

PRESS KIT

Screen Australia
Dragonet Films and Firesign
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present

▶▶▶ **Being Venice**

Sometimes the men in a woman's life bring nothing but trouble

*** OR ***

One of the great mysteries: what it's like inside another's head

Starring
Alice McConnell, Garry McDonald
Simon Stone, Katie Wall

Director/writer
Miro Bilbrough

Producers
Karen Radzyner, Michael Wrenn

Filmed entirely on location in Sydney, Australia

Sales agent: Wide Film Sales
Australian/NZ distributor: Curious Distribution

Length: 89 minutes
Aspect ratio: 1:1,85
Sound: 6 Channel Wav
Language: English

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► **BEING VENICE SYNOPSES**

In one line

Venice is having trouble with the men in her life: she breaks up with her lover and starts an affair with her best friend. The aggravation of her ex-hippy dad, camped on her sofa, is the last straw.

*** OR ***

During the week her ex-hippy dad is sleeping on her sofa, Venice is dumped by her lover, has an affair with her best friend, and faces up to ghosts from the past.

In a nutshell

Venice is having trouble with the men in her life. On the night her ex-hippy dad Arthur arrives in Sydney to stay on the sofa of her tiny apartment for a week, she is dumped by her lover and begins an ill-advised affair with her charismatic best friend Lenny. Arthur carefully ignores the turmoil swirling around his daughter's life until she confronts him about the childhood that still pains her.

In detail

Whether Venice is at the art gallery where she works or out with friends, she jots down observations on post-it notes and stores them, like unborn poems, in an old cake tin.

After years apart, Venice's ex-hippy dad Arthur arrives in Sydney from New Zealand to stay on the sofa in her one-room apartment for a week -- to teach a creative writing workshop and luxuriate in extended sunshine hours. Absorbed in a "meals-I-have-enjoyed" monologue, he fails to take much notice of his daughter -- or the undeclared emotions that his presence stirs.

On the first night of Arthur's visit, Venice's boyfriend Marcus dumps her after she calls his approach to sex "medicinal". Apprehended for failing to buy a train ticket by a truculent inspector, Venice telephones Arthur so that he can verify her identity. His response to being woken is aggrieved, and she continues on to best friend Lenny-the-philosopher's house where he impishly counsels, in regard to her now ex-boyfriend: "Your unconscious desire to liberate yourself is bigger than your desire to serve the status quo". Venice accepts Lenny's invitation to watch violent DVDs in bed with he and his girlfriend Irene. In the small hours, she impulsively seeks out his affections. When Irene storms out, remorse compels Venice to follow. They drive to a spiky heath outside Sydney where they tussle, and Irene reveals that she is pregnant to Lenny who believes that "babies emasculate male genius".

Meanwhile, Arthur tells his schoolboy students: "It's one of the great mysteries what it's like inside another's head". Later he explains to Venice how he gets would-be writers to open up. But he's not encouraging his daughter to do the same. After picking a fight with him, Venice reaches out to an unreceptive Irene, then Lenny again. Their lovers' consummation is brief, idyllic and arranged around Arthur's schedule. Afterwards, Venice takes Lenny to the beach. Believing happiness is hers, she accidentally dives into a rock. Summoned by Irene, Lenny abandons Venice in the hospital before she regains consciousness.

Venice oscillates between unconsciousness and waking-dream. Arthur's bedside presence only heightens the confusion. It's Irene's visit that recalls her to the present. Discharging herself before dawn, Venice returns to Arthur and her apartment.

Lenny makes a contrite midnight visit and they make love while Arthur, effectively a hostage, feigns sleep across the room. Next morning Lenny expounds on his latest thesis topic "Animal Sovereignty For Humans" and the realization dawns on Venice: her new lover is an emotional disappointment. Arthur's appraisal is much the same: indeed Lenny reminds him of himself as a young man. There is no consolation in this for Venice: she wants love, recognition and, late in the day, some delayed parenting. Arthur wants sunshine, surf and his next sugar hit. Venice doesn't recognize the 60-year-old tourist her father has become. They take their warring sensitivities to Sydney's most scenic walk to Bondi Beach. They're devolving into petulant children.

On the morning of Arthur's departure Venice can't hold back any longer. Her father feels like a stranger. Why did he send her away when she was just seven years old? Her unwelcome frankness shatters Arthur, but it's his own testimony that dismantles him. In the aftermath Venice sees Arthur for what he is: a man. It's an unexpected release, and one that allows her to acknowledge Lenny's coming fatherhood and Irene's claim. Dropping Arthur at the airport she turns for home. There's a book of poems ready to be born -- and Venice has the title.

► **THREE KEY POINTS**

This is Garry McDonald's most significant film role yet

Garry McDonald is one of Australia's most familiar, intriguing and loved actors and *Being Venice* is his largest and most significant feature film role to date. It is a joy to see so much of him on the big screen.

