



Balaban and co-star Joshua Jackson in *One Week*

TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL REVIEW

# MILKING IT

Alison Pill is savouring her sweet and wild ride!

Alison Pill realized by the age of 11 that despite her National Ballet School training, she probably wasn't going to make it as a ballerina. Still drawn to a life lived in the spotlight, the Toronto native set her sights on becoming an actress. After appearing in numerous Canadian television productions, Pill landed her big-screen break in 2003 in the indie sleeper hit *Pieces of April*. "It was beyond indie—it

was guerrilla film-making!" she recalls. "The craft table was a bag of chips in the back of a car."

She went on to appear in darker fare, playing a teen gun nut in *Dear Wendy*, as well as more mainstream flicks, like last year's hit comedy *Dan in Real Life*. Between movie gigs, the 22-year-old actress returns to New York, where she has be-



come a Broadway darling since her Tony-nominated 2006 performance in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. Since then, Pill has wowed critics with her performances in *Mauritius* and *Blackbird* (co-starring Jeff Daniels). Most recently, she played a young woman who chews out her boyfriend in Neil LaBute's play *Reasons to Be Pretty*.

Pill returns to the big screen this fall in Gus van Sant's Toronto International Film Festival entry, *Milk*. She plays Anne Kronenberg, an aide to the 1970s gay politician Harvey Milk, played by Sean Penn. "In the film, I have this crazy-ass perm, fake boobs and high-waist pants!" says Pill, laughing. On a more serious note, she says that it was a challenge to do justice to the groundbreaking events of Milk's life and death. "We filmed the candlelight march following his assassination with thousands of volunteers walking down Market Street in San Francisco," recalls Pill. "If you look at California, which has just legalized gay marriage, these people had a lot to do with paving the way. So there's tragedy, but there's victory too." BRIONY SMITH

"For me, *Into the Wild* was about a foolish forsaking of opportunity," says Liane Balaban, who plays Ben's fiancée, Samantha. "I had trouble empathizing with a character who saw his privilege as a burden. In *One Week*, the protagonist has done the 'sensible' things in life—college, getting engaged, having a career—but still feels that something is missing. The film is about his search for something deeper—his true self. Anyone who feels that they've settled and wonders 'What if' will identify with him."

As for her own role, Balaban credits McGowan

with providing her with the vivid details that brought her character to life. "There was a 'what I love and hate about Samantha' montage in the script that revealed all of her idiosyncrasies: She has eclectic taste in music and a beautiful hip

“ANYONE WHO FEELS THAT THEY’VE SETTLED AND WONDERS ‘WHAT IF’ WILL IDENTIFY.”

bone and makes an annoying jaw clack while eating.”

Idiosyncrasy is probably Balaban's specialty: At 28, the Toronto-born actress is already a dab hand at inhabiting complicated characters. Most critics cite her performance in *New Waterford Girl*, but she was also terrific as a con artist in *Seven Times Lucky* and completely charming in her long-time collaborator Simon Ennis' Heritage Minute From Hell short, *The Canadian Shield*. Balaban says that she's excited about her role in Ennis' upcoming feature debut, *You Might as Well Live*, and her lead role in the CBC pilot *Abroad*. "It's about a journalist from Toronto who goes to work at a paper in London, England. In a nutshell, it's about a girl trying to fit in overseas—or, more succinctly, it's about a broad abroad." □

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