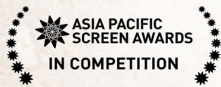


FROM THE PRODUCER OF **THE ORATOR** AND **BELLBIRD**

TIM ROTH

JORDAN OOSTERHOF

CONAN HAYES



DARE TO LOVE

PUNCH

A FILM BY NEW ZEALAND DIRECTOR **WELBY INGS**

PUNCH PRODUCTIONS LTD. IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION, PROSPECT FILMS AND THE YELLOW AFFAIR PRESENTS PUNCH TIM ROTH JORDAN OOSTERHOF CONAN HAYES
COSTUME DESIGNER SARA BEALE PRODUCTION DESIGNER IAIN AITKEN SOUND DESIGNER JAMES HAYDAY COMPOSER DAVID LONG EDITOR PAUL MAXWELL CINEMATOGRAPHER MATT HENLEY EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS ADRIAN BURR JONTY BROOK & LAMIA NAYEB PRODUCERS KAROLINA DWYER & STEVEN BESTWICK JILL MACNAB & PHIL BREMMNER
PRODUCERS ROBIN MURPHY & CATHERINE FITZGERALD WRITER & DIRECTOR WELBY INGS



Robin Murphy Productions, Blueskin Films and the New Zealand Film Commission presents:

PUNCH

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY:

Welby Ings

PRODUCED BY:

Catherine Fitzgerald

Robin Murphy

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS:

Adrian Burr

Jonty Brook and Lamia Nayeb

Karoliina Dwyer and Steven Bestwick

Jill Macnab and Phil Bremner

RUN TIME:

98 minutes

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LOGLINE:

Seventeen-year old Jim is a small-town boxing hero who carries the hopes and dreams of his father Stan on his shoulders. His growing relationship with local boy, Whetu, forces him to confront the truth about his sexuality, and choose his own future.

SYNOPSIS

PUNCH is a contemporary film about love, loyalty and liberation. Jim (Jordan Oosterhof) is a seventeen-year old boxer in a small town. He is a golden boy, preparing for a fight that will elevate him to an early professional status. All bets are on his climb to success. But his father Stan (Tim Roth) is a demanding coach and a notorious alcoholic.

But Stan has given everything to see his son gain professional status and escape the brutality of his small world. As Jim begins to rethink why he is fighting his life tangles with Whetu (Conan Hayes), a tough, gay Maori boy who spends his days in an old shack down by the beach. With his mongrel dog Moimoi he cobbles together a fragile glamour and dreams of leaving town to become a musician.

In a world that pretends that being gay is accepted, this film peels back the veneer of tolerance to show just what exists under the surface. Away from the rainbow flags and Pride parades, Jim and Whetu must navigate isolation, hypocrisy, the brutality of small town boxing ... and an anonymous queer bashing that no one will talk about. As Jim stumbles towards discovering what it really is to be a gay man, he is forced to see that strength has little to do with heroism.





DIRECTOR'S VISION

"*PUNCH* has been in development for a long time and I have never let go of the determination to bring it into the light. It sits in the context of recent films like *Moonlight*, where sexuality and bullying in a coming-of-age narrative are used to explore the vulnerability and beauty of the human condition.

Although it is Jim's story, this is really the story of anybody who has fought to find their place in the world, even when this means losing the things that keep you safe.

PUNCH looks at love in an unusual way. It is essentially two connected love stories; one between a father and his son and the other between two young men. Jim, Stan, and Whetu are all flawed but despite their clumsy handling of relationships with each other, they are all good men.

We feel for them and we want their lives to go in the right direction. When Whetu and Jim show us that they are free, that they have become strong and sensitive but separate men, our struggles with them and our hopes for them reach an unpredicted kind of triumph."

Welby Ings
September 2021

THE FILM'S STORY

Historical context

PUNCH was in development for many years, with writer and director **Welby Ings** having fought hard to bring it to life, as a commitment to his late partner, who held the national title in the triple jump but grew up in a small-town boxing family.

