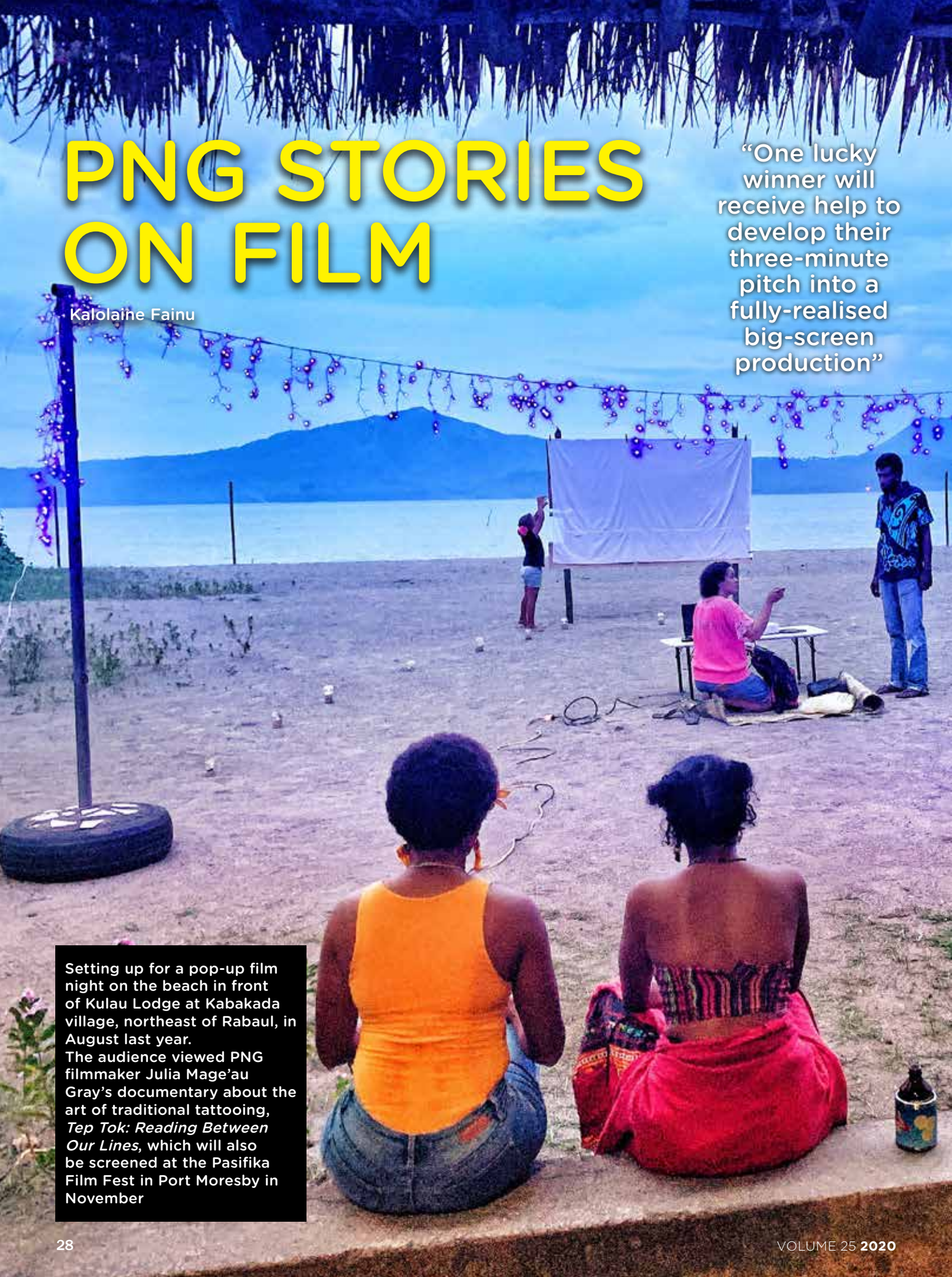


# PNG STORIES ON FILM

Kalolaihe Fainu

“One lucky winner will receive help to develop their three-minute pitch into a fully-realised big-screen production”



