

Midnight At The Paradise - Press Kit

Midnight At The Paradise is a romantic drama set in Toronto against the backdrop of the crumbling Paradise Cinema. It's the feature directorial debut of Vanessa Matsui (*Ghost BFF*), written & produced by Bill Robertson (*The Events Leading Up to My Death, Apartment Hunting*), starring Liane Balaban (*The People Garden, One Week, New Waterford Girl*), Allan Hawco (*Moonshine, Republic of Doyle, Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan*), Ryan Allen (*SEE, Tokens, Titans*), TIFF rising star Emma Ferreira (*Learn to Swim, Unstable*), Kate Trotter (*Tru Love*) and the late Kenneth Welsh (*Twin Peaks, The Aviator, The Day After Tomorrow*) in his final film role.

Country: Canada

Genre: Romantic Drama

Runtime: 94 minutes

"A perfect movie for movie lovers" – POV Magazine December 2022

Logline

Over the course of one evening, three couples are pulled into a collision course of sexual chemistry, delusion and hope as they explore love, death, desire and what the magic of movies mean to them.

Synopsis

When they were teenagers, Iris (Balaban) and Alex (Hawco) went to see the sexy French New Wave classic 'Breathless' and fell in love. But life had other plans. Twenty years later, Iris is married to workaholic doctor Geoff (Allen), stressed out by motherhood and caring for her dying, self-centered film critic father, Max (Kenneth Welsh). Tonight she has scheduled a screening of 'Breathless' at the rundown Paradise Theater in Max's honor, and on a whim invites Alex. But when Alex shows up with his fiancée Anthea (Ferreira) in tow, Iris' world is turned upside down and the two ex-lovers spend the evening contemplating the past and plotting a future together.

Midnight At The Paradise is a thought-provoking look at what makes long-term relationships work, and how movies can shape our views on romantic love. In one evening, three couples at various stages of their relationships come to appreciate that any marriage requires equal doses of delusion, forgiveness, laughter, hope, and sexual chemistry.

Midnight At The Paradise explores three stages of love: Iris and Geoff are at a mid-point in their marriage, sandwiched between caring for their young daughter and for Iris's father Max; Alex and Anthea are the newly engaged couple, enjoying their honeymoon phase even though their wedding is still a week away; and Max and Charmaine, Iris' parents, now divorced, are coping with the impact of Max's terminal illness.

Midnight At The Paradise is also cinematic love letter to Toronto. The city plays itself, highlighting such beloved locations as The Monarch Tavern, The Drake Hotel, the historic diner The Ace, and all the great lost movie houses, including The Regent on Mt. Pleasant, and the iconic Paradise on Bloor Street.

Midnight At The Paradise is produced by Bill Robertson's Billfilms (*The Events Leading Up to My Death*), with the financial participation of Telefilm Canada and Ontario Creates. It is executive produced by Paul Barkin of Alcina Pictures (*Night Raiders, Firecrackers, The Colony*). Canadian distribution for the film is handled by levelFILM. Cinematography by Jason Tan (*The Clark Sisters: First Ladies of Gospel, Goalie*), production design by Hanna Puley (*Brother*), costume design by Jess Sanchez (*Ghost BFF*), and featuring original songs by the up-and-coming Toronto indie-rock band The Neighbourhood Watch.

Midnight At The Paradise - Production Notes

LIANE BALABAN as Star – the first piece of the production puzzle

The original impetus for *Midnight At The Paradise* was the lead actor herself, Liane Balaban. Robertson wrote the script specifically for her to star in. "I was determined to get her starring in something because I'd worked with her and believe she's so underrated. Having Liane in mind during the writing process was perfect because I could see Iris very clearly in my mind. I knew how Liane would say things and how she would react as the character," Robertson says.

"I first saw the script several years ago when Bill sent it to me," recalls Balaban. "From the very first iteration, I've loved it and loved the character. I thought it was so interesting that it was a six-hander between three couples and such a wonderful piece for actors because there are so many long, sustained scenes (sometimes 5-6 minutes) between either the four of us or the two of us. It makes it almost feel like a play. It's a luxury in film to be able to stay in character for so long."

