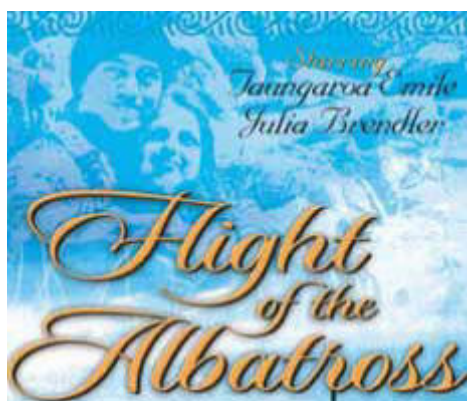


Flight of the Albatross Movie Premiere



On the 6th July 1996 the World Premiere of the movie 'Flight of the Albatross' was held in a large marquee erected in the playing field at Kaitoke School on Great Barrier Island. On the island for the occasion were all the New Zealand cast, the co-directors Vincent Burke and Werner Meyer who travelled from Australia especially for the event, representatives from the NZ Film Commission and, of course, Barrier residents and visitors.

The event began at 4.00pm with celebration drinks including a complimentary Montana wine with a special premiere label 'Flight of the Albatross'. Locals gathered in unique attire, glamorous gowns, evening suits, bow ties and gumboots. The Director Werner Meyer flew his gumboots from Sydney for the occasion.

Kaitoke School grounds sported a very large 20x40 metre marquee surrounded by smaller marquees offering food and drink. As evening approached the flood-lighting came on and the crowd moved to find seats inside the marquee. The dignitaries were welcomed with a Maori Karanga and a taiaha challenge before they were introduced. Vincent Burke, the Producer, compared the premiere with those he had attended elsewhere and declared it unique.

Some technical problems with the projector affected the quality of the film but despite this it was a wonderful evening, a night to remember for all those in attendance. With about a thousand people present it was one of the biggest gatherings on the island.

About the Movie

A joint production between Top Shelf Productions of Wellington and Fritzwagner Film Company of Berlin 'Flight of the Albatross' was filmed on Great Barrier Island, mainly at Sugar Loaf and Okupu, during January and February 1995.



The screenplay was adapted by Riwia Brown from the novel by American Deborah Savage. Riwia is best known for her 'Once Were Warriors' script. The novel is based on Deborah's memories of Great Barrier Island where she lived for about 4 months during 1981. She returned for a two week visit in 1995 to watch the film develop and spend time with the crew.

Photo: Taungaroa Emile (Mako) with author Deborah Savage



Diana Ngaromutu Heka, plays Mari in the film, the mother of Mako, (played by Taungaroa Emile). Diana was selected by a casting agent in Wellington and it wasn't until she was auditioned for the part that the film company realized she came from Great Barrier Island. Her two daughters also had roles as extras in the movie.

That was one of two coincidences, the other being the company did not realize the original story was based on the island until after they had chosen it as their location. In the novel the island is called 'Great Kauri Island'.

Diana was a driving force behind the premiere event. When she learned that the film was not going to be premiered, only released through Theatres from 12th July 1996 she felt it was the logical thing to organize a Barrier Premiere. She contacted the Great

Barrier Island Business Association who agreed to organize the island arrangements while she worked on a sponsorship proposal to present to corporate businesses to raise the necessary funds. It seemed like an insurmountable project to put together in just six weeks. But, in Diana's words when it was all over, "Yes, we did it."

Photo: Director Werner Meyer and Diana Heka complete with gumboots.

Before filming could commence a considerable amount of set building was undertaken. A pub and store were built at Okupu and an old bach at Sugar Loaf, right on the beach, with authentically weathered boards. A bridge was also built across the creek to an existing home which had been hired for the film.

Another local to gain a speaking part was Gloria (Chubby) Park who was chosen for a dual role as bar person and baby sitter. With no acting experience Chubby was very nervous at first. Producer Vincent Burke called Chubby "a natural".



Photo: The Bach at Sugar Loaf

Many locals were involved in the production, from providing accommodation, catering, transport and set building. A team of people gave their support in unacknowledged ways such as those who were there to help set up the marquee, transport equipment and those who appeared on the morning after the premiere to clean up the grounds.



The Story

Mako, a young Maori boy on the verge of a criminal future, unwillingly returns to his idyllic island home off the coast of New Zealand to live with his mother and her new husband, Mike (played by Australian actor Jack Thompson).

Photo: Peter Smith, local Bob Walters and Jack Thompson at the 'Okupu Pub'.



Sarah (Julia Brendler - Moondance), a promising young musician from Germany has come to the island to spend the holidays with her estranged ornithologist mother who is doing research on the island.

The two young people are drawn together by the discovery of an injured albatross, who, with the help of an old lady who 'sees everything', becomes the catalyst affecting both their lives.

Director Werner Meyer, **Writer** Riwia Brown, **Producer** Vincent Burke, **Executive Producer** Rita & Susanne Wagner

Cast

Julia Brendler Sarah, **Taungaroa Emile** Mako

Suzanne von Borsody Claudia, **Peter Schmode** Walter

Diana Ngaromotu-Heka Mari, **Jack Thompson** Mike **Peter Tait** Digby,

Beryl Te Wiata Margaret, **Louise Petherbridge** Isie, **Pete Smith** Huka,

Eva Rickard Hatai, **Ebony Kite-Bell** Atawhai, **Gloria Park** Bartender

Ngati Wai Liaison Whetu McGregor, Shona Rapira Davies,

Kaumatua The Company had its own Kaumatua, Rei Rakatau, who has been involved with the NZ Film Commission for a number of years. "The film is an exciting development in NZ film history, by its focus on cultural communication"

Painter Dave Alison, **Animal Wrangler** Horace Newton, Caroline Girdlestone



Photo: Wayne (Gibbo) Gibson MC & island co-ordinator, for the Premier, Doreen Scott

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