



REUNION

REUNION is a feature film about a pregnant woman who returns to her recently-deceased grandparents' old family home to spend time with her estranged mother and recover from a difficult break-up.

Packing up the old house for sale while approaching the the shortest days of the year, this modest family get-together soon turns dark.



SYNOPSIS

Ivy tries to reconnect with her estranged daughter Ellie while keeping their contradictory memories of the past at bay. Anxious over her pregnancy, Ellie is haunted by the guilt of a childhood accident she caused and discovers her unborn baby is being supernaturally threatened. But the more Ivy tries to help Ellie in her emotional unravelling, the more things spiral out of control.

The story starts from the outside, empirical world and spirals inwards towards the subjective core of Ellie's fragmented psyche as she tries to reconstruct the past while simultaneously being attacked and torn down in the present.

Initially, it seems that Ivy is a positive persona compared with Ellie's frantic and threatening characteristics. Gradually, viewers are challenged by the shifting dynamics between Mother and Daughter and Ivy is revealed to be someone with unexpected motives.

How much antagonism will any one viewer tolerate before reorienting sympathies towards Ellie, an inherently faulty and painfully vulnerable protagonist? Will anyone empathize with this imperfect victim despite her own shortcomings and unreliable hold on reality? Ellie finally learns to survive and salvage her own selfhood by defending the unborn and the dead in a climax that physically manifests the family's monstrous past.

The film begins with the slow dread of *Autumn Sonata* / *The Piano Teacher* and leads into the supernatural terror of *The Shining* and resolves in a cathartic climax.

In the middle of winter, Ivy, a 55-year old mother, is packing up her recently deceased in-law's strange and expansive old Victorian home. As Ivy boxes everything up for auction, her 30-year old, pregnant daughter Ellie arrives from out of town. Ellie is a professor and is finishing a book on the history of science while visiting with her mother to recover from an intense breakup from her fiance. Ellie is helpless, needy and dependent and Ivy is assuring and supportive.

But the old house conjures disturbing memories for Ellie who is haunted by the ghost of her dead sister, Cara, who Ellie accidentally killed in childhood. Ellie grows more disturbed and erratic as Ivy tries to comfort and contain her strange behaviours. While sleepwalking one night through the house, Ellie discovers a deformed homunculus in one of the moving boxes. Ellie is convinced this nightmare is Cara's supernatural threat to deform her own unborn baby as revenge. Ellie tries to appease Cara's ghost by uncovering the true cause of her death 20 years ago. As Ellie goes around the house unpacking all of Ivy's boxes, Ivy becomes more defensive and controlling, trying to keep Ellie from going completely crazy.

After discovering clues and uncovering pieces of old memories from around the house, Ellie confronts Ivy about the true cause of Cara's death. Ivy admits that it was her own fault that Cara died but had been blaming Ellie all along. Mother and daughter reconcile over this long untold guilt. Ivy leads Ellie to her bedroom to rest and then locks her inside. Ellie tries to get out and begins having contractions and goes into a panic. Ivy begins burning boxes and household items, destroying the bits of left over memories. Cara appears and unlocks Ellie's bedroom door. Ellie runs outside to recover items from the burning trash pile. She finds a skeleton of the deformed homunculus from her dream. Ellie feels like she has gone insane and Ivy draws Ellie into a secret room in the house, a laboratory where she and her husband had grown their children in alchemical, pre-scientific methods. Ivy pleads with Ellie to calm down and let Ivy take care of Ellie's baby- the first real baby the family has ever had.

Ellie discovers test tubes with failed versions of herself and Cara and other homunculi inside. As Ivy tries to trap Ellie in the laboratory, Ellie escapes, locking Ivy inside the secret room, hidden behind a wall, never to be discovered. Ellie escapes the house with her baby and a peaceful, contented Cara.



single location
seven characters
small crew (12-14)
flashbacks in summertime
non-specific, fabulist setting
filmed in New Zealand stormy season



Aesthetic Notes

silhouettes and shadow figures
architectural framing
milky chiaroscuro
natural lighting

immersive textured environments
symbolic and spatial color
2-D design vs 3-D space
de-centered framing



Director's Notes

What the screenplay cannot convey is the subjectivity of the camera and how the film will subtly shift tone and point of view from Ivy to Ellie. What begins as a seemingly harmless and amusing generational family dramedy turns sinister as Ellie's existential crises to retain her selfhood under her mother's control is slowly revealed.

