

PRESS KIT

A FILM BY ALEXANDRA HSU

POP!

NYU TISCH SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AN ALEXANDRA HOUSE PRODUCTION "POP!" STARRING MICHELLE ANG CINDERELLA CHE AMIR MALAKLOU GRACE SHEN
MUSIC BY GEORGE SHAW DIANA CHA EDITED BY BRETT NOBORIKAWA ADDITIONAL EDITING IMRAN J. KHAN ZEKUN MAO SOUND DESIGNER DIANA CHA
PRODUCTION DESIGNER YAO ZHANG COSTUME DESIGNER MATTHEW MATHIASSEN DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ENRIQUE UNZUETA
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ALEXANDRA HSU LILY HSU TONY HSU PRODUCED BY ALEXANDRA HSU ROXY SHIH
DIRECTED BY ALEXANDRA HSU WRITTEN BY MICHAEL CUMES STORY BY ALEXANDRA HSU
A FILM BY ALEXANDRA HSU

a coming
of age
story
about
breaking
out.



Director/Producer:
Alexandra Hsu
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POP!

SHORT FICTION, 22'

SHORT SYNOPSIS

POP! follows the travails of Jennifer Yang, an unemployed thirtysomething living at home in Southern California with her mother, Pearl, who dreams of her daughter getting a boyfriend and finally having the perfect skin. Jennifer hates parties, but her mom convinces her to attend a family friend's upcoming Chinese New Year Banquet, promising her that her old high school crush, Johnny Lee, will be there. She spends an entire week frantically looking for ways to remedy or mask her unruly adult acne, but when the party doesn't go as planned, the bond between mother and daughter threatens to break beyond repair. With a healthy dose of humor and compassion, *POP!* explores the dynamics of mother-daughter love and why letting go and moving on is a key part of adulthood.

FESTIVAL SPECIFICATIONS

GENRE Mother-Daughter Drama Comedy

LANGUAGE English, Chinese

FILM TYPE Fiction, Short Film

LOCATION Orange County, California

CAMERA Alexa Classic

SOUND FORMAT Stereo

COMPLETED 2024

FESTIVALS



POP!

ARTISTIC STATEMENT

Part drama, part comedy, *POP!* evokes the sometimes absurd ups and downs of Millennial life. The story was inspired by my own experiences, chiefly the fact that I have struggled with acne for the last 20 years. It began in junior high and continued through high school, college, and graduate school. Despite all the experts I've consulted and the many different remedies I've tried, I've never been able to entirely get rid of my acne.

The idea of writing a story based around these experiences percolated in my head for several years. But I wasn't sure if I really wanted to broadcast my adult acne so publicly. I had never seen acne depicted seriously, as it can be a sensitive and embarrassing issue. The only time we normally see acne depicted in film is through stereotypical characters who are teenagers or nerds, and also usually the butt of the joke.

I wanted to create, instead, a story that was both personal and honest. This made me think about how acne and physical appearance are very much tied to confidence, especially for women. I also wanted to make a film in my hometown of Orange County in Southern California. There is an obsession with how you look in certain parts of the OC. The culture is heavily influenced by Hollywood and the film and entertainment industry. Because the OC is more of a coastal county and because of its wealth and attitudes, there is an extreme and conscious effort to appear healthy. But what "healthy" actually means is to look flawless all the time. Even when you're in your workout clothes.

With all this in mind, a character began to form in my mind: A young woman contending with body image and self-confidence, striving for independence as an adult woman, and reflecting on what she wants for her life—all while breaking free from her mother's expectations and desires for her. When I shared this potential story with a few close friends and collaborators, the response was overwhelmingly positive. They said they hadn't seen acne discussed like this before and they were touched that it was inspired by my own personal experiences. I realized this was a story I had to tell.

While I was thinking about casting for the role of Jennifer, I met up with Michelle Ang, an acquaintance from the film world, for lunch. She told me that as a Chinese New Zealander actress, she was tired of playing stereotypical Asian characters who were either martial artists, doctors/lawyers/smart characters with glasses, or overly sexualized Asian women. She wanted to play a woman who felt real, who didn't wear makeup, who was dealing with ordinary, relatable issues. I hadn't previously considered Michelle for the part, but her comments hit a nerve and prompted me to cast her. Michelle ended up being the perfect person to play Jennifer.

Ultimately, *POP!* is both a mother-daughter story and a tale about what it means to be an adult (even one who still suffers from acne). It's about realizing that sometimes we are our own harshest critics, and the way we see ourselves is often out of sync with the way others see us. I will never forget how when I screened a rough cut of this film for the faculty at NYU Tisch, my dean told me he had never even noticed my acne. I was touched.