VANESSA MATSUI as Director – the second key piece

A few years into the process, Balaban introduced Robertson to Vanessa Matsui – initially as a possibility to play the second female lead (the role that eventually went to Emma Ferreira). Matsui says, "This was in pre-COVID days, and I felt that I'd aged out of the part that Bill had in mind for me. When he learned that I created the *Ghost BFF* web series, he said, 'I actually think you might be the one to direct this.' I thought that sounded crazy. But eventually, I said yes."

"Vanessa and I hit it off in terms of our tastes and interests, and I admired what she'd done with *Ghost BFF* as a creator, writer, director, and star. Over the course of a couple of years, we kept in touch. She was the first person that I'd met who I thought: yes, she gets the vision, and she's got the talent. Since *Midnight* is such an actor's piece and she is such good friends with Liane, it eventually struck me that Vanessa would be a great fit as director. I asked, and she said yes. I can't say enough good things about her and the results I think speak for themselves" - Bill Robertson on working with director Vanessa Matsui.

Midnight At The Paradise marks Matsui's feature film directorial debut, and as a character-driven six-hander, it was the ideal project for this actor-turned-director. "I was looking for that next bold move in my career," she says. "What initially attracted me to the project was that I could see what the lead character, Iris, is going through. I'm a 40-year-old mom with aging parents and a little kid, and I'm in that in-between place where you're not young anymore, but you're not old."

"As a woman of colour in this world, making the decision to start to play big, I can say that the night before coming to camera, it felt like diving off a diving board– but it shifts, and I've been having a bit of a profound experience. I've heard other directors say this, but it's almost like 90% of your job is done if it's cast right," Matsui says, feeling her maternal instinct kicking in. "I needed to let my cast know that they're safe, that they could do their thing, and my job was to not get in the way."

The Cast and Their Characters – *Midnight At The Paradise*
Exploring themes of saying goodbye to the nostalgia of youth

LIANE BALABAN – IRIS

There is a lingering potency to a first great love. Iris thinks she has moved forward from her youthful love of bad boy Alex to marry Geoff, the man who has given her everything. But even with the stability of the family she loves, she loses her balance as she struggles to cope with the imminent death of her father, Max. The fever of that first love has stayed with her. When the opportunity presents itself, innocently enough in her campaign to save the Paradise Theatre, she's prepared to see if it can be, if not rekindled, perhaps put to rest.

"Even with a great husband and a wonderful daughter, Iris fantasizes about the one who got away. She'd always thought bittersweetly about Alex, wondering what might've happened if they hadn't parted ways when she was young, still harbouring a lot of confusion and pain around how that relationship ended. It's probably why she's never been able to get past it fully. Alex's positive response to her email about The Paradise's benefit screening of *Breathless* and about Max being unwell, it's enough to get her to take it to the next step."

Balaban speaks about the themes in the story, the first of which is *loss*, "My character is grappling with loss in so many different ways: the loss of her father, but also she's not ready to accept the loss of her youth. She can never get back to where she was young and free and could do anything she wanted. Now she's married and a mom, and you look back wistfully on that time of your life before you were married and had kids. If you had only known at the time how lucky and free you were. Acceptance is another theme, but that only comes through at the end. The message of this film is realizing it's good where you are, that where you are is okay."

ALLAN HAWCO – Iris' mercurial ex ALEX

Allan Hawco describes his character as "someone who has been searching his whole life for something. In his youth, he had a punk rock band that toured the whole country, achieving a certain level of success, but it burnt him out, and he lost his way. Vanity is his central trait."

"Alex has a rock and roll sensibility, an artistic sensibility with a core belief in finding and following his passion. Some people can live their lives that way, lean into it and live it. And it's what they need more than anything. I can identify with that. But for Alex, I think it was too much. There were too many variables that he couldn't control, and he couldn't live with them. He gave it up, moved to the sidelines, and became a record executive — transferred to the sidelines. I believe this had haunted him as it would me if I didn't personally delve in as an artist. I don't know if Alex ever found what he was looking for."

What 38-year-old Alex did find was Anthea, a 26-year-old grad student who is now his fiancée, and they're a week away from their wedding. Hawco observes, "It's not so much that Alex is now trying to do the right thing. No, I think he's trying to do what's right *for him*, and I think he doesn't care who he takes down on the way there."