Mundanity hides an unspoken unease. Casual comments become manipulative in retrospect. Faux pas hide disturbing triggers and emotional blackmail. Moments of vulnerable honesty might be performative. But these are appearances: never overt, only seen from the point of view of one of the two characters. The synthesis of these perspectives (and the resulting cognitive dissonance) is what the camera should visualize in a lyrical way.

The film is about recreated memory: actively re-remembering past events based on influences, guilt, coercions and new perspectives in the present. The ghost of Cara slowly shifts from a manifestation of guilt to a transformed moral conscience. While Ellie's awareness grows and she confronts her own evolving point of view, she consequently remembers her past differently. This feedback loop is dramatised in the film.

The film itself will shift from an ethereal, haunting psychodrama about the unspoken guilt over a mysteriously dead child into an unhinged, visceral body horror of generational, alchemical manufacturing of the "perfect family."



excerpt from the screenplay:

IVY

Aren't you excited about the baby?! Do you even know if its a boy or girl yet?

ELLIE

I'm not doing ultrasounds.

IVY

Don't you want to know if it's a boy or girl or if it's sick or deformed or something?

ELLIE

Mom- the baby is fine. I'm not doing an ultrasound- I've looked into all of that and decided its safer not to.

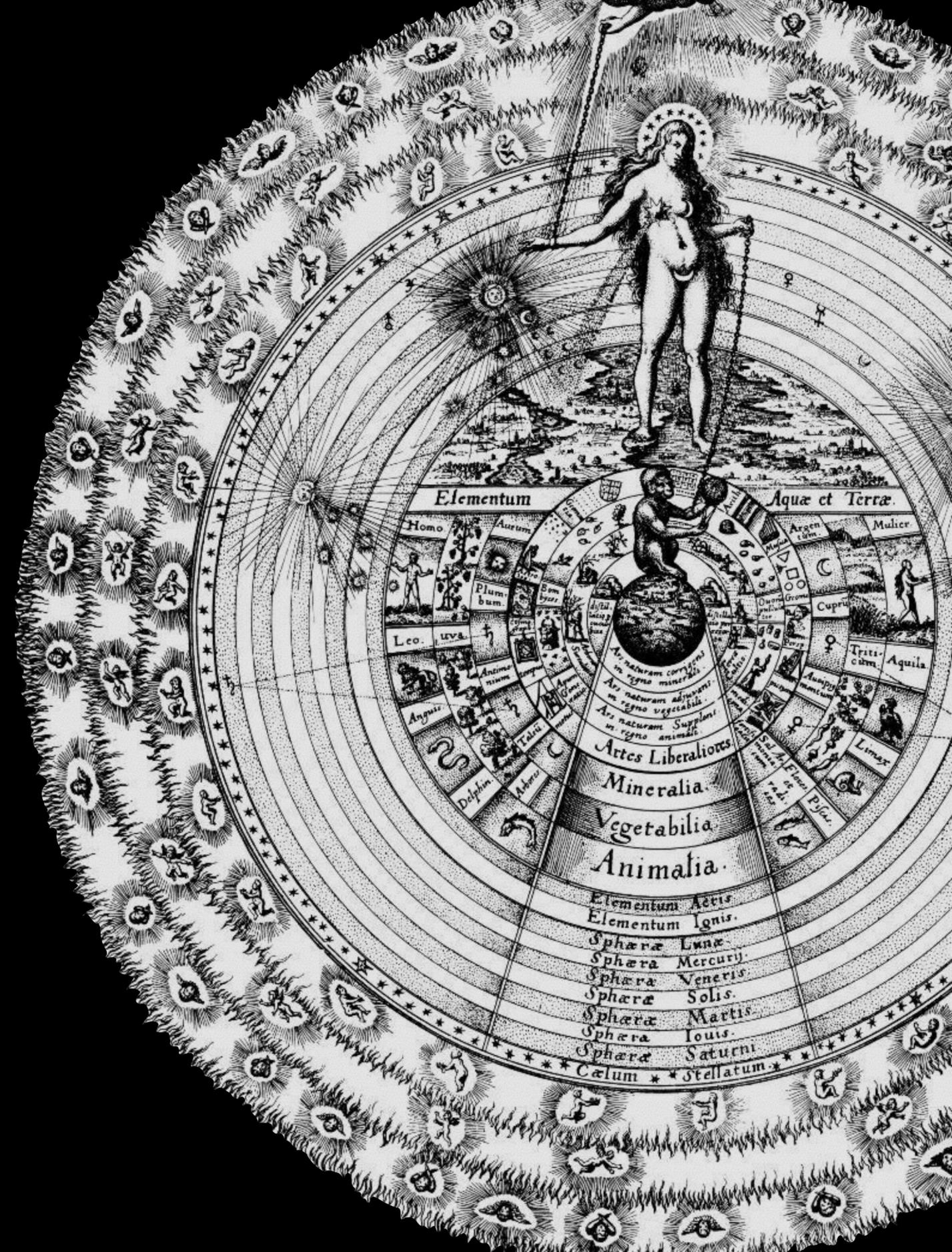
IVY

Well. I'll just have to have paint the nursery beige then.

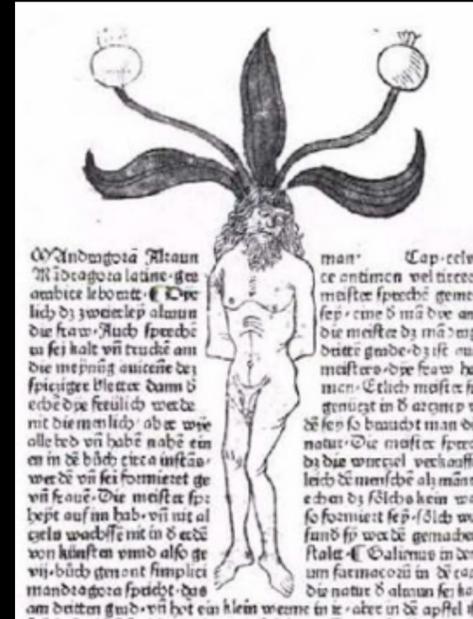
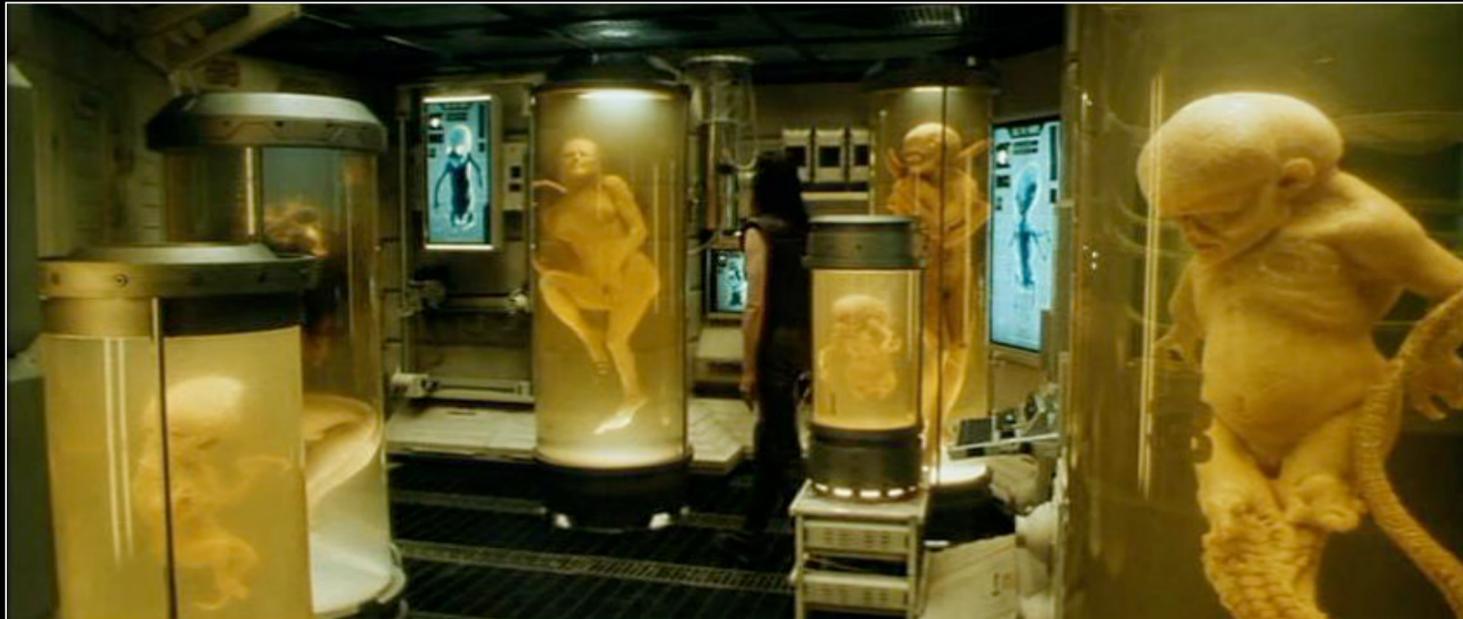
INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Ellie stands in the kitchen with water boiling on the stove.