After years of playing comedic characters -- some of them for many years and including the crowd-pleasing *Mother and Son* and the 1970s hit *The Norman Gunston Show* -- he is chuffed that in the last five years he has been sought out for more dramatic roles.

"It's a next step up, that's how I feel anyway, from what I'd normally be doing," he says of his role as Arthur, Venice's ex-hippy dad. *"It is a much deeper role that I am used to -- I play much lighter roles usually -- and there is a very emotional scene right at the end of it in which Venice wants, really desperately, to talk about things in the past and he doesn't want to."*

But Garry has a lot of fun with Arthur's eccentricities as the character finds himself out of his comfort zone and in his daughter's world.

At its core, *Being Venice* is about real life

Absurd idiosyncrasies, foibles, delusions, the quirks we are born with, the imprint of our parents and life's experiences make us what we are. The characters in this film, their awkward interactions and their habit of skirting around what they really think and feel, have been observed with such wry truth and fresh insight by debut feature writer/director Miro Bilbrough that they are as real as it is possible to be on the big screen.

"Being Venice is about the truth and absurdity and intimacy of human relationships," says Miro. *"It's the stuff of our lives and it's what fascinates me. I wanted to make a film for people with an interest in the contrary aspects of who we are. From time to time what we do shocks and surprises us, subverts our idea of who we are more than we may like to admit. I think a very broad school of people will relate to that."*

How could it be that Venice, for example, well into her adulthood, acts the way she does and finds it so hard to say what she needs to say to the men in her life? In her breakout performance as Venice, Alice McConnell helps us understand why.

***Being Venice* is a love letter to Sydney**

Sydney plays a starring role in *Being Venice* but not glitzy Sydney with its sparkling harbour, the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House. The Sydney that audiences see here is the ring of inner Sydney residential suburbs that the people who live there love, with the star of the show being the inner west.

"One of the things I loved most when I first read the script was that, having been brought up in Sydney and grown up here, it made such lively use of all the places I recognized and had so rarely seen on film before," says producer Karen Radzyner. *"The inner west, the Princes Highway, Clovelly Beach, the Royal National Park: we shot in all those places."* And those places have been photographed in such a way as to capture their unique brand of beauty.

Comments Miro, *"Being Venice is a love letter to the Sydney I know most intimately. Forget the picture-postcard place. It's the shabbier glory of its elemental fringes, heat-struck summer nights, and concrete-shore seaside that I love. It's in these lesser seen nooks and crannies that Venice and her friends eke out their rich, precarious existences."*

► DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

There came a point in my life when the gap between the ideals and vanities I held dear about myself (a *good, moral* person), and the messier business of desire and impulsive behaviour (a *selfish, yearning* person) seemed to be staring me in the face. I felt the urge to write about a group of characters troubled by such tendencies, by the great bloody yawning gulfs between their conscious and unconscious selves.

Foremost of these and at the centre of this film is a woman named Venice. A woman on the threshold of crossing into that place where we expect to be older, safer, wiser but -- sometimes hilariously -- aren't! A woman, as society would conventionally have it, who should know better but, deliriously, doesn't. As I said, it's a subject I have yards of experience in, the kind of subject I love to discuss -- laugh and moan about! -- with friends.

As a storyteller I'm also exploring a father and daughter as they wrangle roles they have outgrown but which persistently, doggedly define them. I feel that this kind of vexed family relationship has resonances for so many of us, parents and children both, and most especially as we age.

Miro Bilbrough
April 2012

► MAKING THE FILM

The Binger Filmlab had a big impact on the story

Originally *Being Venice* was titled *Lenny and Venice*. Back then it was principally the story of the title relationship, but also the story of a love triangle. That all shifted when writer/director Miro Bilbrough was accepted into the script development program of the Binger Filmlab, a development hothouse in Amsterdam that writers and directors from all over the world aspire to be part of.

Miro was at the lab for four months in 2006-07, writing and attending lectures and workshops. Early on she had to present the script-in-progress -- its themes, story structure and so on -- to an audience of about 20 other participants. Having consulted on more than 500 feature and short films over the years, she had prepared meticulously for the presentation. Nevertheless, she ran into trouble when she realized she could no longer hide the fact, to herself or anyone else, that she didn't believe in her own story. She had been working on it for two years -- "intermittently because one has to earn a living" -- and felt it was charming, even whimsically entertaining. Now she recognized that there was insufficient subtext and no powerful engine driving the actions of her characters.

"I got 10 minutes in and confessed to being stuck," she says of her presentation. "It was an awkward, drowning moment and I can't remember exactly how I recovered except that the natural storyteller in me kicked in and I started telling stories about another character altogether: Venice's father."

Very soon, quite literally, she had everyone in the audience laughing and crying -- and yelling out that she simply had to include the father in the story.

