcalfe adds: “You can't understand where you are going if you don't first understand where you have come from. And its important as New Zealanders, here in Aotearoa, that we celebrate our past and our own heroes. Dame Whina Cooper’s legacy is profound. In order for us to move forward as a nation, it's very important that we see those heroes' lives portrayed on a big screen, so that people of all ages can see a part of themselves in that journey.”

The filmmakers set out to bring to audiences a knowledge of who Dame Whina Cooper was; the human being behind the historic figure.

“Sometimes we look at our heroes and come close to denying them their humanity,” explains Stephens. “People do great things, but when they go home, they're just ordinary people. What is that like? What are they like in that private space?”

The filmmakers also wanted to show the impact of Whina’s brave leadership on the voices of young Māori leaders today.

“Those in their 30s down may know about modern Māori activists like Pania Newton, but they may know little about the heritage of activism that inspired people like Pania Newton,” continues Stephens. “They may know the famous photograph of Whina setting off on the land march, but that's it.
When I see Māori activism today, particularly from women, I know the role Whina played in enabling these voices of protest. They want to change society for the better, and are able to push for that because Whina did what she did.”

Stephens and Metcalfe had worked together previously on the film *The Dead Lands* and the subsequent *The Dead Lands* TV series, so for both it was a natural fit, and the first of many working relationships they would form in the making of WHINA. To be guided by a kaupapa and to collaborate with respect is emblematic of the type of Māori-Pākehā relationships for which Whina Cooper herself was an advocate and exemplar.

DEVELOPING WHINA

The first step was approaching the custodians of Whina's story.

As Tainui Stephens explains: "We had to be granted the power and the authority to be the voice on behalf of the people who are the custodians of Whina's story."

Matthew Metcalfe began the dialogue with Whina's descendants eleven years ago, the Cooper family.

IRENEE COOPER, Dame Whina Cooper's granddaughter and an executive producer on the film, talks about those initial discussions with her father, JOSEPH COOPER for which she was present. Joseph wanted to give his mother's life story a platform to be shared during his and his sister's (HINERANGI PURU-COOPER) lifetimes; though it had to be done right.

"My father was really excited that he was able to speak with a group that could bring it to life for him, that he was able to carve out what he believed to be important about Whina's story. And he instantly had a connection with Matthew" says Irenee. "From that point onwards, he was always 100% excited and supportive of GFC bringing the film to audiences."

Metcalfe then worked alongside Stephens who came onboard as a producer and who already knew the family as elders of his own iwi (tribe), Te Rarawa.

Of her grandmother, Irenee says: "She's already such an iconic figure, but for the rangatahi (young people) to understand what her life was about and to see how she made a difference, we felt it was an important part of history that needed to be told on screen."

Irenee Cooper felt that the legacy her grandmother left her family was always intended to be shared with the world.

"My grandmother's life was never personal, so it was really about carrying on what she had started and allowing the young generation coming through to see that," says Cooper. "So I don't feel like we really owned it, it was about making sure that people could hear her voice like we heard it in those days. Helping our grandmother inspire others striving to make change is part of the kaupapa of our whānau."

Irenee Cooper is the young girl holding her grandmother's hand in the famous photo. Her poignant memories of that day perfectly encapsulate her closeness to the woman behind the legend. They speak to the family intimacy that the film sets out to portray.

"There have been monuments built, and murals and ads created based on that image, on that moment I shared with her," explains Cooper, "but for me the most striking memory was the softness of my grandmother's hands. I remember that dearly. As we marched down past the snow-capped mountains, I remember telling her that I wanted an ice cream, because the

mountains looked like huge ice creams. I remember the smell of fresh kete (meal) kits being made, and the women holding babies, making them. So, whenever I look at that photo, I feel again how it was to be a three-year-old child, and how it felt to be with my grandmother."

"It was a pleasure and an honour to be able to meet with my own iwi spokespeople and discuss our wish to tell Whina's story to the world," says Stephens. "They were very supportive, and we needed that support."

Joseph Cooper also encouraged Stephens and Metcalfe to consult with other members of the 1975 Te Roopu O Te Matakite march.

"The Cooper family consider all the leaders of the land march as family," explains Stephens, "such was the weight and the power of what they went through in that era. So, we spent time with representatives from the movement. It was important to us to sit with them, celebrate them, and discuss with them how to best shape the film.

BUILDING THE CREATIVE TEAM

After securing agreements from the family and support from the iwi rūnanga, the producers went through an extensive research process – speaking in depth with many who knew Whina, hearing their perspectives about her as a leader and a human being, and refining their understanding of the community of Panguru, into which Whina was born.

During the development process, Metcalfe and Stephens brought onboard another crucial Māori-Pākehā pair within the growing WHINA film family.

