

BAREFOOT

A FILM BY DANIS GOULET



OFFICIAL SELECTION 2012 TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

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Images available at www.barefoot-film.com or upon request.

SYNOPSIS

In a tight-knit Cree community in northern Saskatchewan, sixteen-year-old Alyssa's plans to become a mom begin to unravel.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Barefoot tells the story of Alyssa, a sixteen-year-old Cree girl from a small community in northern Saskatchewan who wants to be pregnant. But this story is not about teen pregnancy; it is about young love and hidden truths, where Aboriginal teen girls find their sense of place in the world and the futures they imagine for themselves.

"I think many Aboriginal teen girls grow up fast and become independent at a younger age," says writer and director Danis Goulet. "I wanted to create a little window into this world that doesn't shy away from the complexity and nuance of their experiences."

ABORIGINAL YOUTH IN NORTHERN COMMUNITIES

Canada's own policy of assimilation and colonization has had a profound effect on Aboriginal youth. "We hear a lot about northern Aboriginal communities in the news — the poverty, high suicide rates and substance abuse that is a result of the attempted decimation of Aboriginal cultures," explains Goulet, herself Cree/Métis originally from the Saskatchewan community of La Ronge, where *Barefoot* takes place and was shot. "But this is all we hear about and it is not the whole picture."

Goulet grew up in Saskatchewan and describes its communities as their own distinct *settings*, with unique locations, cultures and social customs. "Although many communities in the north are facing challenges, the rhythm of life and the beauty of the people create a profound resonance that I have rarely witnessed on film or in media."



ABORIGINAL YOUTH IN NORTHERN COMMUNITIES CONTINUED

Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing demographic in Canada and many Aboriginal communities are focusing on youth as the promise for the future. “I think that Aboriginal youth are under enormous pressure. Not only do they have to face the regular pressures of being a teenager, but they have also been left to contend with the legacy of colonization — questions of identity, instability, struggle and cultural loss. How does a sixteen-year-old deal with all of that?”

In spite of the challenges facing Aboriginal youth in Canada, their experience is multi-dimensional. “They use new technologies to evolve their forms of interaction, they engage in evolving their culture, in preserving traditions, and in redefining their identity and their relationships to each other and to the rest of the world.”

CASTING PROCESS

“Aboriginal people, perspectives and northern settings are under-represented in Canadian cinema,” says Goulet of her decision to cast non-actors from the north. “I am passionate about bringing stories to the screen that are told from the perspectives of Aboriginal characters — in this case, teen girls.”

Goulet aspired to create a depiction of Aboriginal teens that captures some of the characteristics and nuances of the culture and region. To that end, more than 200 Aboriginal youth from five communities in northern Saskatchewan auditioned. “We wanted to work with people who already understood what it’s like to live there, and to find a cast that would reflect the distinct world of reserve life in northern Saskatchewan.”

Following the audition process, ten young people were called back for an intense week of training and rehearsal with drama facilitators, using a community theatre model. At the end of that week, three leads were cast: Emily Roberts, Cole Ballantyne and Kassie Svendsen. All three are from northern communities, and Roberts and Ballantyne are Cree-speakers. “The young people we worked with were a huge inspiration. I was floored by some of the challenges that many of them face. But in spite of these challenges, there is spirit, tenacity, beauty and vulnerability. And Emily, Cole and Kassie brought that to the screen.”

DRAMATIC TRAINING

Different drama techniques were used to enable the young non-actors to look into moments of critical decision-making in their lives and to examine issues in a deep and personal way. The week-long training period began with three days facilitated by Dr. Linda Goulet, a professor at First Nations University, and Dr. Warren Linds, a professor of group dynamics and human relations at Concordia University.

The two have been offering drama and healthy decision-making workshops to youth in the File Hills Qu’Appelle Tribal Council area since 2006. Prior to that they worked with the Regina Public School Board for more than ten years to help students examine issues such as racism and violence by using theatre workshops.