"It unleashed something and I didn't look back," she says. The father emerged as the understory, the motor that was underneath the triangle of Venice and Lenny and Irene. The father's presence and all that he stood for put a lot of pressure on Venice. And you need pressure on characters in a dramatic screenplay to reveal who they really are."

Miro also decided on two other fundamental things during her highly rewarding time at the Binger Filmlab. She imposed a one-week time frame on the film's story -- the length of the father's visit in fact -- which greatly helped the structure and rhythm of the piece. Plus she gave in to the realization that the lead character Venice was the same character, 25 years older, that had featured in her 2003 short film *Floodhouse*.

*"Floodhouse is a 52-minute study of a 15-year-old girl going to live with her hippy dad in the sticks and encountering her excessively flamboyant, estranged mother in the process," says Miro. There is no mother present in *Being Venice*, but there is a father and daughter struggling to connect, a relationship rarely focused on in Australian films.*

Welcome to a little seen world

All the action in *Being Venice* takes place in Sydney, more specifically, in a 15-kilometre wide strip of land that hugs the coast and stretches 50 kilometres down from Sydney Harbour and into the Royal National Park.

There are many people with many different values embedded in this area, some of them in some of the most expensive real estate in Australia, but the film hones in on a very specific, slightly marginal, rather bohemian, downwardly-mobile group: intellectuals and people in the creative industries, including writers and artists. They are people who have not let technology rule their lives or stop them from thinking for themselves or interacting directly with each other.

"I wasn't seeing the sort of people I know on screen in Australian films and television... self-consciously articulate people, talkers who none-the-less find it difficult to say exactly what they actually mean or really want," says Miro. And although I didn't set out to do it, the film also provides glimpses of how the creative process works. They say write what you know, and that's what I know."

Says Alice McConnell, who plays Venice: *"I think there's a lot in the film for women who have chosen a more unconventional path and that woman is in all of us. Even if we have gone down that family/baby life there is still a Venice in all of us: a frustrated artist or creative in there somewhere."*

Simon Stone, who plays Lenny, echoes Miro when he says that *Being Venice* succeeds in showing how artists look at the world, and the messy ways in which they live.

"I think the great joy of watching the film for the average audience member will be its extraordinary insight into the artistic process and how the artistic process is essentially about learning how to live, because only then can you learn how to reflect on life. And so the beauty that the audience sees in the film is the beauty of life itself."

He makes the further point that artists are always in danger of being isolated from society but that Miro loves her characters and is on their side: *"In the same way that the absurdity of Chekhov's characters is allowed, Miro's characters are allowed to be themselves."* He cites the Australian film *The Castle* and the French film *Amelie* as films that, although wildly different in sensibility, also portray distinctive characters in judgment-free style.

Miro has learned from a life time of observing film and from her own filmmaking that it is necessary to create a set of characters that feel utterly real to the audience, and to place them in an authentic time and space to create a truly affecting experience.

"The film grew out of character," she says. "I very rarely start with story or plot when I'm writing. I have to be able to smell my characters, to sense them, and they have to be contradictory enough for me to love them, which usually means they are deluded in small human ways."

Alice McConnell conveys a profound sense of being

Venice is played by Alice McConnell

Venice's New Zealand childhood was informed by a 1970s artistic/hippy lifestyle that included time on a commune with her dad. She now lives a creative life in Sydney, working in an art gallery part-time and constantly gathering material to use, one day, in a collection of poetry. She feels things deeply and is an independent spirit who has had a richly tumultuous romantic life.

Venice hasn't seen her father Arthur for many years and is full of nervous anticipation about his visit from New Zealand. Things start to go awry from the very first night when the boyfriend she's been talking up to Arthur, dumps her. From that moment, her impetuous decisions simultaneously spice up and cause havoc in her life.

Accustomed to her own space, Venice finds her father's invasion of her tiny apartment very difficult. She fails to confide in him about the way her life is unraveling and he studiously fails to notice. He is not an innocent bystander because his presence intensely rekindles the pain of her past -- and spurs the behaviour of her present. And yet, although it may not be immediately apparent, part of the paradox of this central character is that there is integrity to who she is despite what she does.

Miro found Alice McConnell's audition for the part of Venice "unusually riveting". Very quickly she realized she had found an actor who could convey a profound sense of being without appearing to act.

“She was truly cinematic which is actually quite rare,” says Miro. “The other thing about Alice is she had an old-soul quality. I wanted Venice to be a luminous but also damaged character, a character who had experienced pain and sadness and wore it. Alice had that, while also having her beauty. It’s a compelling combination.”

At one stage in the film Venice says of her father: “Arthur used to talk about ‘having intense relationships’. Having intense relationships was like the pinnacle of existence, or maybe just talking about them.”