Also serving as inspiration are the experiences of two gay boxers known to Ings, as well as a number of takatāpui tane (gay Māori men) with whom he currently works.

Ings is a gay man who also grew up in, what he calls, "the wops". "We drove to a small town for the big shop". He has been actively involved in the pursuit and protection of gay rights and has been so since coming out when he was 20. In the 1980s he was arrested several times while campaigning for Homosexual law reform and he worked on the amendments to the Human Rights provisions of the 1990s. He was fired more than once for being an out gay man, and was beaten up on several occasions. He was a key organiser of the Auckland protests against the Victoria Spa raids and "the entrapment of gay men". For instances like these, the gay community has never received an apology from police, even after homosexuality was decriminalised in 1986.

A lifetime of experiences such as these has partially served as a political motivation for the film. In it, Welby has sought to show that just below the surface - the myth that diversity is adored and everything is rainbow flags is not true. For many young gay men, especially those who are gender diverse, attitudes, acceptance, and treatment, even after 35 years of law reform, are still toxic. This is especially true for isolated LGBTQ+ youth living away from metropolitan hubs. Being thrown out of families, marginalised in hypermasculine sports, or told that being gay is not an issue anymore, are ongoing experiences.

Welby Ings was illiterate until the age of 15. Although he is now a professor and supervises doctoral candidates from around the world, to this day, he uses drawings as a vital means of creative thinking. A reference to this is in the film's opening and closing sequences that appear as a drawing on water stained paper.

In this film, the gay bashing, the alcoholism, the local boxing fights, the silenced rapes, the tentative outreach of the medical profession, the transition from sex to love ... to letting go, all happen. Such things are specific but universal. As a push back against a climate where being gay is now seen as relatively normalised, Welby used recent, true incidents to peel back the veneer to expose what can lie just below a surface.

But *PUNCH* is also two, interwoven love stories; one between a father and his son and the other between two young, New Zealand gay men. These characters are flawed but despite their clumsy handling of relationships with each other, they are all in essence, good men.

Production and COVID-19

Producer **Robin Murphy** met writer and director Welby Ings in 2016 through a mutual friend. Drawn in by his unique voice and original approach to filmmaking, the pair agreed to work together on short film *Sparrow*. The success of working together on that project led to Murphy's involvement in *PUNCH*.



When COVID reached New Zealand, it presented unique disruptions to the industry and filmmakers who, on *PUNCH*, held themselves to hygiene standards higher than those recommended by experts. Productions of this size, says Ings, could not afford for even one person in their newly-formed bubble to get sick. As such, Murphy eventually persuaded friend and mentor **Catherine Fitzgerald** to join the production team because the pressures of financing and producing a film was no longer a one-person job during the pandemic.

Fitzgerald was drawn to the film due its timeless nature: "It's a touching story of first and unexpected love set in a small, unforgiving community". On the location of the shoot and the backdrop of the film, Fitzgerald compares the unchanging characteristics of the wild west coast to the "feral, repressed, and stuck-in-the-past qualities of the desperate small town these boys live in". She continues: "The world in which *PUNCH* is set is as much a character as any cast member. It is at once timeless, expansive and awe inspiring."

Casting

When it came to casting the role of Stan, Ings wanted someone who could capture the nuance of an alcoholic father. He wanted to avoid a cliched 'boozy Kiwi dad' and when the script was sent to an agent in the UK, acclaimed actor **Tim Roth** was quick to accept the role to the delight of *PUNCH*'s production team.

Ings and Roth met over Zoom and immediately got on well. They continued with weekly video chats until Roth came out to New Zealand in the middle of an international pandemic. Ings stated "he has a great love of New Zealand." Roth agreed: "It's the safest place on the planet and I'm a fan of the Prime Minister. It was just a question of saying yes and it was all very simple to me".