She looks out of the window at the rain storm over the forest.



Ellie's book project involves research into the medieval origins of modern science and how natural philosophy and early attempts at alchemy and experimental techniques led to the Enlightenment and 'Age of Reason.'





Film References

Subjectivity/Expressionism

- The Mirror, Tarkovsky (fragmented narrative, choreographed camera and immersive subjectivity)
- The Duke of Burgundy, Strickland (fabulism, framing and shifting character bias)
- The Double Life of Veronique, Kieslowski (doppelganger/spiritualist narrative)
- Enemy, Villeneuve (doppelganger, magic realism and subjectivity)

Dramatic

- Martha Marcy May Marlene, Durkin (framing, merging timelines)
- The Piano Teacher, Haneke (mother/daughter psychological drama)
- Autumn Sonata, Bergman (mother/daughter domestic drama)
- Persona, Bergman (merging subjectivity of characters)

Horrific

- Inland Empire, Lynch (dissociative fragmentation and altered chronology)
- Images, Altman (immersive subjectivity and horror elements)
- The Shining, Kubrick (supernatural terror)
- The Conjuring, Wan (haunted house)

Dream/Re-Membering

- Meshes of the Afternoon, Deren (dream/memory)
- Last Year at Marienbad, Resnais (memory/dream/present-tense)
- Solaris, Tarkovsky (guilt, magic realism, memory affecting the past)