“That was the key to me understanding where Venice came from and what she too was looking for, whether she was conscious of it or not,” says Alice.

She continues: “It was just such a joy to be able to experience the world of this poet. Everything is poetry to Venice, from the moment she wakes up to the moment she goes to sleep. There’s an incredible sensuality to the way she goes about her life. It’s a beautiful way to approach life, as challenging as it may be, as uncomfortable at times and lonely. But Venice is not someone who can just follow a conventional path without questioning, without looking for meaning and real purpose.”

Miro then cast Arthur, Lenny and Irene

Arthur is played by Garry McDonald

Arthur is a writer who teaches creative writing. “It’s one of the great mysteries: what it’s like inside another’s head,” he tells the small group of private school students he’s come to Sydney to teach.

The irony of this is that he is too absent-minded and preoccupied with himself to consider what might be inside his daughter’s head. In fact, Arthur refuses to be interested because when he thinks of the past he is ashamed of his choices: including trading a bully-father for a bully-wife when he was a very young man, and the effect this had on his two children.

Actually, Arthur is full of late-life angst of all kinds. His oft-infuriating obsessions are with small, affordable, hedonistic distractions such as sunshine, coffee and food. Worries about not getting enough sleep or not getting exactly the right condiments at meal times constantly dog him, stealing focus from his relationship with his daughter.

“He has absolutely no teeth because he’s hooked on honey,” says Garry, before going off on a tangent about how people lisp when they don’t have their false teeth in. He suddenly remembers Arthur again: “Still to this day, I’m surprised he’s not diabetic.”

Garry played the role of Arthur in a workshop held during the film’s development. His role had grown bigger by the time cameras rolled about a year later.

“There was a beautiful serendipity to the casting of Garry McDonald as Arthur,” says Miro. “It was the first time I had heard an actor speak in the voice I’d heard inside my head when he read the lines at the script workshop. I laughed out loud at the way he nailed the character’s unconscious wit, his blithe obsessions. Indeed, the mesh between actor and character was striking. ‘You’ve been talking to my wife and daughters haven’t you?’ he teased me on a lunch break.”

“Garry has been able to capture the well-educated but strangely naïve Arthur, the puritan who had turned into a hedonist just a little too late in life. It’s such a gently comic, gently sad portrait.”

Lenny is played by Simon Stone

"Being Venice was always going to be a story filtered through the eyes of a woman but Lenny was the character that initially leapt out, that moved, fascinated and tickled me," says Miro.

The 1973 French film *The Mother and the Whore* (Jean Eustache), which also features a love triangle, supplied the spark for Lenny's characterization. Lenny is an eternal PhD student, amateur philosopher and lecturer. Miro describes him, quasi-comically, as someone *"with a giant thought bubble hovering over him, like you'd see in a cartoon strip ... Extravagantly intellectual, extravagantly verbal."*

Lenny is also charismatic with a zest for life. Deep down, however, he is fundamentally vulnerable as he swings between doubt and certainty. Miro comments, *"I see him as a genuine seeker. As someone who says 'Yes' to life -- and to Venice -- when prudence and circumstance advises 'No'. I believe this makes him surprisingly sympathetic."*

In cinema terms, Lenny becomes Venice's love interest. Yet Lenny's emotional vulnerability and his brand of masculinity makes him a very different love interest to the kind of men found in Australian cinema and television. That's precisely what thrilled Simon about playing the role.

"It's incredibly unusual (in Australian film and television) for a man's sexuality to derive itself almost entirely from personality and intellect rather than from physicality or macho bluster. I loved the gender-defying nature of Lenny as a romantic interest ... It was an extraordinary opportunity to explore parts of my sexuality that I haven't as an actor, except for in theatre, where lots of European plays get done and so you get to play those kinds of characters."

Lenny's verbosity also makes him very unlike most local leading men. The role was perfect for Simon, a writer and a director for theatre, which in Australia at least, is usually an intellectual step above cinema. If Simon has an ease with Lenny's heightened style of language, it's less surprising when you realize that four people in his immediate family are academics.

"I am surrounded by those kind of people -- although none of them are into navel gazing quite as much as Lenny! -- and felt I could bring something to the role that was truthful and not clichéd," he says. Nevertheless he regarded the role as daunting to play because Lenny's dialogue is at times so willfully, playfully obtuse and because he wanted the audience to like Lenny.

"Finding a way to avoid him becoming a wanker was really important to me. The dialogue is very intellectual in its detail, very academic almost, poetic at times ... and it was a great challenge to make sure it felt like a real human was acting with their groin and their heart and their stomach when they were doing what they were doing. Unless an audience sees that, the story is not going to work."

