B A B Y

A film by **JOSEPH MARCONI**

2026 OFFICIAL SELECTION PHOENIX FILM FESTIVAL

Official Selection CINEQUEST FILM FESTIVAL

KIANA MADEIRA

MAURY STERLING MARIELLE SCOTT BLAKE LINDSLEY WITH IRENE BEDARD AND AMY HARGREAVES

UPPERSTATE presents in association with PLUMBOY PICTURES, DIVISIONIST FILMS, and LITTLE IDEA MEDIA A film by JOSEPH MARCONI KIANA MADEIRA "BABY LOVE" MAURY STERLING MARIELLE SCOTT BLAKE LINDSLEY with IRENE BEDARD and AMY HARGREAVES Music by MONDO BOYS Edited by ARIANNA TOMASETTIG Production Designer TESSLA HASTINGS Director of Photography DAVID VOLLRATH Executive Producers KIANA MADEIRA JON COLLINS-BLACK NATASHA SILVER BELL STEPHEN NEMETH BLAKE LINDSLEY IRELAND MORAN DIVISIONIST FILMS ALINOR STERLING MOLLY STERLING YOUNG BOOZER DAN MORILAK VICTORIA SHAMSHOYAN ZACHARY GREEN A LIST CONSTRUCTION Produced by LYSETTE URUS, P.G.A. JOSEPH MARCONI MAURY STERLING Written and Directed by JOSEPH MARCONI

upperstate

L O V E

Baby Love

Written & Directed by Joseph Marconi
Produced by Lysette Urus, p.g.a,
Maury Sterling, Joseph Marconi

USA | 2025 | Color | 87 minutes

Contact:

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www.babylovefilm.com

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Synopsis

Logline

A female MMA fighter on the brink of self-destruction finds a lifeline in a court-ordered equine therapy program, leading her to confront her past and redefine her future.

Synopsis

Rhiannon “Baby Love” is an MMA fighter on the brink of self-destruction who battles through underground fight circuits, facing physical and emotional turmoil. When a series of concussions threaten her career, she is forced into an unconventional equine therapy program. Skeptical and defiant, she gradually bonds with the horses and the program’s patients, rediscovering her inner strength and confronting her past. As she heals, she must decide whether to return to the cage or forge a new path.

Watch the Feature

87 min | Screener available on request: joseph@upperstate.tv

Filmmakers

Joseph Marconi

Writer/ Director/Producer

Los Angeles, CA

Joseph is a writer and director from the Hudson Valley, New York. He began his career in advertising, working with global companies like BBDO and Showtime. After a brief stint as a New York City nightlife photographer, he transitioned to writing and directing short films, music videos, and branded content. His short film, *Baby Love*, won Best Short Film and Best Made in Montana Film at the 2021 MINT Film Festival. He edited the documentary feature *Hargrove* (directed by Eliane Henri) and the Muslim Futurism music video *Alhamdu* (directed by Abbas Rattani), both of which premiered at Tribeca 2022. Joseph is also a 2021 Film Independent Fellow. *Baby Love* will be his debut feature film. Joseph is represented by Brian Levy at Entertainment 360.

Lysette Urus

Producer

Los Angeles, CA

Lysette is a multifaceted producer originally from the NY metro area. Lysette has built a career producing documentaries, including *As We Speak* for Paramount+ which premiered at Sundance in 2024 and *Who is Michael Jang?* which premiered at the San Francisco Doc Fest in 2024. *Baby Love* will be Lysette's first narrative feature as the lead producer. She is a 2021 alumni of the Film Independent Producing Lab and Fast Track.

Maury Sterling

Producer/Actor

Los Angeles, CA

Maury is an actor, writer, and producer originally from Mill Valley, California. As an actor, he has appeared in numerous films, series, and recurring roles, most notably of late as Max Piotrowski on the Showtime juggernaut *Homeland*. Maury and his wife Alexis recently launched their production company Little Idea Media. Under the banner of this new production company, which aspires to create stories that challenge narrative, perspective, and tradition, they have produced the short film *Blood and Water*, the feature *My Dead Friend Zoe* (winner of the 2024 SXSW Audience Award) and now *Baby Love*. Maury is represented by Forward Entertainment, and Innovative Artists.