“To direct the film was going to be such a huge undertaking,” explains Stephens. “Different films require different ways of working, and Matthew and I had no problem moving away from the individualistic angle that an auteur brings to film, in favour of a collaborative approach of two directors working in concert, working as partners.”

The producers approached JAMES NAPIER ROBERTSON, a renowned drama director, and PAULA WHETU JONES (Te Aitanga a Mahaki, Whakatōhea, Ngāti Porou), a talented and experienced director of both drama and documentary.

Metcalfe adds; “James had directed *The Dark Horse*, an amazing film, also about a real-life figure, and Paula had a history of directing drama and documentary and was one of the directors on the highly acclaimed anthology film, *Waru*. From the very beginning, they operated as one individual unit, to bring Whina’s story to the screen.”

“One of the aspects of developing Māori film is trying to break down hierarchies,” explains Tainui Stephens. “From the very beginning, James and Paula were like brother and sister. There was an openness, an appreciation of each other, the respect was evident, and they knew what constituent elements each could bring to tell the complete story. There was no artifice about their relationship, no need or requirement on their part to stand back.”

Whetu Jones and Napier Robertson didn't know each other before being approached about WHINA, but both knew and respected the other’s work.

Napier Robertson says: “I'd seen a short film that Paula made called *A Matter of Time*, which I thought was so powerful. I don't think a directing partnership would work if you didn't have that belief in the other person, in their creative instincts. There has to be a synchronicity to it, which I realised there would be with Paula, and that’s a great thing.”

“The whole process was open and honest,” adds Whetu Jones. “Everything out on the table, everything discussed. We both wanted the best for the film, and I believe we got it.”

As Whetu Jones and Napier Robertson spent more time with Whina’s family, and listened, watched and read more about her, both felt that it was important to see in the film the events of

her life that added up to the person she became, and to not portray Whina as a saint but as a beloved wife and mother. They fully embraced the personal complexities of her character.

“She had flaws, and we weren't afraid to address them,” notes Whetu Jones, “but we wanted to address them in a way that would allow the audience to feel compassion for the choices that she had to make.”

“We wanted to show her as a fully three-dimensional human being,” adds Napier Robertson. “Dame Whina is this towering figure, so it's easy to forget the day-to-day struggles that she might have dealt with, and the challenges she had to overcome to do the things that she did. Those are aspects that I think anybody, when they see the film, will be able to relate to. The more we learned about Dame Whina, the more we were blown away by what she'd done and the life that she led.”

Early drafts of the script for WHINA were written by Academy Award winning British-New Zealand writer JAMES LUCAS, with Whetu Jones and Napier Robertson writing the final screenplay.

As the script was refined, front of mind for the filmmakers was that the film had to do justice to Whina herself.

Napier Robertson comments: “For Paula and I, each decision always came back to ‘how do we serve Whina's story and her legacy? How do we create this with her whānau so that they feel proud of what we've done?’ A film is a big, powerful thing, it can take on a life of its own, so it's crucial to make sure that you do justice to the person you're telling it about.”

Whetu Jones adds: “We wanted to make sure people understood how pivotal Whina was, so for example, we devised a dramatic way to show the vital importance of the Māori Women's Welfare League, which Whina was the first President of. We show that in the 1950s there were slums in the middle of Auckland. Land was being taken off the Māori, they were moving into the cities but couldn’t get work and or accommodation. We can powerfully and emotionally depict those things through the medium of film.”

In the screenplay, the writer-directors focused on contrasting the public and private parts of Whina’s life, at the same time as highlighting the remarkable inner strength she demonstrated in both.

“Time and time again, Paula and I kept seeing how unbelievably brave she was, and how much resistance she came up against from all directions,” says Napier Robertson. “She had to struggle many times during her life. She lost and sacrificed so much, but remained this incredibly resilient, charismatic leader, who always knew who she was. Whina was a chief but a chief in Māori terms, not Western. She was a chief, but she was born on a dirt floor. They thought she died. Then they thought she was a boy. From the minute she was born, there were misconceptions about who she was. But Whina never doubted who she was.”

Whetu Jones adds: “She was not afraid. With the courage of her convictions, she just kept going. She made mistakes along the way, but she always truly believed that she was doing the right things for her people.”

Part of Whina’s complexity, which would come out strongly in the screenplay, was her embracing of her Māori as well as her Catholic spirituality.

“It surprised me that she staunchly kept her Catholic faith throughout her whole life, even when her faith didn't necessarily support her,” notes Jones. “The Catholic Church turned their back on her, but she never turned her back on them. I was surprised by that decision, but I give full respect to her for doing that.”

In 1957, on stepping down from her role as inaugural President of the Māori Women’s Welfare League, the organisation bestowed on Whina Cooper the title Te Whaea o Te Motu (Mother of the Nation). Although the name is still closely associated with her, to some the most important titles she can have are simply ‘activist’ and ‘educator’.