The character of Alex is a personality type director Matsui has seen before. "I've got friends who were in Alex's position where, when they were young, they were poised to become famous. They had careers that were about to explode, and for whatever reason, it didn't happen. Working in the arts is hard. It doesn't always have the trajectory you had planned. So, you find yourself as an older person looking back,

wondering what happened, what were the missteps, or was it just bad luck that you didn't quote-unquote make it. Then life becomes finding peace with your adult self."

RYAN ALLEN – Iris' straight-arrow husband GEOFF

While Iris' marriage to Geoff doesn't fulfill her, it does offer a form of protection from within which she can entertain her 'what if' fantasies. Geoff is a solid guy, one of those people who believes that if you do the right thing— wife, marriage, child, good profession— happiness should follow. And this motivates Geoff to show up on the night of the Paradise benefit to support his wife.

Played by Ryan Allen, Geoff is an ER doctor. He's good at his job, and he cares deeply about helping people. He's also a family man who loves his wife and his daughter. He's able to help Max, Iris' father, who is dying. Geoff is more pragmatic about the inevitability of death than Iris. He wants to move to the next step to help Max go happily and peacefully, while Iris is still clinging to hope that he can find a new drug trial that might save him. When the film begins, these two are at odds, and this is causing some friction in their marital bliss.

It is crucial to the story to appreciate that Geoff is entirely unaware of Alex. He attributes the strife to the natural progression of marriage. "Their child is eight years old, so maybe the seven-year itch is happening. But he never suspects Iris is going to meet up with an ex-lover." Says Allen. "Geoff is not a cheater by nature, so he believes, and he's taken by surprise when Alex comes into the picture."

EMMA FERREIRA – Alex's intuitive, cerebral fiancée ANTHEA

Into this mix comes Anthea, played by TIFF Rising Star Emma Ferreira who approached the role with great dedication and undeniable talent. Robertson, who also teaches at York University, knew Emma from her student days at York and saw her as perfect for the role of the smart, intuitive grad student.

"Anthea and Alex, who have been together for all of nine months, are about to have a massive wedding," Ferreira explains. "It's been a whirlwind romance. They've barely spent any time apart and she's been swept up by this man who seemingly has got his stuff together. He's charming, lovely, and he cares about her. She's holding strong to the illusion or delusion of happily ever after. I think her spidey-senses are tingling a little bit when he says he wants to go to Toronto even for a day – to check out a band. What she is about to learn is that Anthea is walking into the eye of the storm." Standing her ground, as much as she is testing the ground she's standing on for the first time, she informs Alex that she will be accompanying him to Toronto.

For Ferreira, it initially felt as if everybody in this story was emotionally naive. "It's been really interesting to play across from Alex, who is a man-child, and seeing how much more grown-up Anthea is. But in that naïveté, she's also incredibly fearless, which is like a powder keg for transformation, which we all go through in this script." She especially sees Anthea go through this, "wild transformation, of really kind of coming to terms with the commitments that she's made and then also liberating herself from that story."

KENNETH WELSH – Iris' film critic father MAX

Rounding out the key cast and giving ballast to the story is Max, Iris' father, played by veteran actor Kenneth Welsh in his final film role. There is unaddressed history here for Iris as Max, long divorced from CHARMAINE (esteemed Toronto theatre actor Kate Trotter), leaves behind him a messy trail of adultery

and putting his wife and daughter second to his desires. But in Max's final chapter, neither he nor Charmaine, who has come to tend to him, are pulling punches.

"The whole film revolves around the showing of this film *Breathless*, which is fantastic," Welsh observed. "Max, a former film critic, loves movies. He grew up with them, criticizing them, and now he's at home in his bed dying of cancer and slowly but surely, the pain overtakes him. It was always my intention to play against any maudlin dying acting because Max does shout a lot while he's in pain, which I love. You have to maintain like, a sense of humour when your role seems to be taking you somewhere unpleasant, which Max can tend to be because he's a bit caustic. Even at his best, Max has got an edge that I like. He's cynical. He digs at people, and he has a weird sense of humour."