Miro adds that from the moment she watched Simon deliver Lenny's lines with beguiling ease -- and while munching on a bunch of grapes in the audition room; *"I knew he would bring the necessary lightness of touch, the sense of play to the sometime-high-seriousness of the role."*

Irene is played by Katie Wall

Irene is a cranial osteopath who has an extraordinary ability to see and cure people's physical and mental aches and pains. Irene's role is the smallest of the four main characters but she is, arguably, its most perceptive, down-to-earth and self-aware character.

As she says in the film, *"I fell in love with Lenny's possibility, and his woundedness, his damage. I don't know which came first, but when I first met him it seemed he had possibility all over him ... I still feel like that. I'd follow that man to the ends of the earth. Unfashionable as that sounds."*

"I was blown away by her audition," says Miro. "Katie was beauty and poise incarnate -- with dynamite just below the surface. She's also got a mind like a steel trap which meant we had a lot of fun analyzing Irene's behaviour in strategic terms and in relation to both Venice and Lenny."

European investors drove the financing

For a dozen years Miro and producer Peter Sainsbury had a close working relationship, making two films (*Floodhouse* and *Bartleby*) together, and working on the early development of *Being Venice*. After he retired Miro approached Karen Radzyner to come on board as producer. It would be the debut feature for both filmmakers. Coincidentally, Karen was simultaneously being advised by her husband, Daniel Nettheim (director of *The Hunter*), to work with "someone like Miro Bilbrough" because he felt the two had similar sensibilities.

"What made me want to make this film," says Karen, recalling her first reading of the script, "was the way Miro cut between scenes or subtly delivered on an earlier interaction, to allow us inside the characters and to show them to be so much more than the sum of their parts. I was hooked."

But Michael Wrenn, who recommended Karen, was the first to officially come on board as producer. He met Miro in early 2007 at CineMart, a co-production and financing market associated with the Rotterdam Film Festival. (This was immediately after she'd been to the Binger Filmlab). After Michael was given the script he promised to get back to Miro within three days. He did, which impressed her greatly. At that time he was working between Australia and New Zealand, and as an acquisition scout for leading sales companies Celluloid Dreams and Maximum Films.

Two years later, with her two producers on board, Miro's project was one of 39 chosen from 550 to be in official selection at Cinemart 2009. A lot of the interest in the production of the film emanated from Europe. This was not surprising given that Miro's sensibility is more European than US, and that European broadcasters make a habit of investing in film, unlike their Australian counterpart.

"At Cinemart we attracted two broadcasters who loved Miro's previous film Floodhouse, Germany's ZDF and France's Arte which, for an Australian film, is quite exceptional," says Michael. A German production company, Rohfilm, then came on board. Karen fleshes out the value of the European broadcasters: "They (ZDF/Arte) are real opinion makers in the financing and festival circuit: people who are very choosy about the films they fund and their recent films have won at Berlin and at Cannes. Having them on board really meant something."

The boards of Screen Australia and Screen NSW decided to invest in *Being Venice* in December 2010. By then Michael had formed the NZ/Australian entity Curious Distribution with Matt Noonan, whose investment was the final piece in the financing puzzle.

Many contributed on set to Miro's fresh artistic vision

Being Venice was entirely shot on location in Sydney, over six weeks in August and September 2011. Unprompted, several cast and crew have mentioned that working with a writer/director is a much more intense personal experience because that person has created the material, it means a lot to them and there is one clear vision driving the film and giving everyone focus.

"It felt like every department slotted in beautifully, and quietly went about their work," says Alice, who met with Miro to discuss the story and Venice many times over the three years between her casting and the cameras rolling. "It was a very intimate, tight-knit experience. It was a really lovely family vibe."

Among the cast, Garry was the biggest stickler for delivering the words just as they were on the page. Says Miro: *"He was the script's champion. It was a beautiful thing to have Garry McDonald defending my words."*

This behaviour, he says rather frankly, flows from a yearning to be a writer that is impossible to fulfill because, he claims, he hasn't the ability.

"I really enjoyed working with Miro ... and I did love getting the script exactly right because you knew she sweated over it and it did make sense when you got the words exactly right," he says. Laughing, he continues: *"She tried to be terribly sensitive, which didn't work with me, because I am so deaf. After a take, she'd come and give me notes in a way that the other actors wouldn't hear, and I'd have to say 'There's no point Miro, yell it out, let everyone hear'. She was good value."*

Being Venice is a film with a very strong artistic underpinning: some of the scenes take your breath away with their beauty. Indeed, the number of people who describe Miro as a "true artist" is striking.