THE FILMMAKERS

Writer/director Danis Goulet's short film *Wapawekka* (2010) premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and screened at the Sundance Film Festival and the Berlin International Film Festival. Her previous short films *spin* (2003) and *Divided by Zero* (2006) have screened at numerous festivals in Canada and around the world including Sundance, the Smithsonian's Native American Film + Video Festival and the Message Sticks Film Festival at the Sydney Opera House. Her work has been broadcast on CBC, APTN, Air Canada, and Movieola. She is a recent alumnus of the NSI's Drama Prize Program and the TIFF Talent lab. Her latest short, *Barefoot* (2012), was selected for the Canada: Not Short on Talent Showcase at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival. Danis currently develops initiatives for the Aboriginal arts sector at the Ontario Arts Council and was the former Executive Director of the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival. Danis (Cree/Métis) was born in La Ronge, Saskatchewan and now resides in Toronto.

Producer Christine Kleckner's most recent work is the short film *Wapawekka* (2010) which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and screened at Sundance and the Berlinale. During her time with the National Film Board of Canada, she collaborated on groundbreaking projects including the multi-platform *Filmmaker-in-Residence*, *Home Again*, and *The Stories We Tell*. Christine also worked on CTV's acclaimed *Corner Gas*, and her productions have been acquired by CBC and Air Canada. She recently completed the National Screen Institute of Canada's Drama Prize Program. *Barefoot* (2012), was selected for the Canada: Not Short on Talent Showcase at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival. Christine resides in Toronto working freelance in documentary and drama.

Director of Photography Daniel Grant was raised in Halifax and developed an interest in image making at a young age through still photography. Matched with a love of film, this led him to pursue the craft of cinematography. Upon graduating from the film studies program at Ryerson University, he was awarded 1st Prize for Student Cinematography in Canada by the Canadian Society of Cinematographers (CSC). Since then he has accumulated a wide variety of credits as a cinematographer on music videos, feature films in both the dramatic fiction and documentary genres, and over forty short films to date. His work in documentary has taken him to Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and across North America.

Editor Lawrence Jackman has worked on many award-winning documentaries and dramas. Focusing primarily on independent documentaries, he has a long-standing association with the National Film Board of Canada. He was nominated for a Gemini in 2005.

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

Emily Roberts (Alyssa) was born in Saskatoon and grew up in Hall Lake and Prince Albert. Aged 17, she enjoys both athletics and the arts, and can be found singing regularly in talent shows across northern Saskatchewan. Emily lives with her family and two pets, including a dog named Famous after her dream of becoming a star – but only after university.

Cole Ballantyne (Brandon) lives in Prince Albert, already an accomplished jigger at 17. When not performing as part of the Northern Prairie Dancers, Cole can be found sparring at the Wildcats Boxing Club and volunteering in his community. He plans to study performing arts in university.

Seventeen-year-old **Kassie Svendsen (Charlene)** has lived in Prince Albert all her life. A high school student at St. Mary's, she is a vital member of the school's wrestling team. Off the mat, Kassie enjoys hanging out with friends and exploring her emerging artistic side.

CREDITS

Writer/Director	DANIS GOULET
Producer	CHRISTINE KLECKNER
Director of Photography	DANIEL GRANT
Editor	LAWRENCE JACKMAN
Sound Designer	MIKE FILIPPOV
Drama Workshop Facilitators	LINDA GOULET & WARREN LINDS
Workshop Elder/Moss Bag Artist	IDA TREMBLAY

CAST

Alyssa	EMILY ROBERTS
Brandon	COLE BALLANTYNE
Charlene	KASSIE SVENDSEN
Kookum	IDA TREMBLAY
Cashier	CRYSTALLIN ROBERTS
Gina	DENISE CHARLES
Gym Teacher	SARAH C. POOLE
Clarence	JONAH RATT
Kyle	JORDY PHINNEY
Stacy	CHANTAL BALLANTYNE
Little Brother	TYRELL TREMBLAY
Little Sister	TERRILYNN TREMBLAY
Randi	DESIREE SEWAP
Brigitte	CHEYENNE SEWAP
Sarah	ALEISHA CHARLES
Baby	CIARA CARR

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