Max doesn't suffer from regret, and this is crucial in a film about reconciling oneself with one's past. Max says: "I accept the consequences of my actions. Fuck it, I embrace them! It's about personal growth. Without it, we're just a spineless mass of sheeple. The whole point of human existence is to rise above that." Welsh noted, while Max accepts his mistakes, he won't admit any of them. That is the subtext of this character.

The Gift of a Script Actors Enjoy Reading – Multiple Times

"***Midnight At The Paradise*** is meant as an homage to the great movie love stories and the role they play in our lives – particularly our romantic lives," says writer/producer Bill Robertson. It is meant to take audiences back to an era when filmmaking emerged from a period of studio film and transitioned into a period of high-energy auteur filmmaking that produced the French New Wave and films like Godard's *Breathless*.

"The complications of relationships and how people's lives fit together - or don't - that's what interests me. I wanted to put everything that I love about the movies *into* a movie. ***Midnight At The Paradise*** is meant for people who love going to the movies, sitting in the dark and feeling connected to other people, and going on a journey through other characters."

What was interesting to Allan Hawco was that this script was not about finding a tidy solution or resolution to the problems it presented. "It's about exploring what the problems are and what we do to each other to find those answers. This made it really intriguing. It's not like a romcom, you know; it's deeper."

Kenneth Welsh was more succinct, "This script has *actual* relationships in it, which is rare. Honestly, and they're all different. It's like a play in that all the characters interact with each other. At some point, I interact with almost everyone in the script, but each relationship unfolds as we do each scene. For an actor, that's really such an exciting thing to be able to do. I mean, I actually read the whole script several times. I don't usually do that."

Emma Ferreira points out a mistake she made when she first read the script. "It looked like an easy role -- a piece of cake. It's not, and the credit for that goes to what Bill wrote and how Vanessa has led us through it. ***Midnight At the Paradise*** is a Russian nesting doll. You read it, and you're like, okay. And then you go in and in, and it just keeps getting more and more and more complicated between these people. No one comes out scot-free. No one is a saviour. Everyone's got their own kind of bag of hammers, as my mom would say. It's quite complicated, which is just the juiciest thing ever. It's great."

Balaban thought her character came across as overly serious on the page, but that changed because of director Matsui. "Vanessa infused Iris with a lot of life and comedic, awkward moments. One day, when we

were blocking a scene in the theatre, she came up to us, unable to contain her laughter, saying, 'I don't know if this is going to work, but it could be so funny if you try something. When we tried it, we were all laughing. She's not taking it too seriously, which gives the performances vitality.'

The Locations – Toronto as Toronto in *Midnight At The Paradise*

Ryan Allen loved not only the script but all the Toronto locations in the film. "I'm a Toronto boy myself. I live in the Junction in Toronto's west end, not too far from the Paradise Cinema. That really appealed to me. And because I come from a theatre background, these longer scenes are so different from what we usually get in film and TV, but they give us the time and space to play with the development of the story. That really drew me to this script."

The story of the Paradise is intertwined with the characters. Under the marquee twenty years before, Iris' relationship with Alex took an abrupt turn. As much as she is now hoping to return the theatre to its former glory, Iris cannot help it but wonder what could have been with Alex — to see if there is the possibility of a future.

The Paradise wasn't always at the heart of Robertson's script, but that changed when he cycled past and saw renovations taking place. The theatre on Bloor Street West opened in 1937 and closed in 2006. Set to be turned into a pharmacy, it was given a heritage designation, saving it from demolition; the building was restored and reopened in 2019. Robertson found the metaphor for his story: "That's what it's about: separating the warm feelings of nostalgia from the truth about what happened in the past. The central character of Iris is trying to navigate what happened 20 years ago with Alex but in the context of the present."

Midnight At The Paradise - About the Cast

LIANE BALABAN (Iris) created a major splash at Sundance with her debut in the lead role of Alan Moyle's *New Waterford Girl*. She received a Special Jury Citation at the 24th annual Toronto International Film Festival for her performance. Variety described her performance opposite Kevin Pollak in Gary Yates' acclaimed *Seven Times Lucky* as "unforgettable." Recent films include *Lullaby*, directed by John Leonetti for Alcon, *Small Fortune* by Adam Perry, *Woman In Car* by Vanya Rose-Kuhrt, and Mina Shum's *Meditation Park*. She also starred in the romantic comedies *The Grand Seduction* with Taylor Kitsch and *Finding Joy* opposite Josh Cooke, as well as Joel Hopkins' *Last Chance Harvey* with Dustin Hoffman, *Coach* with Hugh Dancy, Michael McGowan's *One Week* opposite Joshua Jackson, *Definitely Maybe* written and directed by Adam Brooks for Universal Pictures, Bart Freundlich's *World Traveler* opposite Billy Crudup, and Michael Almereyda's *Happy Here And Now*.

