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Behind the scenes with New Zealand actress Erana James

21/11/2017



di Kimberley Ross

Erana James is a young and very talented actress from New Zealand. We met in Rome during the days of **Alice nella Città** – a movie festival dedicated to a younger audience – where she presented the movie “The Changeover”.

She was incredibly sweet and posed for a few portraits, and after we talked a little I had the idea to propose this interview so that you can all get to meet her. All photos were shot on expired x-pro lomo film, cross-processed

Polaroids were shot on the new One Step 2 camera by Polaroid Originals and a vintage polaroid sx-70.

Hi Erana, would you tell us something about yourself?

My name is Erana James, I am 18 years old from New Zealand and I play the lead role of Laura Chant in the feature film The Changeover directed by Stuart McKenzie and Miranda Harcourt. I am of Māori descent, the indigenous people to New Zealand I am extremely passionate about Māori culture, and of course acting. I am studying Sociology and Te Reo Māori (Māori language) at university, and I am in my first year.

When we met you were in Rome to present your movie “The Changeover”. Tell us something about this movie and how you got involved in this project.

The Changeover is about a teenage girl named Laura Chant, and it is a love story between her and her little brother Jacko. Jacko gets stamped by a dark mark by Carmody Braque (Timothy Spall) and Laura has to go on a journey of self growth and of self discovery to changeover from a girl to a woman, and from a sensitive to a witch. It is a supernatural story grounded in reality. I have been involved with this project for a few years now! When I was 14 began attending a Professional Level Teen Acting class, which is curated by Miranda Harcourt. I have been working with Miranda since around 2013-2014. At the beginning of 2015 I had the opportunity to audition for the tone reel for The Changeover which I was able to land the role for and from there I was lucky enough to be able to play Laura Chant from the feature length film.

“The Changeover” is based on a successful novel by the same name and belongs to the young adult fantasy genre (Twilight anyone? :D). Are you a fan of this genre? What kind of movies do you like?

I am fan of this genre! Stuart Mckenzie often says that The Changeover is Rough Poetry. And I think this notion of Rough Poetry crosses across the type of film and television that I am a fan of. Jane Campions work in Top of Lake is definitely at the top of my list in terms of acting, story, style, themes etc. Film and television that makes you feel something, no matter what that feeling is.

What were your experiences as an actor before this movie?

They were very limited! I began attending a Professional Level Teen Acting Class (as mentioned above) run by Miranda Harcourt out of a Creative and Performing Arts School called Rata Studios when I was about 14. I had loved attending the classes and acting outside of school but it wasn't until i landed the role in The Changeover that I thought that this really might be something I'd like to be doing with my life. I just really love being on set surrounded by people that love doing what I love doing.

How was working with a legend like (omg!) Lucy Lawless?

Incredible as you could probably imagine! I feel extremely fortunate and lucky to have been able to work with such amazing names like Timothy Spall, Melanie Lynskey, and Lucy Lawless. The experience and knowledge from all three of these amazing people was so valuable for a new comer like me! I learnt more than I ever imagined I would about not only acting, but about how to deal with the pressures of a film set and relationships. From the beginning of rehearsal it was very clear to me that I had so much to learn from such experienced talented people, through to the final day shooting the cast (and crew, everyone really..) were really there supporting me through the whole experience.

**I've never been to New Zealand and I admit that in my mind it looks a lot like Hobbiton :D
Can you describe what life actually looks like in NZ, especially for a young woman like you?**

I am afraid I am going to disappoint you to say that New Zealand really is not a lot like Hobbiton! We have beautifully diverse landscapes and some of the most beautiful pure landscapes and nature. A nice small country of only around 4 million people. I am originally from a smaller city in the north where I grew up on a farm, till I moved to the capital city, Wellington (though a very small capital city!). It's familiar and small and diverse. Wellington is a really creative city, with quirky characters everywhere, and Wellington will definitely always be my home.