Simon says she's "possibly the most sensitive artist" he's ever worked with: *"She is so finely attuned to the minutiae of emotional and physical landscapes. You learn from very individual details how to play your character in general and I think that's a really, really great approach to directing. As a director myself, I find it extraordinarily helpful."*

"Part of my job was to channel Miro's instincts for these characters: how they would live, what they would do, the kind of spaces they would live in and why," says production designer Alex Holmes. Filmmaking, of course, is one of the collaborative arts. *"She was great to work with because she had very clear ideas about her characters, which was no surprise because she's been living with them and writing them for years!"*

Venice's art gallery job inspired the filmmakers to explore how this might spill over onto the walls of her small, lovingly decorated apartment. With much generous support from the artists themselves, Alex hung Venice's room with an eclectic mix of international artworks including those by celebrated New Zealand photographer Laurence Aberhardt; the painters Christina Conrad and Betty Clegg (the artist-mothers of Miro and her partner Jeremy Clegg); Sydney painter Idris Murphy, and Magnum photographer Josef Koudelka.

Venice may not have cultivated conventional securities like a mortgage and superannuation, but she has none-the-less created, within limited means, a world that is expressively vibrant, a different kind of security.

Non-gentrified Sydney is celebrated here

The streetscapes in *Being Venice* are full of terrace houses from the 1920s in original condition, shops and pubs hardly changed since the 1950s. Given the gentrification of Sydney's inner suburbs, the filmmaking team had to be careful where they pointed the camera.

Cinematographer Bonnie Elliott takes up the story: *"There is still a lovely flavour to parts of the inner west: the train lines, the slightly crumbly buildings. There were some strong visual references that Alex and Miro and myself spoke about between us. The paintings of Edward Hopper were a strong influence in their sense of buildings and colour and landscape, and the pools of light you get at night."*

As Arthur remarks to his daughter when he arrives at her building for the first time: "You didn't tell me you live in a Hopper painting."

The film's colour palate is lush: saturated but soft, less primary than shades of apricot, aqua and dusky pinks. This palette is augmented by Miro's taste for vintage clothing, as stylishly recreated for Venice by Miro's long-term collaborator, costume designer Terri Kibbler.

The film relishes close-ups, particularly of Venice, with legendary cinematographer Sven Nykvist's work for Ingmar Bergman as an influence cited by both Miro and Bonnie. Indeed when the pair started to examine Alice through the lens they realized how unusually eloquent her gaze was and pushed it's centrality to the visual storytelling further.

There has been a happy continuity to Bonnie working on the film because she was camera assistant on Miro's short films *Bartleby* and *Floodhouse* (Kibbler also worked on these two films).

Miro comments: *"Bonnie and I had a dialogue that pre-dated the film and this created the perfect conditions for what had to be a very intimate vision. It was clear to us from the outset that rather than simple naturalism we were looking for a subtly heightened and subjective camera language to capture Venice's way of feeling and experiencing the world."*

When Bonnie read the script, she was struck by Miro's poetic influence: *"Obviously the character of Venice is a poet but actually the film has these incredible internal rhythms. So the film, like poetry, is full of surprises. You don't expect things in poetry and this film has that quality too. It might be a turn of phrase or the actions of the characters."*

Post-production took place in Sydney from September 2011 to March 2012. Adrian Rostirolla, edited the film. Will Ward was the sound designer; Andrew Lancaster and David McCormack were the composers.

"Trusting Miro and the team she gathered together to deliver on her scripted vision was the easiest part of making this movie," says Karen with her producer hat on. She then makes a personal observation: *"The film they created is the artfully boiled down essence of a city I love and characters I can't help but adore."*

► ABOUT THE CAST

Alice McConnell (Venice)

Alice was nominated for a 2005 Australian Film Institute Award for her performance as the best friend of the title character in the mini-series *Mary Bryant*, directed by Peter Andrikidis. “*It was a total joy to play Elizabeth, a whore with a heart of gold. And having dirt rubbed in my hair every day is the sort of makeup I like!*” *Being Venice* is Alice’s second feature after Peter Carstairs’ *September*, the first film produced under the Tropfest banner. Playing the role of Eve in *September* required her to spend six weeks surrounded by golden wheat fields: “*It felt like heaven on earth.*” Other special experiences on film and television projects include being part of Tony Krawitz’s short film *Jewboy* and starring opposite Richard Roxburgh and Essie Davis in “*actor whisperer*” Cate Shortland’s mini-series *The Silence*. Alice paints in her spare time, which she doesn’t have much of because she recently had a baby. Her dream is to work with the UK director Mike Leigh because of his very organic approach.