Television credits include guest star appearances on the shows *Man Seeking Woman* with Jay Baruchel for FX, *Republic of Doyle* for CBC, *Played*, *Motive*, and *Saving Hope* for CTV, *NCIS: LA* for CBS and recurring roles on *Supernatural* for The CW, *Alphas* for Syfy, and *Covert Affairs* for USA. As well as co-starring Richard E. Grant, *St. Urbain's Horseman* based on the novel by Mordecai Richler.

As a writer/creator, Liane has her own series *Maggie McKill* in development with Temple Street.

ALLAN HAWCO (Alex) is an acclaimed actor, writer, and executive producer and one of Canada's most recognizable stars whose wide range of talents appeals to audiences of all ages. He can uniquely connect to the viewer as an actor and from behind the scenes as a writer and producer. He currently appears on the CBC and Netflix show *Moonshine*.

Allan is also recognized for his role as creator of the hit CBC television series *Republic of Doyle* (2010-2014) under his own production company, Take The Shot Productions. Allan played the lead, Jake Doyle, the roguish and irreverent private investigator, and served as the show's head writer, executive producer and showrunner for its six-season run. The show was highly successful and is now a leading show on streaming networks such as Amazon Prime and Netflix Worldwide.

Allan's television and streaming credits include: *Another Life* (Netflix), *Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan* (Amazon Prime), *Frontier* Season 1-3 (Netflix), *Caught* (CBC), *Departure* (Peacock/CTV), *The Detectives* (CBC), *Moonshine* Season 1,2 (CBC), *The Book of Negroes* (BET/CBC).

Allan's feature film credits include principal roles in Director Bruce McDonald's award-winning film *Weirdos* (2017) and director/actor Paul Gross' *Hyena Road* (2016). Prior credits include a starring role in *Love & Savagery* (2009), directed by John Smith, and Sir Richard Attenborough's *Closing the Ring* (2007) with Christopher Plummer and Shirley MacLaine.

RYAN ALLEN (Geoff) is no stranger to stage, screen, or recording booth. With early origins in opera performance, Ryan quickly transitioned his stage career to the theatre, and there's been no stopping him since. Theatrically, Ryan's most notable credits include multiple productions of *The Color Purple* and a leading role in the Broadway production of *The Book Of Mormon*.

On-screen, Ryan's work has spanned a variety of networks and streamers with highlights including a series lead role on *Between* (Netflix), *SEE* (Apple TV+), *Five Days at Memorial*, directed by John Ridley (Apple TV+); recurring guest star roles on *Rogue* (DirecTv), *Taken* (NBC), *21 Thunder* (CBC), and most recently the role of fan-favourite Jack Drake on the latest season of *Titans* (HBO Max).

EMMA FERREIRA (Anthea) is currently starring in two Netflix shows, including the new Rob Lowe vehicle *Unstable*. She was named a 2021 TIFF Rising Star for her feature debut and lead role in the feature film *Learn To Swim*. She trained at York University's Acting Conservatory. She was cast as Juliet in *Measure for Measure* and Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* in Canadian Stage's Shakespeare in the Park.

KENNETH WELSH (Max) had a long and fascinating career that started in Edmonton and led him to stages and studios across Canada, the U.S., and worldwide. He starred in seven seasons at The Stratford Festival and twelve years and twenty plays on and off Broadway. Two of his favourites were premieres of *The Real Thing* directed by Mike Nichols and *Frankie and Johnny In The Claire de Lune* opposite Kathy Bates. Kenneth was featured in the AMC series *Lodge 49* and most recently guest-starred in episodes of *Charmed* and *Star Trek Discovery*.

