

Stick Girl Productions Presents

# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

90 minutes of animated entertainment

At  
1:00,  
3:20,  
7:15,  
9:25



**FOLKS!**  
By no means miss  
**LONG TACK  
SAM**

The sensation of  
Berlin, Paris,  
London, Sydney,  
Shanghai—

One Week Only!

**25¢**  
TILL  
1 P.M.

# PREMIERE

# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

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*She wants to run away from the circus...*

# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

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## SYNOPSIS

*1932: The Great Depression. The dying days of Vaudeville. Fascism is on the rise.*

The LONG TACK SAM TROUPE, fabulous travelling Chinese Circus headliners, famous for their East-meets-West blend of acrobatics, comedy and magic, have been reduced to opening acts for movies.

MINA, feeling overworked and under-appreciated, is tired of the show and wants to pursue her own desires, but her Chinese father, LONG TACK SAM, is grooming her to take over the business. Her Austrian mother, POLDI, is struggling to manage the troupe and her young son, BOBBY, at the same time. The ghost of her younger sister, NEESA, won't leave her alone.

When the troupe travels up the coast to Vancouver to open for *One Way Passage* at the Orpheum Theatre, turns out Mina is not the only one who is eager for change. Other members of the troupe are not happy with the status quo, but jobs are scarce and Sinophobia is high. When Mina is offered a way out of the circus, she is torn between her loyalty to her family and her own freedom. When the world is in chaos, is it really time to leave everything you know?



# SHANGHAI FOLLIES



## DIRECTOR'S VISION

SHANGHAI FOLLIES, inspired by the exploits of my Chinese vaudevillian family, tells the story of a young woman who wants her independence but is tormented by sibling rivalry, conflicted by family loyalty, and has to surmount the societal obstacle of being a mixed-race showgirl in the middle of the Great Depression.

This story is based on MINA, my grandmother, who rarely talked about her life in the show. For her, it was not just all wonder and magic, it was a hard life she was happy to leave behind. Yet she missed the camaraderie and beauty. I want to explore that seeming dichotomy between the beautiful illusion on the stage and the harsh reality off of it. I want to show that imagination and its teammates hard work, sacrifice and perseverance, are the tools artists use to create their world on and off the stage.

As a nod to the era, the feel and pace of the story is the patter of Screwball comedies and the world of Noel Coward. Like Elvira in *Blythe Spirit*, nobody can see the ghost of NEESA except her sister, Mina, but it's played bittersweet, not as broad comedy. The ghost is an expression of her guilt and grief, why she wants to leave the show and why she can't.

Visually, Shanghai Follies will incorporate different animation and comic styles of the '30s, from Fleisher's *Betty Boop*, to *Wonder Woman*, and, like the real variety show, incorporate styles from East and West. The world of the Great Depression, with its poverty and racism, is sepia-toned, while the stage show is fabulously saturated. Flashbacks are presented in the style of the Golden Age of comics. Ironically, unlike the vaudeville acts from all over the world they are replacing, the talkies are still in black-and-white.



# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

## MINA

MINA is a dutiful daughter, burdened with too much responsibility. On stage, she dances, plays the saxophone, and is a magician's assistant, but what she really longs for is a life of her own. Mina's an advocate for women's empowerment -she's run her own dance studio- yet the only way her father would let her leave the show is if she found a husband, which she doesn't want to do. Mina needs to come to terms with the grief and guilt over her sister's death that is keeping her from her own independence. Is she ready?



## NEESA

NEESA has always felt in the shadow of her older sister. She loves Mina, she just wishes she would get out of the way. Sassy and daring, death has not diminished her feelings of sibling rivalry.



# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

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## LONG TACK SAM

Acrobat, magician, comic, father, husband, entrepreneur, leader of the **LONG TACK SAM TROUPE**... **SAM** has been on the road since he was sold in to the circus as a young boy. Eternally optimistic, he doesn't even know he's a harsh taskmaster- it's the only life he's known. Ignoring all barriers, he fell in love and married his wife, **POLDI**, in small town Austria and created a show around their girls, so they could all be together. Sam feels great responsibility for his extended family and can't accept he is too old to keep up this life on the road. He must learn to trust the show will go on even without him at the helm.



# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

## POLDI

POLDI leapt at the chance to leave her life as a shopkeeper in a small Austrian town to marry Sam and run away with the circus, but the years on the road have taken their toll. She's been a performer, a manager and a mother. She sees how hard a life of touring has been on the girls and she wants something different for her young son, BOBBY, who she adores. Homesick for her own culture, she wants him to have the bucolic childhood she had. She cannot bear to lose him to the show like she did NEESA.



## BOBBY

Five-year-old **BOBBY** has ants in his pants and wants all the attention all the time. People are either getting him to stop doing something, or ignoring him completely. He loves the circus and can't wait to try out the trapeze. He doesn't know and he doesn't care what other people have in mind for him.

# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

## PO CHU

PO CHU has been with the troupe since he was a boy, performing as male or female, as needed. Now, he's presenting as a woman off-stage, too. After all, it's 1932. If not now, when?