“I consider Whina as the paradigm of what an activist should be,” says Tainui Stephens. **“**The great African American emancipator Frederick Douglass said the most important thing is to ‘agitate, agitate, agitate!’ Whina’s life story was one of activism against injustice – whether that be the theft of Māori land or male oppression or other injustices. Whina was a person who refused to accept the wrongs of the status quo. She realised that if there was going to be substantive change, you can't take your foot off the gas pedal.”

For Irenee Cooper, her grandmother “was above all an educator. She was up against the patriarchy by being a woman, she was up against the church conflicting with her Māori culture and values, she was up against the governing bodies when it came to land rights and the decisions made around Te Tiriti. If you keep your vision in mind, and keep your values close, you can achieve anything. That is something that she taught us as a family. She also taught us how to play poker. She was really good at poker!”

CASTING WHINA

With the script completed, the producers and directors faced the challenge of casting a film spanning 90 years in the life of one extraordinary woman.

One clear initial decision that helped anchor the process was to not limit the casting to actresses of different ages who looked the same, but to focus on the energy that they possessed, an energy to emulate the ageless spirit of Whina Cooper.

Tainui Stephens explains, “Obviously exceptional talent in the craft of acting was required, but we also needed a type of Māori X factor. For us, that X factor was defined in part by a sense of wairua. Any actor playing Whina could not be daunted by playing such a huge figure.”

Napier Robertson adds: “The importance in this approach to casting was that we had to break the character up into three main sections, with three different actors portraying different periods of her life, but her spirit, the ‘feeling of her’ had to be unchanging. The baton pass between each actor couldn’t disrupt the emotional flow of the character. It had to enhance it. So, we had that as a unifying principle, but also as a big challenge.”

Casting the most senior actress first was seen as strategically important for the film.

Producer Matthew Metcalfe explains: “The three actors would each take a slice of her life that becomes a metaphor for her wider journey. The young Whina is bold, outwardly strong, but still has much to learn. Whina as a young adult woman, and as wife and mother, must deal with the harsh realities of life up north in the early 20th century. Whina as the leader of the 1975 land march is the culmination of her life’s journey. All of those life lessons have come full circle in that character and that actress.”

The actress first spoken of to portray Whina as a kuia was the esteemed RENA OWEN *(*Ngāti Hine, Ngāpuhi) *(Once Were Warriors).*

“Rena and I first worked together in the late 90s,” adds Metcalfe. “We've done many films together, and she was the first and indeed only choice to play the older role. Rena was immediately engaged with the screenplay and the story – she herself is from the north, from Moerewa. She came aboard immediately and contributed to the final development of the screenplay, to help us bring WHINA to life.”

Rena Owen recognised that Whina: “had that innate quality of the gift of the gab, and that's I think a talent you're born with. It's a bit like acting, it's a talent you're born with. Hone Tūwhare (a New Zealand poet) said that he thought Whina Cooper was the greatest living actress he'd ever met. If she’d been born in this era, perhaps she would have gone to drama school and become an actress. She certainly had those qualities and was a phenomenal speech maker.”

For Irenee Cooper, who would be the primary representative of the family throughout all stages of the production: “The casting was very personal and really difficult for me, to be okay with the women who were going to play my grandmother. I remember bursting into tears at times during casting, because when the actors got it ‘right,’ it could evoke so many memories of her.”

Cast alongside Rena Owen, to depict Whina in the middle stages of her life, was another well-known actress, MIRIAMA MCDOWELL (Ngāti Hine, Ngāpuhi) (*Waru, The Dark Horse*).

Whina Cooper, and Rena Owen, had both been personal idols for Miriama McDowell.

“I've got a picture of Whina on my wall, right when you walk into my house,” says McDowell. “People say: ‘Oh, you put a picture up of her because you're doing the film?’ and I reply: ‘No, no, she's always been there.’ She's always been an inspiration for me, just like Rena Owen has always been an inspiration for me. *Once Were Warriors* came out when I was about 14. I remember being in the movie theatre watching it, and thinking: ‘Wow, look at this woman telling our stories. She's amazing.’”

McDowell saw Whina as “a woman constantly thrust into situations where she is thinking ahead, and above everyone else. She was a visionary, from a small town. The challenge through her whole life was to get people to see what she could see. She could see how Māori were being dealt an unfair hand, and instead of sitting inside that she would say: ‘What can we do to fight? What can we do to change? How can we lift each other up and support each other?’”

Up and coming actress TIOREORE NGĀTAI-MELBOURNE (Ngāti-Porou, Tūhoe) (*Cousins*) was cast as the young Whina.