Kenneth won a total of five Canadian Screen awards and one ACTRA Award. He was trained at the University of Alberta and the National Theatre School of Canada. He was a recipient of the Order of Canada. He holds an honorary doctorate from his Alma Mater. He was very proud to be the parent of Juno-nominated singer/songwriter Devon Welsh. Kenneth passed away on May 5, 2022. ***Midnight At The Paradise*** is his final film.

KATE TROTTER (Charmaine) Kate's screen credits now number well over 60 and include her Gemini Award-winning guest-starring performances on Global Television's dramatic series *Blue Murder* and a Gemini-nominated performance. Her guest turns also include roles on *Murdoch Mysteries*, *Monk*, and CBC's immensely popular *Heartland* to name just a few.

Kate has performed in television movies, including the dramatic thriller *Plain Truth* opposite *Law and Order's* Mariska Hargitay; the mini-series *The Lives Of The Saints*, where she played opposite Sophia Loren, *Jasper Texas* as Jon Voight's wife; *Fallen Angel* playing opposite Gary Sinise. Big screen credits include *Beyond Borders* where she shared the screen with Angelina Jolie and Clive Owen; *Compulsion*; an award-winning performance in *Tru Love*; and *Upside Down* with Kristen Dunst and Jim Sturgess.

Midnight At The Paradise - About the Filmmakers

VANESSA MATSUI (Director) is a two-time Canadian Screen Award-nominated actress of Japanese descent. Selected as a Sundance New Voices fellow in 2019, Vanessa's critically acclaimed hit web series *Ghost BFF*, which she wrote, directed, and starred in has won multiple awards, including Best Web Series at the LA International Femme Film Festival, has been nominated for six Canadian Screen Awards over two seasons, has screened at festivals globally including The Austin Film Festival where it was also nominated for Best Web Series, and can now be found on Shaftesbury's KindaTV. She attributes her love of storytelling to her extensive training in acting and improvisation; she studied the Meisner technique with the late Jaqueline McClintock, and studied and performed as an improviser for ten years in Montreal, most notably at the Just For Laughs Festival with *The Bitter End* (a serialized, completely improvised sitcom). She is an advisor for Sundance Co//ab's TV Writing Core Elements course and is making her directorial feature debut with ***Midnight At The Paradise***.

BILL ROBERTSON (Writer/Producer): Bill Robertson is a Toronto-based award-winning writer/producer/director (*The Events Leading Up to My Death*, *Apartment Hunting*). His first feature, *The Events Leading Up to My Death*, won Best Canadian Screenplay at VIFF. Robertson has also worked in television as a creative producer/writer/director. In 2014, he won a Canadian Screen Award for producing the History Channel's hit *Museum Secrets*. In 2020, he was selected to participate in a Sundance Producer's Workshop with ***Midnight At The Paradise***. He also produced the breakout Toronto indie band, The Neighbourhood Watch, whose music and performance are featured in ***Midnight At The Paradise***.

PAUL BARKIN (Executive Producer) has been actively producing feature films through his company Alcina Pictures over the past two decades. Paul is an award-winning producer and champion of director-driven and first-time filmmakers. He has produced an array of critically acclaimed and commercially successful films for the last 20 years, which has earned him a nomination for the 2022 CMPA Established Producer Award. Selected credits include Cherien Dabis' Sundance and Cannes entry, *Amreeka*, nominated for three Independent Spirit Awards including Best Picture, Bruce McDonald's 2007 Berlinale Panorama opener, *The Tracey Fragments*, starring Elliot Page, the ice-age apocalypse, *The Colony*, starring Laurence Fishburne and Bill Paxton, Jasmin Mozaffari's powerful, award-winning debut, *Firecrackers*, and Danis Goulet's multi-award winner, *Night Raiders*, starring Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers and Brooklyn Letexier-Hart. Upcoming for Barkin is the psychological-thriller *Sharp Corner* from award-winning director Jason Buxton (*Blackbird*).

JASON TAN (Cinematographer) – *The Clark Sisters: First Ladies of Gospel*, *Son of A Critch*, *Goalie*, *An American Dream: The Education of William Bowman*

HANNA PULEY (Production Designer) – *Brother*, *Nine Films About Technology*, *Run This Town*

For more info and media links, see <https://www.midnightattheparadise.com>

Or contact Producer Bill Robertson billfilms@gmail.com All Territories Available except Canada