

PROFILE



PHOTO C/O PINK MONKEY

Nicole Oliver Actress

Nicole Oliver is a multi-faceted talent who believes in diversification: she hosted the Slice lifestyle series *Crash Test Mommy*; voices a number of animated characters, including Zoe on *Littlest Pet Shop* and Princess Celestia on *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*; and has a guest-starring role on the new TV series *Rogue*, which premieres this month on The Movie Network and Movie Central. She also works consistently in the voice-over market for companies like American Express, Starbucks and Wireless Wave. Oliver's nine-year old son William Ainscough has followed in her footsteps and plays the lead, Billy, in the City comedy *Seed*. Oliver plays his teacher in several episodes.

Hometown: Born in Ottawa, raised in Toronto. I came out to Vancouver in the mid 90s to do a guest spot on *The Outer Limits* and went back and forth on the LA, Vancouver, Toronto triangle until I met my husband and fell in love and settled in Vancouver. We have been married for 12 years and have two boys.

Start date: I was a ballet dancer and wanted to go pro but I blew my knee out in high school, which dashed that dream so instead I did a high school play in grade 12. I remember walking on the stage and thinking this is pretty cool, so I told my dismayed parents I wanted to be an actor. My parents said okay but go to school and get a degree. Go for it. So I went to York University and took the theatre program, graduated and never looked back.

Most memorable working experience: I did a turn on *Rogue* and it reminded me of why I love being an actor. I played an alcoholic mob wife and my husband had just been shot. I worked with Marton Csokas who plays the lead gangster and director David Frazee. The actors on set were digging layer after layer ... it was an amazing experience because I felt like I was playing again. It is great to be reminded of why you wanted to do this in the first place.

If I won an Oscar I would thank: My family and also my agents. I have been lucky. I have been with the same agency for 23 years, Characters Talent Agency, so I would thank my agents Murray Gibson and Caroline Young. Also, I did a movie a long time ago with Eva Marie Saint, who was popular with Alfred Hitchcock back in the day. She told me a story about how in this biz don't let them get into your heart; remember who you are and what is important to you. That has stuck with me so I would give her a tip of the hat.

Working with your son on Seed: It was a treat. It was a challenge. It was so surreal. I am really proud of him. The hardest part was not to let my mom brain kick in. My character is a teacher who doesn't like his character very much so every time I found myself thinking 'look at you go' I had to remember that I don't like him. It was a wonderful experience and he will either thank me or blame me for wherever this path leads him.

Latest role: I have an indie film coming out this summer, a mockumentary called *Leap 4 Your Life*, directed by Gary Hawes of Vancouver. And cartoon-wise I am recording the fourth season of *My Little Pony* and the second season of *Max Steel*, which just premiered on Disney XD and Teletoon.

My latest five year plan: I am always about changing and evolving. I like to do things I am fearful of most. So I want to try stand-up. I would like to get back to the stage and do some Shakespeare. And I want to segue into directing cartoons and animation so I am starting to write my first short film. ■

sought donations from every "wrapping" production and shot in a non-sound proofed warehouse. We premiered to a sold out audience at Toronto, but our second screening was the morning the twin towers came down so our TIFF party stopped there. We did the tour of other Canadian Film Festivals but like so many well-intended Canadian films, didn't make anything the box office. We were undeterred at the time.

I was stoked when Alliance Atlantis approached me to co-produce *Owning Mahowny*, a \$10 million, UK/Can co-pro. We scouted in Atlantic City and the director Richard Kwietniowski and I had a blast. Who wouldn't with the brilliant method actor Philip Seymour Hoffman and John Hurt whose war stories entertained us all? I saw the film to the end and we celebrated in both Sundance and at the Berlin Festival before it was released theatrically worldwide.

TWIST, written and directed by Jacob Tierney, was the embodiment of "alienated and dysfunctional" characters – a modern interpretation of Dickens transported to the streets of Toronto staring Jacob's BFF Nick Stahl. We got the film in the can for \$60K and completion money trickled in along the way. We premiered at the Venice film festival – pure magic. After that Jacob and I traveled together to Halifax, Croatia and Moscow Film Festivals. Jacob went on to prove, "make your first film and travel the world", and I discovered a new joy; the work/travel combo.

Then came the BMW short film. After the success of the UK series, I thought working with an ad agency and a high profile client would remind me of what it was like working with gads of money. Patrick Sisam was the writer/director and while we had a fantastic premiere at TIFF during the Holt Renfrew party, there was a tad too much narrative for the BMW demo. It was a shame, because we didn't get to make any more.

In 2006 Sarah Polley invited me to be involved in *Away From Her* at first draft stage, and we moved forward very fast. It was a team effort - Danny Iron, Jennifer Weiss, Simone Urdl, all of us justifying to Telefilm why the film was going to cost more than a typical first film, and then Sarah was flying off to the UK to pitch Julie Christie. First day of PP and we're exterior cottage, -35 degrees Celsius, Bracebridge, and it's a miracle a lens didn't break. Julie and Gordon Pinsent's opening volley was one of the most profound moments of the film. Cut to the Oscar

nominations and we're sooo excited.

I then worked on *Global Metal* – the first documentary I did with Banger Films. Myself and five guys, on tour in Japan, Indonesia, China, Poland, Israel, India and Brazil. What happens on the road stays on the road, until there's a need for therapy to recover from it.

It was an unforgettable adventure, which a year later, led to *Flight 666*, a doc about Iron Maiden's Somewhere Back in Time tour. We flew on their private jet to 13 countries in 3 months. Five star hotels (albeit 2-3 nights per city), crazy fans, a tough road crew who partied hard and really famous rock stars. A life-changing journey!

It was hard to come back down to earth after such tremendous travels but *Suck*, a rock and roll vampire movie, seemed highly appropriate. Directed by Rob Stefaniuk and EP'd by Gabriella Martinelli, we struggled through a constant shortfall in the financing and distributor woes all the way through production and post. We never reached the potential of a theatrical release, so thank goodness for the Canadian festival system. At TIFF, we found our homegrown audience and got to hear the applause for one night.

Shortly thereafter, and after 10 years of trying, I laid to rest my own projects. Despite development deals with CTV, Movie TV, and Movie Central, my film and TV projects never really moved far enough forward to allow writers to actually quit their day jobs. My directors were equally despondent and needed to make a living, so they pursued their own "work for hire" objectives. I "consulted for hire" on other people's projects, which also didn't get financed. And then a new adventure arose – Alex Raffé offered me a Producing day job, a move to BC and so to present day.

Mr Young – a tween multi-cam sitcom for Thunderbird and YTV – was such a dramatic move from earnest filmmaking and I love it. We laugh every day, we shoot a new episode every week, we have instant audience feedback and before I know it, I've been here for nearly three years. We're now in prep on a new show by the same showrunners, Dan Signer and Howard Nemetz, and I hope to continue for many, many years to follow.

I love this city, I love our crew and I really love to laugh. Thank you to all of those who have supported me on this meandering magnificent journey, I wouldn't be here without you. ■