Michelle is well known around the world from her early work as a regular cast member on the Australian show "Neighbours" and the hit teen shows "The Tribe" and "Underemployed".

Emmy-nominated for her role of Alex in "Fear the Walking Dead; Flight 462", she won "Best Actress in A Feature Film" at the New Zealand Film and Television Awards 2011 for "My Wedding and Other Secrets" and was nominated for a Logie for her role in "Neighbours".

Her film work has screened in many festivals and won awards including those at Sundance, Cannes and Berlin.

She has worked with Oscar-winning director Jane Campion on BBC mini-series Top of the Lake, Jodie Foster, John Hillcoat and Steven Soderbergh.

Most recently she can be seen in Jordan Peele's Twilight Zone on CBS All Access where she plays a Chinese national marine biologist Dr Ling Hai in "8".

MICHELLE ANG

Jennifer Yang

Cindera Che is an Asian American actor and dancer best known for her distinct role as the Madame in [Michael Jackson: Smooth Criminal](#) (1988). Her career spans over thirty years with her recent appearances on ABC's sitcom [Fresh Off the Boat](#) (2015), NBC's [Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist](#) (2020), ABC's dramedy [Lethal Weapon](#) (2016) and working with the creator of [Master of None](#) (2015), [Alan Yang](#) in his directorial debut in Netflix's feature - [Tigertail](#) (2020).

Cindera started her career as a dancer appearing on a weekly television variety show, at the age of twelve, in her hometown Taipei, Taiwan. In 1977, her father purchased a House of Pies restaurant in Orange County and moved the family to the United States. She landed her first professional job in the U.S. on ABC's [Fantasy Island](#) (1977) Some of her most memorable dancing jobs include: partnering with [Donald O'Connor](#) in [Out to Sea](#) (1997), pop-locking in [Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo](#) (1984), dancing on the freeway in [La La Land](#) (2016) and salsaing in the Showtime series [Penny Dreadful: City of Angels](#) (2020).

Besides being in front of the camera, Cindera has been an influential dance teacher and performance coach for over 35 years. She was on staff at The Edge Performing Arts Center in Los Angeles, as well as teaching in conventions and workshops that took her all over the U.S. and abroad. She created the Movement For Actors training program at The Edge Performing Arts Center. Her skills of turning non-dancers into expressive movers landed her an appearance on [Dancing with the Stars](#) (2005) coaching [Kristi Yamaguchi](#) in her winning performance. Among the choreography projects she's involved in, creating a finale for a cast of 750 inmates from the famed dancing inmates of Cebu, the Philippines for the film [Dance of the Steel Bars](#) (2013) was her favorite as she was able to truly explore the idea that dance transcends all human barriers: a belief that she aims to bring to all of her work.



CINDERA CHE

Pearl Yang

DIRECTOR

ALEXANDRA HSU

Alexandra Hsu is a director-producer, born and raised in Orange County, CA. She fell in love with film in high school. Film was a perfect fit for Alexandra - a combination of her parents' careers - father was an engineer-entrepreneur, mother was a artist-fashion designer.

Alexandra received her MFA from NYU Tisch School of the Arts in Film Directing and Production. Prior to Tisch, Alle earned her BA from Scripps College, double-majoring in Media Studies (Film) and Asian Studies. Her undergraduate thesis documentary shot in Shanghai, "Women: Cultural Revolution to Capitalist Revolution," was featured in the Pomona College Museum of Art "China Insights" exhibit, and received a grant from the museum in 2011.

Alexandra has directed short films in Asia, Europe, and USA. . In graduate school, Alle co-wrote, directed, and produced "Sophie," in Hong Kong. "Sophie" had its World Premiere at the Austin Film Festival, and its international premiere at the Foyle Film Festival (Northern Ireland), both Oscar-Qualifying festivals. The film screened at over fifteen film festivals around the world. Alle also directed another short, a 1960s period film, "Our Way Home," in Long Island, N.Y., which had its premiere at Oscar-Qualifying HollyShorts Film Festival, and also screened at numerous film festivals around the world. Alle will be starting the festival run on two short films: "POP!," her NYU thesis film starring Emmy-nominated actress, Michelle Ang, and "Rencontres Paysannes (Farmers Dating)." As a resident in the SFFILM FilmHouse Residency from 2019-2020, she has been developing her first feature film, *Queens*. *Queens* was a Finalist for the Fall 2019 SFFILM Westridge Grant, Finalist for the Big Vision Empty Wallet Level Up Lab, and Finalist for the Giant Leap Accelerator. This year, she started developing a feature film about her great-grandmother Zhang Youyi, where she was selected for the Cine Qua Non Lab Storylines Lab to develop the treatment. In 2019, she was a directing mentee in the Women in Film Mentoring Program, where her mentors were Echo Lake Entertainment manager Chelsea Benson and Film-TV director Hannah Fidell. Alle was the Kearny Street Workshop Featured Artist in Film at their 20th APature Arts Festival (San Francisco), where she was highlighted on NBC News/NBC Asian America. This year, she was a Director Team Member in the inaugural CBS Leadership Pipeline Challenge, where she directed the short film "Unread" for the non-profit, SafeBAE. Alle is focused on developing - her first feature film, *Queens*, a narrative limited series about the story and murder of Vincent Chin, and feature *The Poet's Wife* 成为张幼仪.