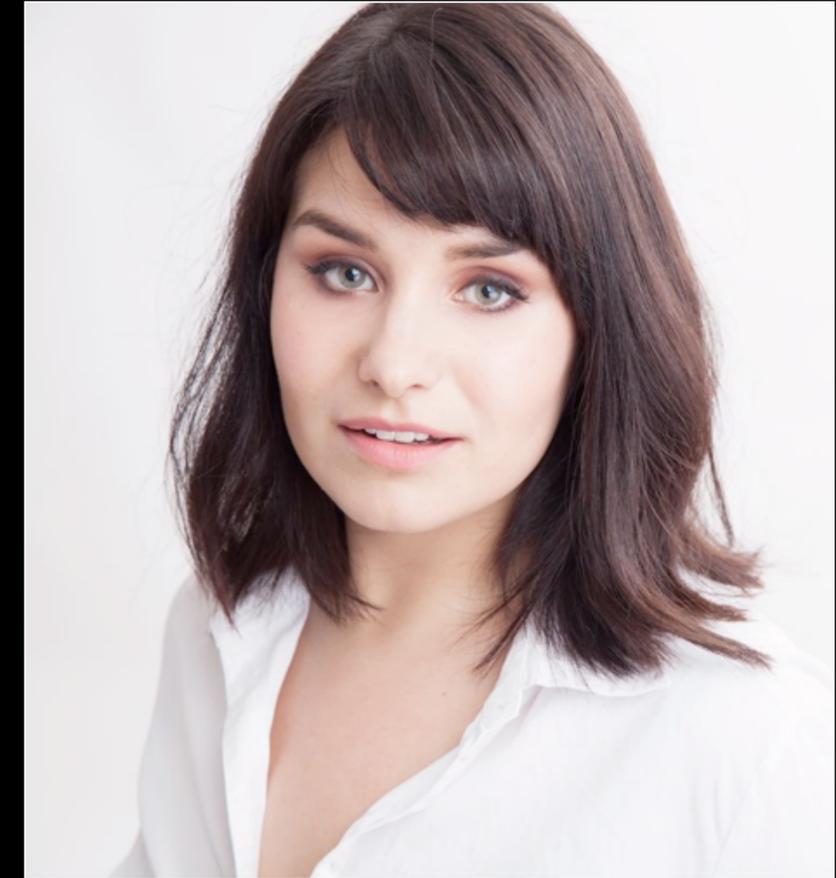


lead roles



JULIA ORMOND (born 4 January 1965) is an English actress. She rose to prominence appearing in such films as *The Baby of Mâcon* (1993), *Legends of the Fall* (1994), *First Knight* (1995), *Sabrina* (1995), *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (1997) and *The Barber of Siberia* (1998). She won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Miniseries or a Movie for her role in the HBO film *Temple Grandin* (2010). More recently she was nominated for an Emmy for her role in *Mad Men* as Marie Calvet.

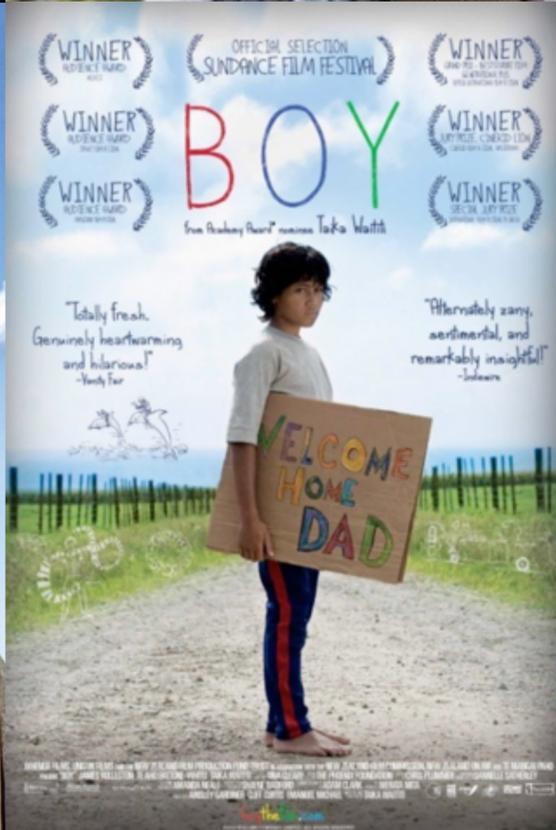
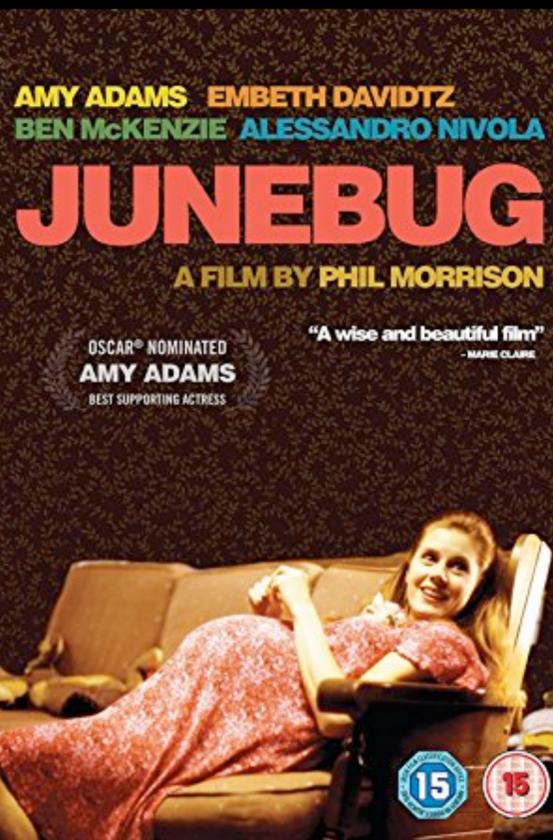
Julia Ormond as Ivy