“Tioreore comes from an education and a background that is a melding of Māori and Pākehā cultures,” observes Tainui Stephens. “Tioreore represents a new generation of Māori, utterly at ease in the Māori world, utterly at ease in the Pākehā world. In casting the character of Whina, as well as other cast and crew, we were so thankful that the Māori film and television world is blessed with a growing critical mass of quality, both in front of and behind the camera.”

Before shooting began, directors James Napier Robertson and Paula Whetu Jones worked closely with the three actresses both on their integration as well as the challenges of their individual depictions.

“Rena is playing significantly older than she is, and Mirama is playing a period of 34 years,” explains Robertson, “so, it was a huge undertaking. Paula and I worked with the actresses separately at first, to develop the speech patterns and vocal rhythms, so that it didn’t feel like a mimicry of Whina but captured her energy as expressed in her voice. We then slowly brought them together so that they weren’t having to copy each other but could organically ‘meet’ in a comfortable, mutual place. It was a challenge, but an exciting one, and Rena, Miriama and Tioreore each brilliantly rose to the occasion.”

MAKING WHINA

Whina Cooper's life was characterised by a profound love of and connection to the land. The key events in her story played out on the land, and so in making a film about her life, the filmmakers knew they had to go to the real places to film those events.

"We had to go to where she was from, and we had to go where she went," explains Matthew Metcalfe. "Whina was born and spent her formative years in Panguru, so it felt required that we film on that very land, so that the story could form a connection to and base itself from that land. We applied that to many aspects of filming, going directly to where the actual events took place, so that the actors and the crew could feel they were bringing to life something tangible and real."

Basing location shooting in the Hokianga also allowed the filmmakers to directly involve Te Rarawa iwi and the Panguru community in the telling of the story.

"It was really special particularly to be able to involve the young people," says Tainui Stephens, "for them to be able to see the story of one of their own brought to their town, and for it to be a storytelling world that they too could participate in. We had some young people working behind the scenes or as extras. We had an open set so that community members could see what was involved in the making of a film. We don't want filmmaking to be a mystery for our people."
The strategy of participation was not a part of this one film alone. It's part of a wider movement to nurture our filmmaker communities. "The desire of Māori to tell our own stories, with our own people, is increasing, while we steadily build capacity in the industry," Stephens continues. For us to be able to film critical scenes back on the land where Whina came from, lived and died, to be able to spend time with the community, to film in the Church built by her father, brought not just authenticity but a wairua and an emotional core to what we were doing."

The rehearsal time with Rena Owen, Miriama McDowell and Tioreore Ngātai-Melbourne allowed the two directors to let the actors explore and take risks in their performances on set.

"That's how they could find those moments of absolute utter connection, and do truly great work," says James Napier Robertson. "It was about creating an environment that allowed them to feel safe and supported in that process, because you could imagine the pressure on the shoulders of those actresses, playing someone who is so iconic and so important to each of them on a personal level. Part of Paula and my job was to make sure that weight didn't lead them to being afraid to take a risk and make an unexpected choice, with the knowledge that we could protect them in those choices."

Irenee Cooper went through a rigorous process of ensuring the authenticity of her grandmother's voice within the script, but was also on hand on set, to help guide what felt right and what didn't feel right for the way Whina might have reacted in a given moment."

“I was so glad I could help bring fluidity and authenticity to the character,” says Cooper. “That was really important and was new for me to go through that very precise process. I learned a lot. And the people that we chose to play the characters were absolutely perfect and did her justice at the end of the day, it was just beautiful to watch.”

Because Whina as played by Rena Owen was the elderly woman who Irenee knew and loved, Owen’s performance faced the most scrutiny.

“That's where her grandchildren remember her the most,” says Irenee Cooper, “so it was a really tough position to be in at times, if things were not necessarily feeling right, it was my job to speak up. So, I felt for Rena, but she was brilliant in the character – her technique and the way she brought my grandmother to life was truly amazing.”

“I was very aware that this was a very big responsibility,” observes Owen. “There were times where I'd lay in bed at night and just feel sheer panic, and I'd have to literally talk myself through it and go, ‘No, you've got this. It's okay.’”

Owen felt that Whina was one of the most demanding roles of her lifetime, but also connected with a spiritual sense of assurance from Whina herself.

“There was so much energy that I had to put into her big speeches, then the physicality of being hunched over like a little Yoda. I was exhausted for days after we did those big scenes. She was a very demanding, taxing role. There was a scene at the marae (meeting house) and I had to do a big speech and I felt quite scared, and I felt a hand come up and touch me and I thought: ‘oh, that's nice, whoever it was’ and I looked and there was nobody there. It was a little reassurance pet on my arm. So, I felt very supported spiritually. I feel that this was a date with destiny. If you're privileged as an actor, you may get a few roles where you feel you were born to play this role. Beth Heke in *Once Were Warriors* was one of those roles, Helen Hawkins in *Siren* was another, and now Whina.”