Setting up for a pop-up film night on the beach in front of Kulau Lodge at Kabakada village, northeast of Rabaul, in August last year. The audience viewed PNG filmmaker Julia Mage'au Gray's documentary about the art of traditional tattooing, *Tep Tok: Reading Between Our Lines*, which will also be screened at the Pasifika Film Fest in Port Moresby in November

Papua New Guinean stories feature prominently in a thought-provoking lineup of films from across Oceania to be screened at this year's Pasifika Film Fest in Port Moresby from mid-November. Among them are Mekeo-born filmmaker Julia Mage'au Gray's two-part series about the journey of four Pacific women as they get inked in the traditional tattoos of their grandmothers. There is also a short film, *The Education of Grayson Toki*, shot against the backdrop of Rabaul's Mt Tavurvur volcano by 19-year-old first-time director Glen Burua; a coming-of-age feature



The two young women trying to create a better future for themselves in bittersweet Goroka-made film *Aliko & Ambai*

film, *Aliko & Ambai*, set in Goroka and made by local film students; and an offbeat comedy short, *Chicken*, which has already picked up an award for its Port Moresby-born and

raised creator Alana Hicks. Rounding out the PNG offerings is the acclaimed *a Bit na Ta*

(Source of the Sea) - a 30-minute surround sound film developed through the Wantok Musik Foundation that



Award-winning PNG-born filmmaker Alana Hicks - left and below left, shooting scenes from her short autobiographical comedy *Chicken*, which offers a glimpse into the life of a mixed-race migrant kid growing up in Australia





Kuradui villagers (north of Rabaul) watch *Finding Phebe*, a film about the 2004 return of the ashes of local matriarch and Malapau plantation owner Phebe Parkinson, made by her descendant Max Uechtrit and screened in September last year. Phebe was the sister of Queen Emma, the famous American-Samoan princess who built a copra empire in Rabaul in the late 1800s

examines pressures faced by the Tolai people of Rabaul over the past 100 years. In the interests of connectivity in these isolating COVID-19 times, the festival's organisers for the first time have included a virtual component to allow those unable to attend in person to log in online as an audience member, no matter where they are. As well as the online screenings, two other exciting initiatives have been planned – the Pitch Pleez! competition, which is now open online for aspiring Pacific filmmakers before an entry deadline of October 31, and a new online ideas and talk

fest, Virtual Talanoa (Dialogue), to take place on November 17. The trademark Pitch Pleez! has previously been conducted live in Sydney in front of a panel of industry judges and community leaders, but due to travel limitations caused by the global pandemic, will this year be judged online. One lucky winner will receive help to develop their three-minute pitch into a fully-realised big-screen production. The pitch could be in the form of a web or TV series, a short or feature film. Pre-COVID, Pitch Pleez! winners would have been invited to take part in another trademark Pasifika

Film Fest (PFF) event, the 48 Hour Film Challenge, which started as a Sydney-based initiative but last year was co-hosted by the inaugural Native Lens Film Festival in Honiara, Solomon Islands, with the help of PFF directors Kalolaine Fainu and Elijah Malifa. The directors are looking at how to integrate this critical development workshop into an online format – so stay tuned! The online Virtual Talanoa is a new addition to the festival program and aims to help bridge the gap between film industry professionals and emerging Pacific talent. Aspiring writers, directors and film

buffs will be able to talk directly to industry players about their experiences in production, pre-production, funding and distribution. Riding the recent wave of Pacific film that has captivated audiences around the world, PFF is not only committed to helping grow Pacific voices globally, but also to bringing the voices of the region back to their peoples and homelands. Arm in arm with the undertaking to build awareness, pride, skills and opportunity, is the embedded long-term objective of creating a robust and dynamic Pasifika film industry. PFF 2020 was originally scheduled

to tour Pacific-wide in October, with island nations hosting the festival simultaneously. The impact of COVID-19 has meant this seminal step forward has had to find other pathways to the same destination. PFF has previously screened individual one-off films at locations in East New Britain and organisers were excited about taking the festival to more remote locations in PNG. This is currently impossible, but the use of VOD (video on demand) and virtual cinema are designed to reach as many people across the country, the region and the planet as possible. PFF looks forward to