Kiana Madeira

Star / Executive Producer

New York, NY
Toronto, Canada

Kiana Madeira is a powerhouse actress who's past credits prove that she cannot be put in a box. Although she started her career in Toronto at the age of ten, Kiana's international breakthrough came when she led the cast in the hit Netflix horror trilogy "Fear Street." Playing multiple characters across three timelines, Kiana's seemingly effortless ability to take on the challenge did not go unnoticed. She went on to star in the Toronto Film Festival favorite "Brother", which earned her an ACTRA Awards nomination for Outstanding Female Performance. Brother won fourteen Canadian Screen Awards and now lives on Netflix. Being no stranger to the streamer, Kiana also stars in the Netflix Original series "Trinkets" and the hit "After" franchise of YA films.

Breaking into the action space, Kiana has recently starred in the film "Perfect Addiction" where she brought to life Sienna Lane; an MMA trainer-turned-fighter. Her physicality in this role has carved a lane for her as she is currently set to star in the survivor thriller "Titan", with filming commencing later this year. The "Resident Evil" Producers Constantin Film & JB Pictures are behind both Perfect Addiction and Titan.

Kiana is currently making her first leap into producing as executive producer of "Baby Love", an indie fighter drama centered around Madeira who portrays the lead character.

She currently splits her time between Toronto and the US and is bi-coastal.