Speaking on his talents as an actor and colleague (especially working with debut actor Jordan Oosterhof), Ings commented: "He never once compromised Jordan's mana. He would jokingly say to him, prior to each take, "don't fuck this up!". Jordan knew he was proud of him". He continued: "As an actor, Tim is challenging, he takes the role seriously, but I like actors who question things. He has views but as a man he lives generously in the world."

With the casting of Jim and Whetu, Ings sought to challenge the cliché of gay men's relationships built on the idea of a 'masculine' dominant and passive 'feminine' partner. With Casting Directors Amanda Rees and Donogh Rees on board, a large number of actors were auditioned and Ings sat in on every audition.

Whetu is physically and emotionally strong (probably the strongest man in the film). Although he does not have Jim's formal boxing prowess, it is quickly apparent that if crossed in a street fight, Whetu would be the victorious party. Ings sought an actor who could take Whetu's apparent 'androgyny' and make it the sign of strength that it is.

Ings felt that the moment **Conan Hayes** walked into the room, he 'recognised' him from the film. Wearing black fingernail polish, his interpretation was distinctive because he completely inhabited the character. At the end of the audition, when he was asked to sing unaccompanied, he stunned the room. Hayes sings live in the film – and this scene was shot in one take. He worked with Dr Robert Pouwhare to refine a Tūhoe dialect - and he also learned the delicate and intricate skill of weaving kete - so he could completely inhabit Whetu. Hayes also worked with the talented costume designer Sara Beale on some of the garments he wears in the film.

On taking on the role of Whetu and the gravity of the Takatāpui narrative, **Hayes** said: "*PUNCH* is important for right now, especially in the New Zealand context. I'm proud to be a part of this story and showing Takatāpui stories on screen. I know this work is serving a purpose and that's serving my own drive. Anyone who is loved and wants to be loved will enjoy this film. I think New Zealand men need to see it."

The casting of Jim required an actor who could inhabit a young character loaded with testosterone who was also intelligent and vulnerable. **Jordan Oosterhof** fits this completely and is said by Ings to have an instinctive sensitivity and a serious commitment. In the film, like many sons of alcoholic dads, he has to become the father of his father.

Oosterhof did three months of boxing training going from three to five days a week to be 'fight ready' before shoot day. This was something he loved, which he'd never done before - the unexpected upskilling being something he loves about acting.

On working with his co-star Hayes, Oosterhof said the friendship budded both on and off set: "We get on like a house on fire, it's great. Every day has been very comfortable. We've had to do some challenging scenes together and he's made me feel really comfortable."

Both actors were said by crew to have "worked like Trojans" throughout production and with COVID restrictions meaning cast and crew had no social circle, they were all in a COVID-tight bubble, living and breathing their parts for months. It is therefore unsurprising that, when encouraged to improvise, they were both able to contribute significant and original lines and performances.

Director style

PUNCH is Welby Ings' first feature film as a director, and his collaborative directorial style was noted by cast and crew alike. Producer Robin Murphy commented: "Welby is a genuine collaborator and really cares about the team around him. He has a strong sense of the story he's creating and the ability to take others along on the journey with him. He gives equal respect and attention to the youngest and newest members of the crew, as he does with the veterans and experienced creators he's working alongside"

Ings was proud of the lack of hierarchy on set, and his impression from cast and crew was that goodwill was high and everyone genuinely enjoyed working on the film, even though it was tough at times:

"Sometimes through adversity, a particular type of beauty surfaces. It's both the beauty of the film and also the beauty of the experience of making something against the odds. We were up against it. We were battling covid, I wanted to shoot at a time when New Zealand's beautiful cloudy skies could form a backdrop to the film's world, so we were also dodging rainstorms and sandstorms all the way through."