Towards the end of filming, Miriama McDowell also felt a profound connection not just to Whina, but to the need to continue her work.

“The scene where I stand up at the inaugural Māori Women's Welfare League meeting and say forcefully that we need to do these things, that speech was the pinnacle of Whina for me, in terms of my craft,” declares McDowell. “I was working every day just so finally I could perform that speech and character. And when I got to that day, I really felt like I was in Whina’s shoes. By then I could feel her in my bones. I didn't have to act. She was just there saying that speech. I also felt like all her words were relevant to now. We need to look after our women. We need to educate our women. We need to make sure our people have houses to live in.”

Of McDowell and Ngati-Melbourne’s performances, Cooper adds that she and her family: “reveled in the beauty that they brought to bringing my grandmother to life as a young person.”

“Irenee said to us after watching a cut of the film: ‘I never knew my grandmother in her youth,” adds Paula Whetu Jones, “but I now feel that I’ve been able to see and experience her as a young woman.”

Although perhaps the least familiar with film sets, Irenee Cooper was conscious of the special dynamic that Whetu Jones and Napier Robertson brought to the film.

“It was a beautiful integration of both their arts,” she says. “I couldn't imagine how difficult it must be to have two directors on one movie, to make decisions and have your own strong thoughts. I never once saw them dispute, on or off set. It was a privilege to see them working together so well.”

“Without them, I doubt we would have the film we do today,” adds Matthew Metcalfe. “Each contributed to the other's understanding of the story, and each learnt from the other. It was a fantastic partnership. Much the same way that I learned from Tainui and Tainui learnt from me, we all added something that became greater than the sum of its parts. That’s the finest way to make a movie, and is very much in keeping with Dame Whina's own personal approach to life.”

This sentiment is one shared by Whetu Jones. “James and I are probably what she was fighting for, to be honest. What we achieved together with our team and with the actors, we are the essence of what Whina spent her lifetime fighting to achieve – Māori and Pākehā and working together.”

Whetu Jones and Napier Robertson both feel they couldn't have made WHINA without the other, and that the finished film is a testament to the hard work as well as the unity that existed on set.

“On a film, every day there's never enough time, never as many resources as you want,” Napier Robertson says. “There's a constant tension from moment to moment – will you get what you need to get. But the reason you do it is so that you can take these images and sounds you’ve captured into the edit room, and craft and shape and find that final version of what you started all the way back at the beginning, and hope that you've managed to hold on to that. That guiding light, that vision we all had to do justice to Whina’s story, we feel that now WHINA can go out into the world to reach and inspire audiences.”

REFLECTING ON WHINA – THE WOMAN AND THE FILM

Director Paula Whetu Jones: “Was Whina successful? Well, I'm alive, so yes. My mom's Pākehā and my dad's Māori. One of the big things she said was that the way to beat the Pākehā is to marry them.”

Director James Napier Robertson: “Whina fought against what she staunchly believed was not right about our country, yet had an optimistic vision of solving those things and bringing people closer together. This country wouldn't be what it is if it hadn't been for what she did. Does that mean that her journey is done? No, I think that's something that will carry on as long as we exist. Hopefully WHINA is a film that can inspire the next generations of New Zealanders as well as of other nations, to keep making their countries better places. She's an icon that people need to know about. The world desperately needs to look for ways to help each other and be better people together. That's something that Whina represents in such a powerful way.”

Actor Rena Owen: “'Kotahi tātou'. We are one. I think that's the most important message of Whina’s, the one that I would love people to go away with. We are one people. I look at my life – my dad was Māori, my mother was Pākehā – so I've always felt that I'm a bridge in both worlds. As the world sees more and more strife, and as the system as we know it starts to crumble, all our blood runs red, we all have fundamental basic needs as human beings, and we're going to have to unite in order to get through what's in front of us. That’s where Whina’s lessons have power today.”

Actor Miriama McDowell: “My daughters are two and nine, and I hope that young Māori girls watch this film and see themselves in it. I hope it inspires them to channel Whina’s spirit to see people who need help and be moved to do something about that. I became an actor because I believe that the combination of my skills would best help Māori if I was a storyteller. I thought I might be a diplomat or a doctor, but you come to know your skills. So WHINA is important to me because I really believe that stories have the power to change people and change the world.”

Producer Matthew Metcalfe: “I hope that when audiences leave the cinema after watching this film, that they understand why Whina was called the mother of the nation because she sought to bring Pākehā and Māori together, to work together to advance for the common interests of the nation.”