EMMA DRAPER is a New Zealand actress, trained at Toi Whakaari, and appearing in several NZ TV series such as *Nick and Alice*, *Child Proof* and *Girl vs Boy*, as well as short films and features *What We Do in the Shadows* and *Jean*.

Emma Draper as Ellie

producing team



Georgina Allison Conder started her career in the early 2000's with Larry Parr and his company Kahukura Productions. She gained experience in a large number of production roles on films, documentaries and TV series. She has been working as a line producer, working on New Zealand feature films EAGLE VS SHARK, BOY, SHOPPING and THE PA BOYS. Most recently she co-produced CONSENT: THE LOUISE NICHOLAS STORY. In 2015 Georgina founded Miss Conception Films with Ainsley Gardiner. Their new production company is focused on female-lead character driven projects with female key creatives.



Ainsley is of Ngāti Awa, Te Whānau-a-Apanui, Ngāti Pīkiao and Whakatōhea descent. Notably Ainsley produced Taika Waititi's feature films, Eagle vs Shark in 2005 and his No. 1 Box Office hit, BOY, in 2009. Ainsley has produced more than a dozen short and feature films, documentaries and television drama. Ainsley has hosted a short film programme on Māori Television, previously sat on the Māori development of the NZ Film Commission, Te Paepae Ataata, and currently is an Advisory Board member of Script-To-Screen's Story Camp (formerly Aotearoa Writers Lab). She is also a writer/director, her first short film, She started Miss Conception Films with Georgina Allison Conder in 2014 to similarly support female filmmakers to develop stories with strong female protagonists for a female audience.



As a producer and executive producer, Mike S Ryan has helped realize many groundbreaking films in the last fifteen years, most made under \$3 million. His films have garnered nominations and prizes from the Academy Awards, Independent Spirit Awards, Gotham Awards, Venice, Rotterdam, and others. JUNEBUG, starring Amy Adams, made its international premiere at Cannes in 2005 and was one of the lowest-budgeted features ever nominated for an Oscar. Other credits include Todd Solondz's PALINDROMES and LIFE DURING WARTIME; Kelly Reichardt's OLD JOY and MEEK'S CUTOFF starring Michelle Williams; Ira Sachs's 40 SHADES OF BLUE (winner, Sundance 06). <http://www.greyshackfilms.com>

writer/director

Jake Mahaffy's self-produced, micro-budget shorts and features were made single-handedly, featuring untrained actors in rural settings. More recent projects combined with professional actors and crew have also screened internationally. Jake studied fine arts and film at the Rhode Island School of Design, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, foreign languages at Brown University and fiction directing at the Russian State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow. He founded two new filmmaking programs at two universities as an Associate Professor of Film and Art in the United States and currently coordinates the Screen Production program at Auckland University in New Zealand.



The low-budget feature film *Free in Deed* won the Orizzonti Best Film prize at the 72nd Venice Biennale (2015) and four American Independent Spirit nominations among other awards. This film was produced by Jake, Mike and George together with others.