PRODUCER

ROXY SHIH

Roxy Shih is an internationally acclaimed Taiwanese-American producer and director. Her work is extremely versatile and she has worked with many independent companies both overseas and domestically.

Roxy was one of ten chosen for the prestigious Armed With A Camera fellowship in 2011 and received a grant to direct a short film, *Play Time*, that premiered at the DGA and went on a successful film festival tour internationally. She has had her work shown at an array of festivals such as The LA Asian Pacific Film Festival, Cannes, SXSW, Toronto Independent, and Dances with Films.

Roxy recently had her directorial debut, *The Tribe*, acquired by Empress Road Pictures. The film stars the illustrious Jessica Rothe (*Parallels*, *La La Land*), Anne Winters (*Wicked City*, *Tyrant*) and Michael Nardelli (*The Collection*). The film has garnered a lot of media attention and has won awards at prestigious festivals such as Best Narrative Feature at Nice International Film Festival and Best Debut Feature Film at The Female Eye Film Festival in Toronto.

Enrique Unzueta is a Mexican director and cinematographer based in Southern California. Unzueta graduated with an MFA in filmmaking from New York University. He has directed short films in Singapore, Philippines, Mexico, and the US. Unzueta's work as a cinematographer has been shot in 10 countries around the world including China, South Korea, Singapore, India, Vietnam, France, Czech Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico and the US. In 2019, Unzueta was a fellow in Film Independent's signature program Project Involve, and in the year 2020 he was a recipient of the Global Migration, Refugees and Resettlement Reporting Fellowship by The Ground Truth Project. He is currently teaching at Universidad de las Californias Internacional in his hometown of Tijuana, Mexico while working on his first feature.



DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

ENRIQUE UNZUETA

POP!

Michael is an award winning screenwriter, editor and narrative designer currently based in London, England.

A graduate of Screen Academy Scotland's screenwriting program, Michael won Gold Prize at the Page International Screenwriting Awards in 2009, beating over 2,000 entrants. In 2014 his short film *The Romance Class* was filmed for the BBC and premiered at the Austin Film Festival. The film went on to be in the official selection at the Aesthetica, London Short Film and Emden film festivals.

Michael has written for TV, film, theatre and radio, including working on hit UK soap opera *Hollyoaks*. As a script editor, he has worked with numerous production companies and filmmakers including BAFTA-nominated writer Allan Scott. He has also worked as a narrative designer for video games, most recently creating storylines and scripts for the massively successful mobile game *Criminal Case*.



WRITER

MICHAEL CUMES

POP!

CAST

Michelle Ang

Cinderella Che

Amir Malaklou

Grace Shen

CREW

Story by Alexandra Hsu

Written by Michael Cumes

Directed by Alexandra Hsu

Cinematography by Enrique Unzueta

Executive Producers: Alexandra Hsu, Lily Hsu, Tony Hsu

Produced by: Alexandra Hsu, Roxy Shih

Production Design by Yao Zhang

Costume by Matthew Mathiasen

Edited by Brett Noborikawa

UPM: Golie Yazdy

Assistant Director: Arnold J Chon

Hair and Makeup by Veronica Rodarte

Gaffer: Jesse Lee

Grip and Electric: Cole Stamm

1st Assistant Camera: Shirlyn Hippo Wong

2nd Assistant Camera: Abhinav Mellacheruvu

Sound Mixer/Boom Operator: Patrick Joyner

Sound Design: Diana Cha

Music by: Diana Cha, George Shaw

Additional Editing: Imran J. Khan, Zekun Mao

POP!
THANK YOU!

For any questions or inquiries, please contact us at
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