Executive Producer Irenee Cooper: “I'm blessed to have been a part of WHINA, and I hope that audiences fall in love with it like I did. My grandmother’s story helps us today to know that we are on the right track, that we're doing the right things in order to have a voice. It's always been a journey for us as Māori, and we've got to keep going. We have to speak our reo, we have to show our manaaki, and we have to love each other, because our strongest value as Māori is our aroha. Whina would say that it's not over... we've still got a journey to keep going on, we've just got to keep going.”

CREW BIOS

James Napier Robertson: Director, Writer

James Napier Robertson (Pākehā) is a New Zealand writer and director. His 2014 film THE DARK HORSE won nearly 30 awards at international festivals around the world and grossed $2 million at the NZ box office, *The Australian* calling it “outstanding...a work of the highest artistic excellence,” *Variety* stating it “exceptional...the most deserving cinematic export to emerge from New Zealand in years,” and the *RNZ Film Review* declaring it “one of the greatest New Zealand films ever made.”

Napier Robertson won New Filmmaker of the Year at the 2014 Spada Awards, and THE DARK HORSE won Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor and Best Score at the 2014 New Zealand Film Awards. In 2016 it was presented theatrically in the U.S. by James Cameron, and in late-2016 was formally screened at the White House for President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama.

In 2017, Napier Robertson wrote and directed two episodes of Stan Original Series ROMPER STOMPER, which won the Silver Logie for Most Outstanding Miniseries at the 2018 Logie Awards. He is represented by Anonymous Content.

Paula Whetu Jones: Director, Writer

Paula Whetu Jones (Te Aitanga a Māhaki, Whakatōhea, Ngāti Porou) is a mother and a grandmother who started her career in documentary filmmaking 20 years ago. The first documentary she directed, GANG GIRLS, which was also the first New Zealand documentary to explore the place of women within the country’s gang world.

GANG GIRLS won the award for ‘Best Documentary’ at the 2003 Qantas Media Awards. This paved the way for a string of social issue documentaries, which always profiled society through a completely different lens.

She has shot documentaries around the world, including in Cambodia and Palestine. She stepped into drama after two of her short films were funded, including YELLOW ROSES, a love story focusing on dementia, and A MATTER OF TIME, a social commentary about five young people. Both films are currently on the festival circuit.

Whetu Jones was one of the eight writer-directors on the pioneering Māori female-led feature film, WARU, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and played at many festivals around the world.

Matthew Metcalfe: Producer

Matthew has worked for over twenty five years in the film and television industry. He has produced a number of New Zealand's most well known films through his production company GFC Films, including MCLAREN, BORN RACER, BEYOND THE EDGE, DEAN SPANLEY, LOVE BIRDS, DAWN RAID and THE DEAD LANDS, which was also adapted into a television show of the same name with AMC Networks.

Recently Metcalfe wrote and produced MOTHERS OF THE REVOLUTION with Universal Pictures, CAPITAL IN THE 21st CENTURY with Studio Canal and 6 DAYS as a Netflix Original.

Metcalfe has had multiple films shown at the Toronto International Film Festival. These include DEAN SPANLEY, BEYOND THE EDGE, GISELLE, THE DEAD LANDS and 25 APRIL. Metcalfe won Independent Producer of the Year at the 2013 SPADA Screen Industry Awards, and received a Tui Award at the 2002 NZ Music Awards for producing the iconic music video *Fade Away* by Che Fu.

Tainui Stephens: Producer

Tainui Stephens (*Te Rarawa*) is an independent film and television producer, director, executive producer, writer, and presenter.

In 1984, Stephens commenced a broadcasting career on contract to Television New Zealand. As a reporter, director, producer and executive producer, he created over 500 hours of programming. In 2000, he expanded his work into film production, radio, voice-work, writing, cultural consultancy, and governance.

Stephens has brought Māori television stories to international audiences with documentary series co-productions STORYTELLERS OF THE PACIFIC (TV Ontario/ABC, 1993) and FAMILY (Film Australia, 1995). He has been an Executive Producer for events including the MDC Māori Sports Awards (1993-97), and the director of documentaries including THE NEW ZEALAND WARS (1998) and TAUMATA 3001 (2019).

He was a producer for the Vincent Ward feature films RIVER QUEEN (2005), and RAIN OF THE CHILDREN (2008), and an associate producer of Armagan Ballantyne's debut feature THE STRENGTH OF WATER (2009). He was a producer of Toa Fraser's feature THE DEAD LANDS (2014), as well as a producer of the television series THE DEAD LANDS that has been commissioned by AMC for broadcast worldwide.

Stephens is committed to the role of the Māori storyteller in all modern media, and has been a long-time advocate and practitioner of Māori language broadcasting. He is comfortable working in a wide range of genre and content. He is personally attracted to compelling stories that critique and celebrate the human condition.