Garry McDonald (Venice’s dad, Arthur)

Garry captivated audiences with his outrageous antics in *The Norman Gunston Show*, which led to him winning both the Gold Logie for most popular male personality and the George Wallace Memorial Logie for best new talent in 1976. His behaviour in *Mother & Son* also filled Australia’s lounge rooms with laughter from 1983 to 1994. He starred alongside Ruth Cracknell and his character name then too was Arthur. He earned a Silver Logie in 1994 for most outstanding actor on Australian television and, at the same ceremony, the audience award for best comic actor. In 1997 he was inducted into the *TV Week* Hall of Fame and in 2003 was named an Officer of the Order of Australia. He has played well over 50 characters on television—most recently in *Offspring* and *Rake* -- and is also regularly seen on the stage. He won the Film Critics Circle of Australia Award for best actor for the 1990 film *Struck By Lightning*. In the last decade he has appeared in *Burning Man*, *Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark*, *The Rage in Placid Lake*, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *Moulin Rouge!*

Simon Stone (Venice’s best friend and new lover)

Simon principally writes and directs theatre and is resident director at Belvoir Street Theatre. When he takes on an acting gig there is usually a specific reason: in the case of *The Eye Of The Storm*, for example, it was to observe director Fred Schepisi. “*I don’t get the chance to work with great directors and to be absorbed in his process was awe-inspiring.*” His first feature was Ray Lawrence’s *Jindabyne*, starring Gabriel Byrne and Laura Linney, an experience he describes as “*trial by fire*”. *Balibo* was another film highlight: “*It was a small role but the spirit with which the film was made was unbelievably satisfying and I got to go to East Timor which was a wonderful and eye-opening experience.*” Simon has won enormous acclaim for his behind-the-scenes theatre work: he has been nominated for more than 20 Green Room Awards, for example, and his play *Wild Duck* last year won the Helpmann Award for best play. “*In the best performances it seems like characters are experiencing moments for the first time. I keep acting so that I stay aware, while I’m directing, of the insecurity you have to have to keep producing those moments.*” But he also keeps acting because being asked to perform, and performing, appeals to his ego, he adds with a laugh.

Katie Wall (Venice’s lover’s live-in girlfriend)

Katie will be on the big screen in another Australian film besides *Being Venice* in 2012: Peter Templeman’s romantic comedy *Not Suitable for Children*. She has also appeared in Sarah Watt’s *My Year Without Sex* and two films that screened at the Sundance Film Festival in 2007: Cherie Nowlan’s *Clubland*, in which she played alongside Emma Booth and Brenda Blethyn, and Matthew Saville’s *Noise*. She won an Australian Film Institute Award for best supporting actress for the mini-series *Marking Time* and her many other television credits include *The Secret Life Of Us*, *Love My Way*, *All Saints*, *Underbelly: A Tale of Two Cities* and, most recently, *Crownies*. In 2010 she released her first novel, *I Say Tomato*, which is both a satire of the LA film scene and a charming romantic comedy.

► **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

Miro Bilbrough, writer/director

Miro Bilbrough is a filmmaker, script consultant, screenwriting teacher and poet. Her many short films include the 52-minute drama *Floodhouse*, which was in competition in four international film festivals and was one of the most prominent productions in the short film categories of the 2004 Australian Film Institute Awards. Her earlier 26-minute drama *Bartleby* was also much acclaimed. Kilmog Press published Miro's debut volume of poetry, *Small-Time Spectre*, in 2011. She has had poems, as well as essays on filmmakers, published in a range of books, journals and magazines. She wrote a coffee table book, published by Allen & Unwin, which details the creative process behind Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* for example, and a 5,000-word interview with Jane Campion in *Film in Aotearoa New Zealand* which prompted the director of *The Piano* to comment "It is simply the best, most down to earth, irreverent and revealing of any I can remember". Miro has consulted on more than 500 scripts for feature films and short dramas and works as a script mentor at the Sydney International Film School. Miro was born in New Zealand where she wrote a weekly column of art criticism for the Wellington daily newspaper, *The Evening Post*, and trained as a curator of contemporary art, before moving to Australia -- and into film -- two decades ago.

Karen Radzyner, producer

Karen produced *Paper Giants: The Birth of Cleo*, the two-part mini-series about Ita Buttrose that attracted record ratings when it screened on ABC TV in 2011, and the seven-part mini-series *two Twisted* for the Nine Network in 2006. (Her producing partners were John Edwards and Bryan Brown respectively.) She has made a slew of short films and managed the holistic script development program IndiVision in 2007 and 2008 for Screen Australia, which also employs her as a consultant from time to time. Her own projects have often been selected for highly competitive development and financing programs in Australia and abroad including, most recently, the 2012 Berlinale Co-Production Market, and she has three awards from the Screen Producers Association of Australia to her name. She owns production company Dragonet Films with Kate Riedl.

Michael Wrenn, producer

Michael Wrenn has worked in film throughout his adult life, starting behind the candy bar then moving to projection at various UK arthouse cinemas. He moved into a creative and marketing role at the New Zealand Film Commission in 2000 and spent some time managing script guru Stephen Cleary and his company Arista. He has worked in financing and world sales for such companies as Celluloid Dreams and Maximum Films and has held very senior roles at several distribution companies including Curious Films, Electric Pictures and Alliance Atlantis (now Momentum). He has consulted on projects and companies big and small, worked with festivals and sat on boards. His first producer credit was on the 2011 German film *Errors of the Human Body*.