## LIANG NA

Purchased, then adopted by the Longs as a playmate for their daughters, LIANG NA has always felt like an outsider. The fact that she is like a daughter to POLDI, however, does not stop her from having feelings for SAM.



# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

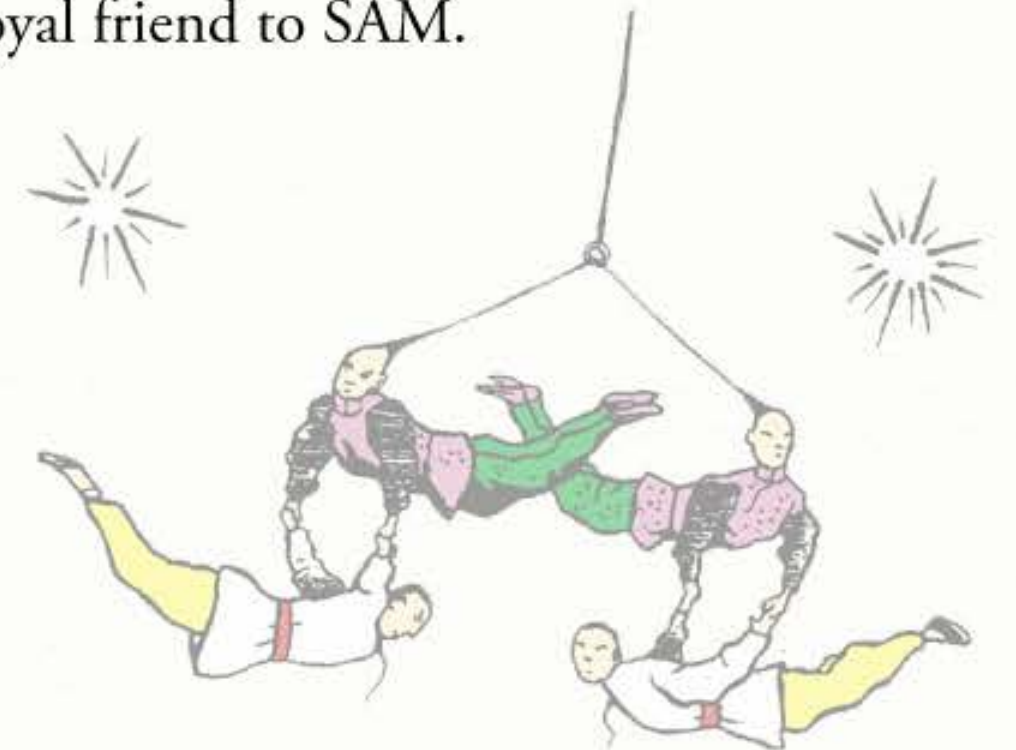
## ELSA KENDALL

ELSA, Austrian vaudeville performer-turned-mystic widow, finds a kindred spirit in fellow ex-pat, POLDI. Knowing MINA wants her independence, she offers her a business opportunity. Is it a favour to Poldi, compassion for Mina, or does she just miss the life of the show?



## CHARLIE RIVAL

CHARLIE joined the LONG TACK SAM TROUPE because of his love of Chinese magic, but on this trip he is relegated back to his vaudeville roots as a trapeze artist, something he gave up, traumatized by NEESA's tragic accident. Like some, he gets his consolation from a bottle which is a detriment to his game, but he's a loyal friend to SAM.



# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

Concept Art



# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

*Concept Art*



# SHANGHAI FOLLIES

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## ANN MARIE FLEMING

*Writer, Director*

Ann Marie Fleming is a writer, director, producer, animator, whose award-winning work in animation, live-action drama and documentary short and feature formats often deals with themes of family, history, and memory.

*Can I Get A Witness?* (2024), her latest feature, featuring Sandra Oh, Keira Jang and Joel Oulette, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and is on TIFF's Top 10 list of Canadian Films for 2024. *Window Horses* (2016), featuring the voices of Sandra Oh, Shoregh Aghdashloo, Elliot Page, and Omid Abtahi, received the Asia Pacific Screen Award for Best Animated Feature. Her animated short, *Old Dog* (2020) is one of the top viewed films on NFB.ca. *Blue Skies* (2002) was voted Best Canadian Short Film at TIFF and *You Take Care Now* (1989) was recently on TIFF's list of Top 10 Canadian Shorts of all time. *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam* (2003) with its then ground-breaking use of moving photographs, shed a light on a little known part of the Chinese diaspora - the vaudeville circus performer - through the life of her great grandfather.

Born in Japan of Chinese, Austrian and Australian heritage, she calls Vancouver, B.C. her home.

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## DEVELOPMENT

*Shanghai Follies*, the feature film, has been developed with the financial assistance from



Based on the award-winning documentary *The Magical Life Of Long Tack Sam* written, directed and produced by ANN MARIE FLEMING. Co-produced by the NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA.

*The Magical Life Of Long Tack Sam* (graphic novel) written and designed by ANN MARIE FLEMING. Nominated for two Eisner Awards.