Liz Adams: Producer

Liz Adams (Ngāpuhi) is an Auckland based producer/line producer and Unit Production Manager with over 20 years of television production experience (local and international) – spanning work across scripted and non-scripted formats.

Her work includes long format drama series, soap opera series, docu-dramas, telemovies, factual reality series and documentaries.

Adams has line-produced JAMES PATTERSON'S MURDER IS FOREVER, STEP DAVE, THE BLUE ROSE MYSTERIES, THE CULT, PIECE OF MY HEART, WESTSIDE and THE SOUNDS.

James Lucas: Writer

James Lucas is an Oscar-winning writer of New Zealand, English and Bajan descent, After graduating from film school at London Metropolitan, being a Writer/Researcher at Talkback Television and an Assistant Editor at Tank Magazine, Lucas began working at Ridley Scott's RSA Films.

His role expanded quickly, becoming an in-house creative – conceptualizing and developing branded entertainment for the likes of Paul Smith, Triumph and Johnny Walker. He has also executive produced projects for the likes of Jaeger and O2. Simultaneously, he composed original music for commercials and film; undertaking projects for clients such as NOW TV, Wallpaper Magazine, Orange, BBC and Sega, as well as finding the time to perform in the 2012 London Olympics opening ceremony.

In 2013, Lucas wrote and produced a short film THE PHONE CALL, with director Mat Kirkby and starring Sally Hawkins and Jim Broadbent. The film went on to win 16 international film festival awards, including Best Narrative Short at Tribeca Film Festival. In February 2015, he won the Oscar for Best Live-Action Short Film for the film.

Since then, Lucas has developed and produced a number of film and television projects, including GAZZA, a feature film biopic of the footballer Paul Gascoigne (of which Lucas holds the exclusive rights) for Starchild Pictures; CHAMELEON, a crime thriller TV series about a real life female serial killer, for Keshet International; CAMPAIGN, a TV serial set in the world of advertising in 1980s Britain, for Wild Mercury/Endemol-Shine; and ENGLISH RHAPSODY, a coming of age psycho-drama, for HWY Films/Red Breast Films.

Lucas is also gearing up for his directorial debut with a short film called PAINT THE DRAGONS' EYES.

Leon Narbey: Director of Photography

Leon Narbey was educated at the Elam School of Fine Arts, specialising in sculpture. He married Anita Janske Narbey (1944 - 2019) in 1966 and together they had two daughters, Vanessa and Beatrix. He lectured at the University of Canterbury in 1972, before joining the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation as a news cameraman.

In the mid-1970s, he shot the Geoff Steven documentary TE MATAKITE O AOTEAROA, about the 1975 Māori land march. In 1978 he made BASTION POINT DAY 507 with Merata Mita and Gerd Pohlmann which he also edited and co-produced. He continued his partnership with Geoff Steven on three documentaries shot in China in 1979, including GUNG HO (about Rewi Alley) and THE HUMBLE FORCE.

Narbey co-wrote and directed two feature films, ILLUSTRIOUS ENERGY and THE FOOTSTEP MAN, in 1987 and 1992 respectively. In 1990, he shot the comedy-drama RUBY AND RATA for Gaylene Preston. In 1993, he was director of photography on the feature film DESPERATE REMEDIES, for which he won the Best Cinematography award at the New Zealand Film and Television Awards in 1994.

Narbey's recent work includes the romantic drama THE PRICE OF MILK, the acclaimed drama WHALE RIDER, NO. 2, the vampire film PERFECT CREATURE, DEAN SPANLEY, RAIN OF THE CHILDREN, the documentary THE TOPP TWINS: UNTOUCHABLE GIRLS, the Samoan film THE ORATOR, GISELLE, THE DEAD LANDS, and ONE THOUSAND ROPES.

CAST BIOS

Rena Owen: Whina

Rena is best-known for her pivotal role of Beth Heke in Lee Tamahori's iconic New Zealand film *Once Were Warriors* - where her performance earned her countless local and international awards and nominations. Since then, Rena has appeared in a multitude of film and television productions, with notable roles in George Lucas's *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones (Part II)*, Stephen Spielbergs's *A.I Artificial Intelligence*, *The Last Witch Hunter, The Dead Lands* and the upcoming release of *Whina.*

Miriama McDowell: Younger Whina

MIRIAMA MCDOWELL (Ngāti Hine and Ngāpuhi) has been working in theatre, film and television for twenty years. She is an actor, director and Mum from Tāmaki Makaurau.

In film, she has starred in *No. 2, The Dark Horse, Mahana, Waru* and *The Great Maiden's Blush,* which earned her Best Actress at the 2017 Rialto Channel New Zealand FIlm Awards. In 2021 the thriller *Coming Home In The Dark* premiered at Sundance Film Festival to rave reviews. Miriama is excited to see the response to her next film *Whina*, in which she portrays the younger Whina Cooper, hero to the nation of Aotearoa. "I remember standing inside the trailer

on the first day of the shoot, hair and make up done, costume on, thinking “I can’t go out there. How am I going to play this incredible woman?”.