PNG filmmaker and traditional tattooist Julia Mage'au Gray (left, and below) inks her niece Salevasa Gray with her grandmother's poopoa (tattoo), helped by Aisa Pokarop (centre), in the documentary *Tep Tok: Reading Between Our Lines*

presenting the work of some of PNG's talented storytellers.

**PNG Filmmakers**

Julia Mage'au Gray:  
two-part documentary

- **Pt 1: *Tep Tok: Reading Between Our Lines***
- **Pt 2: *Tep Tok: Our Lines Connect Us***

Born in the Mekeo area of Central Province, Julia draws inspiration from her Papuan heritage to document a fascinating insight into the stories and practices of traditional tattooing and skin markings as told through the life-changing journeys of four women who now live in either Australia or New Zealand but travel the Pacific hoping to breathe life back into the vanishing art worn by their grandmothers. The two-part series features a woman from Gabagaba village



in Motu, Central, in the first part, and the stories of her three daughters in the second part. Also

featured is a young woman of PNG, Samoan and Australian heritage who wears the marks of her Mekeo



the youth of PNG to follow their dreams. Shot against the backdrop of an active volcano, Mt Taruvuvur, in East New Britain, this film tackles issues of abandonment of a teenage boy by his father and the pressure to succeed, and explores how family dysfunction can impact on educational aspirations and lead to involvement with the wrong crowd.

The Centre for Social and Creative Media, University of Goroka; feature film

• **Aliko & Ambai**  
Young talented PNG student writers, producers, directors and actors were involved in creating this inspirational story that tackles the confronting subject of some of PNG's most pressing social issues. It takes us into the world of two young women faced with the formidable challenges of traversing poverty, violence, forced marriage and abuse as they grow up in the Eastern Highlands. Aliko struggles to complete her education and Ambai searches to escape her abusive home and reunite with her biological father. They navigate the many obstacles in their lives and strive to build brighter futures for themselves, supported by the strength of friendship. As assistant producer Theresa Meki writes, "It is a true Papua New

Guinean film and it has everyday PNG in it: the good, the bad, and the ugly," but ultimately, she characterises it as a film of "courage, friendship and the pursuit of happiness".

Alana Hicks; comedy short film

• **Chicken**  
Combining autobiographical truth with a slightly dark edge provided PNG-born but now Sydney-based Alana with the ingredients to write and direct this offbeat and now award-winning film. Giving audiences a glimpse into what life was like for a mixed-race migrant kid growing up in Australia, the girl at the centre of the film is reluctantly responsible for breaking down any communication and cultural barriers that arise from her PNG mother's interactions with her unfamiliar environment. The plot reads: "All Barbara wants to do is watch *The Simpsons*, but her recently migrated mum has just been overcharged at the local shops, and

**Right: Scenes from Goroka-shot feature film *Aliko & Ambai* include (from top): Aliko sees her late father in a vision; Aliko arrives at her auntie and uncle's house in the rain after the tribal fight in which her parents are killed; Aliko's teacher and mentor, Ms Rizeloh; Ambai cries on Aliko's shoulder**

it's up to Barbara to sort it out. As usual." It mirrors Alana's own early life moving to Australia from Port Moresby at the age of 11 with her PNG mother, from Porebada village in Central Province, and Scottish-Australian father who was a teacher in PNG for many years. *Chicken* (trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hngJApAbM7o>) featured in the 2020 Flickerfest International Short Film Festival, where Alana received the award for Best Direction in an Australian Short Film. *Chicken* is being screened at various festivals around the world, including the upcoming Aesthetica Short Film Festival, Pollywood Pasifika Film and the London Film Festival.