Bonnie Elliott, cinematographer

Bonnie shot her debut feature, *My Tehran for Sale*, in Iran. It premiered at the 2009 Adelaide Film Festival before hitting the world festival circuit. Several of her short films and documentaries have also proved popular with festivals. She has worked with video artist Angelica Mesiti on various projects, including *Rapture*, which won the 2009 Blake Prize. In 2006, Bonnie was selected to attend the Berlin Film Festival Talent Campus and, in 2007, was recipient of the Rising Talent Award at the IF Awards. Bonnie has received recognition from the Australian Cinematographers Society on many occasions and has a Masters in Cinematography from the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS).

Alexander Holmes, production designer

Most recently, Alex was the production designer on *Wish You Were Here*, which opened the 2012 Sundance Film Festival. He has also held that role on *Men's Group*, which won the IF Award for best film in 2008, the documentary *In Our Name*, and the Asian feature *Dance of the Dragon*. He has many credits as an art director including on the features *Panic at Rock Island*, *Prime Mover*, *Newcastle and West*, and on the television shows *Penelope K By The Way*, and the second series of *Lockie Leonard* and *Scorched*. Alex studied at the NSW College

of Fine Arts and the Glasgow School of Art and has a Masters in Production Design from AFTRS, where he won the Fox Award the year he graduated.

Terri Kibbler, costume designer

Terri has vast experience over many years in television, stretching as far back as *Heartbreak High* and including period series and documentary. She has worked on features and shorts too. Some of her work has been for the BBC and she has dressed Val Kilmer. Her credits as a costume supervisor include the second series of *Dance Academy* and *East of Everything*, *All Saints*, *Gurls World* and *Rogue Nation*. Terri originally studied fashion and this paved the way for styling film clips for the music industry and working in community theatre. She studied production design at AFTRS but subsequently decided to make costumes her focus.

Adrian Rostirolla, editor

Adrian's feature credits include *Kokoda*, *Gabriel*, *The Nothing Men*, *Coffin Rock* – in 2010 he was nominated in three categories of the 2010 Screen Editors Guild Awards, including for this film -- *Black & White & Sex* and the feature documentary *Bomb Harvest*. More recently he edited the documentary episode *Law and Disorder: Allen Kessing* (SBS), which was voted best factual program at the 2010 Logie Awards. Also for SBS he edited *The Silent Epidemic*, for the ABC, *Outback Kids* and, for Fox8, *Slide*. He has worked on many short films including *Birthday Boy*, which was nominated for an Oscar in the category for animation, and *Small Boxes* and *The Ground Beneath*, which earned a 2008 Screen Editors Guild Award. He has a Masters in Editing from AFTRS.

Will Ward, sound designer

Will is a sound editor, designer and supervisor. He was part of the team that won the Australian Film Institute Award for best sound in 2010 for the box office hit *Tomorrow When The War Began*; two years earlier he was among the winners of the same award for his work on *Unfinished Sky*. Will was also one of the recipients honoured by the Australian Screen Sound Guild for feature film soundtrack of the year in 2006, 2008, 2009 and 2010. Will's many feature credits include *Red Dog*, *The Way Back*, *Happy Feet Two* and *Australia*, and he also works on documentaries and short films. His focus is making sound an active participant in the story-telling process.

Andrew Lancaster, composer

Andrew won the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Award – with others -- for best original score for *The Hunter* in 2012. It is the latest of many awards for this musician, composer and music producer: he has also been honoured by the Motion Picture Sound Editors (US), the Australian Film Institute, the Australia Guild of Screen Composers and the Australian Recording Industry Association. He has worked on the films *I, Robot*, *The Crow*, *Garage Days* and *West*, and with Japanese producer Taka Ichise (*The Ring*, *The Grudge*). He co-founded Supersonic with Antony Partos, has been in bands and has released his own albums and worked on those of others. His own films as a director include the shorts *In Search of Mike*, *Palace Cafe* and *Universal Appliance Co* and the feature *Accidents Happen*. He was voted Best Rising Talent at the 2001 IF Awards. He has a Masters in Sound from AFTRS.

Dave McCormack, composer

Dave has composed for many features including *Garage Days* and *West* and, in 2011, won the Australian Guild of Screen Composers Award for best music in a series for *Rake*, which screened on ABC TV. He enjoys the challenge, thrill and creativity of collaborative projects. Dave had released a record by the time he was eight years old and hasn't stopped composing, playing, publishing – and studying -- music since. He was singer/songwriter for the 1990s band Custard, which produced six albums and toured extensively, and has subsequently produced five albums of his own particular style of pop music under the banner of Dave McCormack and The Polaroids. He has a Masters in Sound from AFTRS.

-- THE END --