She’s appeared in a number of television series, including *Shortland Street, Outrageous Fortune, Mataku, This is Not My Life, The Brokenwood Mysteries, Find Me a Māori Bride,* and most recently, *Head High.* McDowell won the NZTV Best Actress Award for her portrayal of Renee O’ Kane in *Head High*, the first Māori woman to have earned that honour.

Her theatre career has seen her star in the sold-out season of Sam Brooks ’*Burn Her, Cellfish,* which she also wrote, *The Prophet, The Vultures, Te Karakia* and many more. She has a long relationship with Massive Theatre Company as an actor, director and writer.

Miriama McDowell lives in Auckland with her daughters Talanoa and Hero where she loves to climb mountains and eat good food.

Vinnie Bennett: William Cooper

Vinnie Bennett can most recently be seen in FAST & FURIOUS 9 for director Justin Lin and Universal Studios, in which he plays a young version of Vin Diesel. He previously shot the New Zealand TV series THE BAD SEED for director Helena Brooks. Named a "2017 Rising Star" for his performance in the feature HUMAN TRACES which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, Vinnie Bennett plays a mysterious young man whose arrival to a remote sub-Antarctic research station threatens the relationship of a married couple living on the island.

Previous credits include the NZ telefeature RESOLVE, the NZ drama series FILTHY RICH and THE GULF S2, GHOST IN THE SHELL for DreamWorks, THE SHANNARA CHRONICLES for MTV and TATAU for BBC America. A native of New Zealand, Vinnie is multi-ethnic Māori / Caucasian with European heritage.

ERROLL SHAND: Father Shand

In the last 6 years Erroll Shand has been cementing his reputation in New Zealand & Australian Film and Television industry for diverse, character driven roles in productions such as "Harry", “Underbelly” "Mystery Road" and "Rake". Erroll expanded his international credits with the lead role in bilingual (Portuguese / English) Brazilian feature film "Little Secret" which picked up an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language film, and he was a shining light alongside Emma Thompson in the award-winning NZ production "Highroad". 2019 saw Erroll alongside Essie Davis in "Justice of Bunny King" and closing the year off with the Apple TV series, ‘Shantaram’.

Matu Ngaropo: Āpirana Ngata

Matu is a New Zealand-Māori actor who works across film, television and theatre. His television credits include the lead of Mikaere in Māori Television soap opera Kōrero Mai, along with guest roles on comedy series Seven Periods with Mr. Gormsby and hospital drama Shortland Street. He appears in the upcoming feature film Whina, portraying the celebrated New Zealand politician Āpirana Ngata. Most recently, Matu stars as the lead George Washington in the Australian production of Hamilton the Musical.

WAYNE HAPI: HEREMIA TE WAKE

Wayne Hapi is a Māori carver, artist, musician and actor. Hapi found acting fame after busking on the streets of Auckland. Finding a casting call looking for Māori men for a role in a feature film on the Winz website in 2013 he decided to go through the audition process (despite having no experience in acting) and managed to land a major role in the film *The Dark Horse* for which he received a Tui nomination for Best Supporting Actor at the 2014 New Zealand Film Awards. Since then Hapi has been seen in productions like *The Dead Lands*, TVNZ's *Vegas* and the upcoming film *Whina.* In *Whina,* he plays Whina's father Heremia Te Wake.

Wayne's inspirational personal journey has seen him grow from an unknown to a respected actor in a few short years.

Hapi is now based in Wellington where he lives close to his youngest two children and his grandson.

RICHARD TE ARE: Richard Gilbert

An actor of understatement and finesse, Richard's recent credits include Te Rau Tauwhare on the BBC screen adaptation of Eleanor Catton's Booker Prize winning novel, *The Luminaries*, and Rob in season 2 of *Ahikaroa.* In 2018, he played the lead Teina Pora in Michael Bennett's telefilm *In Dark Places*. His next two film credits followed soon after as Elder Alisa *The Other Side of Heaven 2* (dir. Mitch Davis), and as Gunner Murray in *Danger Close* (dir. Kriv Stenders). He played the sorcerer and chief protagonist Prospero in Robin Payne's production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* Haimon in Heather Timms' *The Antigone Sound*, and as part of the ensemble in Katie Wolfe's *The Haka Party Incident*, and Tama Nui Te Ra in *Mahuika*, directed by Whetu Silver. In 2021 he played Kaea in the compelling short film, *The Retrieval*, produced by Māoriland Productions. Richard enjoys playing the guitar and is far too modest about his singing abilities.