**Matupit Islanders appear as extras in short film *The Education of Grayson Toki*, shot near the base of Rabaul's Mt Tavorvur volcano 22 years after its devastating eruption. Photos taken from Instagram @BSAG Productions, New Zealand**



**First-time filmmaker Glen Burua was only 19 when he wrote and directed *The Education of Grayson Toki***

bubu (grandmother), while the other two are of Fijian descent.

All women share the purpose of reinventing what is in danger of being lost and propelling a resurgence of pride in customary inheritance at a time when our world is transitioning from a past rich with culture and meaning into an uncertain future. "As a skin marker and filmmaker, this sequel is an avenue to author the story of the people we mark and meet on our journey through the work of Melanesian marks," Julia says. "This is not the typical traditional or cinematic documentary but a complex and layered

puzzle-piecing of many voices from the stories shared with myself and my family. It is an avenue to author our stories from my personal Papua New Guinea Australian woman's perspective."

Glen Burua; short film  
• **The Education of Grayson Toki**

When he made this film, Glen was a 19-year-old with no previous directing experience studying at the Divine Word University in Madang. His guiding principle is that "dreams don't have expiry dates", and provides inspiration to



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Right and below: Scenes from the acclaimed *a Bit na Ta (Source of the Sea)* film that documents the challenges faced by the Tolai people of Blanche Bay, Rabaul, over the past century



Wantok Musik Foundation; short film • a Bit na Ta (Source of the Sea)

This 30-minute surround-sound film project is located in ples (place) in Blanche Bay, up the coast from Rabaul, East New Britain, and is an unparalleled historical treasure charting the enormous challenges faced by the Tolai peoples during the century 1875-1975. Central to the Tolai community's capacity to survive the disruptions of shifting colonial powers, war,

volcanic eruptions and independence struggles is the strength and importance of their Tubuan society. Told in their own words and perspective, this invaluable work was produced by a team that included the irreplaceable late Tolai elder Gideon Kakabin, whose vast knowledge provided the historical framework for the film, and renowned Rabaul musician George Telek in collaboration with Australian musician, composer and producer David

Bridie. Singing tumbuna (ceremonial song), string band, lotu church choir style and contemporary soundscapes are supported with archival, cultural and landscape film to create a not-to-be-missed masterwork. Also not to be missed in the line-up of about 40 films from across the Pacific is the highly acclaimed *For My Father's Kingdom*, an intimate portrait of Tongan faith, love and fatherhood. PNG and the island nations of the Pacific are the guardians of customs and

**“There is power in ‘bungim wantaim’ (bringing together) to transition into a future that builds resilience by honouring the past”**

traditions rich with ancestral wisdom and age-old secrets. The rapidly evolving new millennium brings both formidable challenges and unprecedented potential for change. There is power in ‘bungim wantaim’ (bringing together) to transition into a future that builds resilience by honouring the past. Choose to be a part of the vision that enables the voices of the Pacific to be heard. Attend, participate, contribute. Speak out and speak up. Nurture the next generation so that they can sing the songs of long ago as they stand as modern leaders ready to define their own futures.▲

**PASIFIKA FILM FEST 2020**

**When:** November 13 - 29

**Where:** Port Moresby at the PNG National Museum and Art Gallery (NMAG) and Moresby Arts Theatre (MAT)

Keep up to date with all of PFF's events and announcements through their website [www.pasifikafilmfest.com](http://www.pasifikafilmfest.com) or social media channels. To register for Pitch Pleez! (deadline for entries is October 31) or the Virtual Talanoa on November 17, send an email to: [admin@pasifikafilmfest.com](mailto:admin@pasifikafilmfest.com)





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