When asked what it was like working with Ings', actor **Conan Hayes** (Whetu) stated: "Working with Welby is beautiful. He is someone who lives in his art. Every detail is thought out. He's great at giving us direction, feeding us, reminding us where we are in the story. I can trust him."

Jordan Oosterhof (Jim) painted a similar picture "Welby knows what he wants. It's personal for him. I've noticed all day, between takes, he's always humming and I can tell how happy he is. Working with him and being around him has been an honour for me."

ABOUT THE CAST

TIM ROTH (Stan) is an English actor and director who made his debut in the 1982 film *Made in Britain*. A mere two years later he was nominated for a BAFTA for his role as Myron in *The Hit*. Since then he has been a regular cast member of several Quentin Tarantino films including the director's directorial debut *Reservoir Dogs*, and later *Pulp Fiction*. His role as Archibald Cunningham in *Rob Roy* alongside Liam Neeson earned him a Best Supporting Role BAFTA, and both an Academy Award and Golden Globe nomination in the same category. He has worked with other notable directors such as Woody Allen, Francis Ford Coppola, and Michael Heneke. He has been involved in global franchises such as Marvel's *The Incredible Hulk* and *Planet of the Apes*. From 2009 - 2011 he held the role of Cal Lightman in TV series *Lie To Me*.



JORDAN OOSTERHOF (Jim) makes his feature film debut in *PUNCH*. Trained in the Meisner Technique under veteran teacher and actor Michael Saccente, he has worked across TV commercials, theatre, television, including *Shortland Street* and *The Cul de Sac*, and short film *Best Friend*.

CONAN HAYES (Whetu) is of New Zealand-Māori descent, and graduated from Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School in 2018. Since graduating, he has starred as the lead in the local web series *Burbs*, along with acting in Flat Three Productions' web series *Meme*. Conan features in the US fantasy series *Sweet Tooth* on Netflix, other television credits include *It's TV Man* and *The Wilds*, and his film credits include the short film *Hush*. Conan is also an extremely versatile stage actor and dancer, having performed in *Rushes*, *The Visit* and a lead-role in *Once On This Island*. *PUNCH* is his first feature film.



ABOUT THE CREW

WELBY INGS (Writer and Director) is an award-winning director with a number of prize winning short film credits, including 2004 film *Boy*. Described by his alma mater, Auckland University of Technology - where he is also a professor of art and design - as "a disobedient thinker", he has a PhD on the structure and profiles of narrative music videos and television commercials that he completed in 2005. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (UK), a consultant to many international organisations on issues of creativity and learning, and a member of the Designers' Institute of New Zealand, and the New Zealand Screen Directors' Guild. His directorial and writing credits include the short films: *Boy*, *Sparrow*, and *Munted*. *PUNCH* is his first feature film. *Sparrow*, which was produced with Robin Murphy, was officially selected for over 80 festivals and has won 20 awards. His TED talk on disobedient thinking is available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aumxbgOdkRU>

ROBIN MURPHY (Producer) has worked in the New Zealand film industry for 40 years. She's crewed in the art department, assistant directing on numerous feature films and television dramas, ranging from her costume work on the 1981 classic film *Goodbye Pork Pie* to a location manager *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *King Kong*, *Outrageous Fortune*, *Power Rangers*, *Sweet Tooth* (pilot) and the yet-to-be-released UCP series, *One of Us Is Lying*. In 2017 she was location manager for *Pork Pie*, the remake of the 1981 classic. Since 2000, Robin has juggled her freelance work with producing short films and developing feature film scripts. She's produced eight short films, including *Run*, which was awarded an honourable mention at the Cannes Film Festival in 2007. In 2016 she joined forces with writer/director Ness Simons to form Fired Up Productions with whom she released two seasons of the popular web series *Pot Luck*, *PUNCH* is her third feature film, having produced *Lowdown Dirty Criminals* with director brother Paul Murphy, and alongside Ness Simons, she Executive Produced and distributed indie comedy *Births, Deaths and Marriages*, both films were released in 2020.

CATHERINE FITZGERALD, ONZM (Producer) founded Blueskin Films in 2002. The latest release, thriller, *Coming Home in the Dark* (dir James Ashcroft) premièred in the Midnight Section, Sundance 2021. *Returning Home*, a Chinese/NZ feature documentary is in post production. Blueskin Films has produced the acclaimed *One Thousand Ropes*, *The Orator* (both NZ's nominees for Best Foreign Film) and *Bellbird* amongst its extensive international award-winning slate of features, shorts and documentaries which have featured worldwide, including the Berlinale, Venice, Cannes, Sundance, Toronto Film Festivals and the Academy Awards. Catherine has a record of films by women, Māori and Polynesian and other under-represented voices. Other recent releases include *Bellbird* and *Helen Kelly*. Short *The Meek* will be hitting the screens in 2021.

She also Chairs the NZ Film Festival Trust and Playmarket, is a founding Trust member of the Screen Women's Action Group and has consulted for the Berlinale for the NATIVE strand, and served on

Generation, NETPAC and Adelaide Festival Juries. Her other governance roles include the founding Chair of WIFT NZ, NZ Film Commission Board, the Board of the Dunedin College of Education, and SPADA among others.

MATT HENLEY (Director of Photography) is an accomplished cinematographer whose short films, including *Judah Finnigan's Workshop* and *Charmer* have screened at Locarno, Melbourne, Clermont-Ferrand, Camerimage and NZIFF. His first feature film as DOP *Coming Home in the Dark*, directed by James Ashcroft, premiered at Sundance 2021. Matt has been working in the film and television industry for more than a decade and is an experienced director of photography. Over the last few years, he has been shooting a large amount of documentary, commercial and TVC work.

DAVID LONG (Score Composer) composes and performs music. In 2020 he completed the score for the BBC adaptation of Eleanor Catton's *The Luminaries* for which he won the APRA 2020 award for Best Music for a Television Series. In 2021 he has composed score for Tupua Tigafua's dance show, *Ciggy Butts In the Sand* and is composing score for the BBC childrens' drama *Mystic*. Since the late 1990s David has been writing music for film and television, alongside playing in bands and composing orchestral music. He has composed scores for over twenty feature films including *McLaren* (for which he won the APRA Silver Scroll award for Best Original Music), *The Ground We Won*, *25 April*, *6 Days*, *Gardening with Soul*, *Beyond the Edge*, and additional score for Peter Jackson's *The Lovely Bones*. For the *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* he wrote (in collaboration with Plan 9 Music) 'Misty Mountain' (endlessly covered by metal bands, national orchestras and the Third Marine Aircraft Wing Band on YouTube). He wrote music and created musical sound design for Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *King Kong* (also with Plan 9 Music). David was a founding member of The Mutton Birds with whom he made three albums. He has just finished a new album, 'Ash and Bone', which will be released by Rattle Records.

IAIN AITKEN (Production Designer) With a design career spanning more than 30 years, Aitken's work includes production design for feature films, television series, commercials and the stage. Recent credits include all seasons of Starz's *Spartacus*, feature films *Separation City*, *Sione's Wedding*, *The Changeover* and Australian film *He Died with a Felafel in His Hand*. He has worked on numerous television commercials for local and international clients and, on the stage, he has worked for the Australian Opera, Sydney Theatre Company, Melbourne Theatre Company and Opera New Zealand.

PAUL MAXWELL (Editor) - Paul Maxwell is *PUNCH's* editor. His career also includes countless credits for sound editing. Originally from London, UK, Maxwell moved to New Zealand after 14 years in Australia, via a connection with Air New Zealand - editing promotional, in-flight videos. In his decades-long career he has worked on shorts, tv series, and films including: *Aphrodite's Farm*, *Samoan Wedding*, *Chasing Great*, and the first Australian/Italy co-production *The Space Between*.