Credits

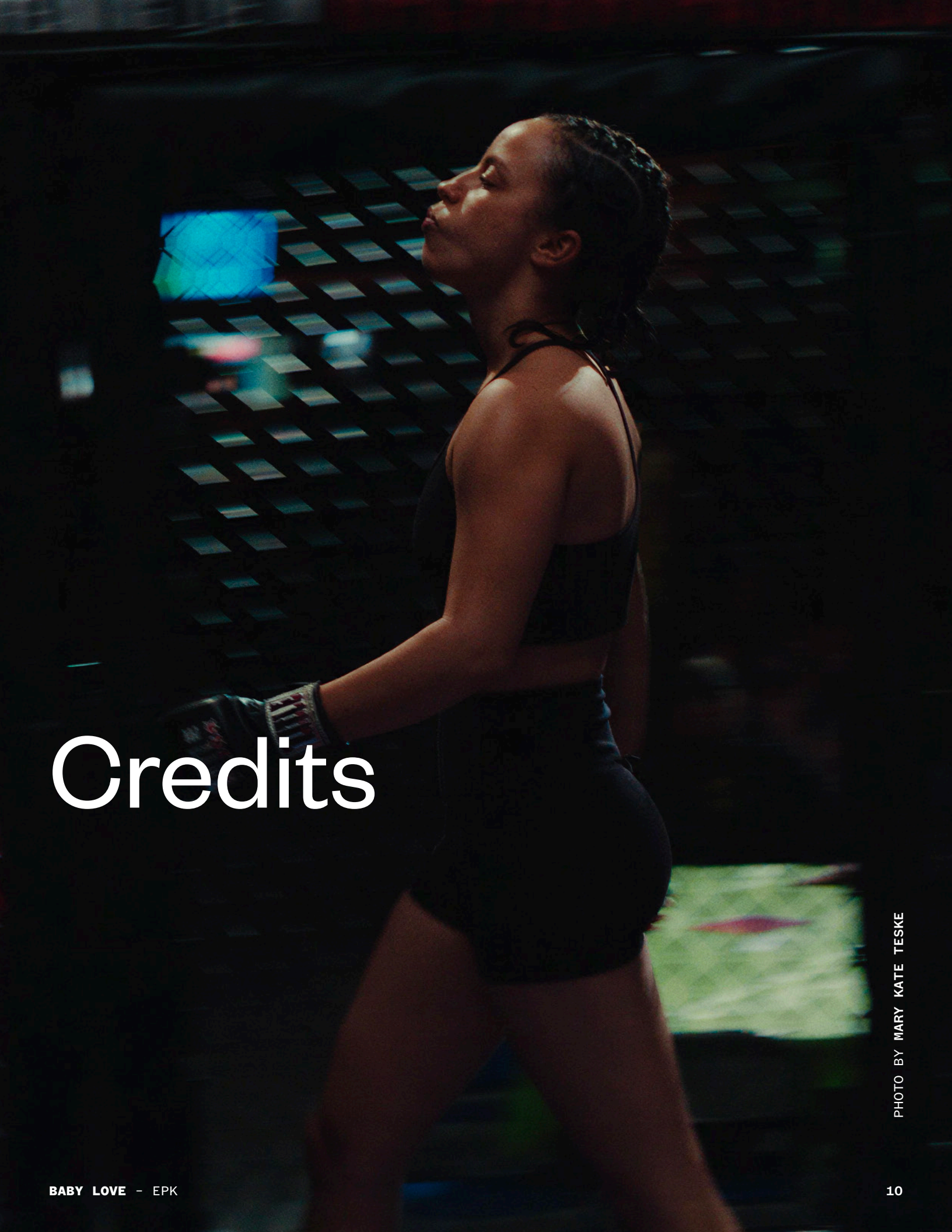


PHOTO BY **MARY KATE TESKE**

Cast

Rhiannon Mitchell	Kiana Madeira
Daryl	Maury Sterling
Josh	Beau Linnell
Harry	Sam Debree
Mary	Mary Ritano
Sierra	Marielle Scott
Big Boy	Isaac Akers
Skinny Boy	Dash Taylor
Neurologist	Cory Birk
Social Worker	Ciara Griffin
Nora Owens	Blake Lindsley
Cherry Bennett	Irene Bedard
Leighann Mitchell	Amy Hargreaves
Annie Boylan	Ariel O'Neill
Referee	Shea O'Neill
Veterinarian	Beth Uthaug
Wally	Matthew Woody
Annie's Boxing Coach	John Amtmann

Crew

Casting by	Terese Classen
Original Score by	Mondo Boys
Costume Designer	Daphne Sweet, Fiona Story, Misty Rose
Edited by	Arianna Tomasettig
Production Designer / Props	Tessla Hastings
Art Director / Props Assistant	Tracy Nitschke
Director of Photography	David Vollrath
Executive Producers	Kiana Madeira, Jon Collins-Black, Stephen Nemeth, Blake Lindsley, Natasha Silver Bell, Divisionist Films
Line Producer	Jeri Rafter
Co-Producer	Chance Housley
Produced by	Maury Sterling, Joseph Marconi
Produced by	Lysette Urus
Written and Directed by	Joseph Marconi

FILM INDEPENDENT

AFF 15. american film festival 5–11.11.2024, wrocław 5–17.11.2024, online

SAG·AFTRA

MONTANA FILM OFFICE

MONTANA BIG SKY FILM GRANT Recipient

Press

Press

American Projects and Partners Participating in U.S. in Progress Announced!

— American Film Festival | **Wrocław**

'Fear Street's Kiana Madeira To Exec Produce, Star In Indie Fighter Drama 'Baby Love' From Joseph Marconi

— Matt Grobar | **Deadline**

Guest Post: Lysette Urus Shares Her "Spa-Like" Escape at Producing Lab and Fast Track

— Lysette Urus | **Film Independent**

Film Independent Reveals 2021 Producing Lab Fellow Participants

— Valerie Complex | **Deadline**

UK, Bangladeshi projects among Film Independent Fast Track Film Finance Market selections

— Jeremy Kay | **Screen Daily**

Fourteen films projects to shoot in Montana after being awarded $500,000 in grants

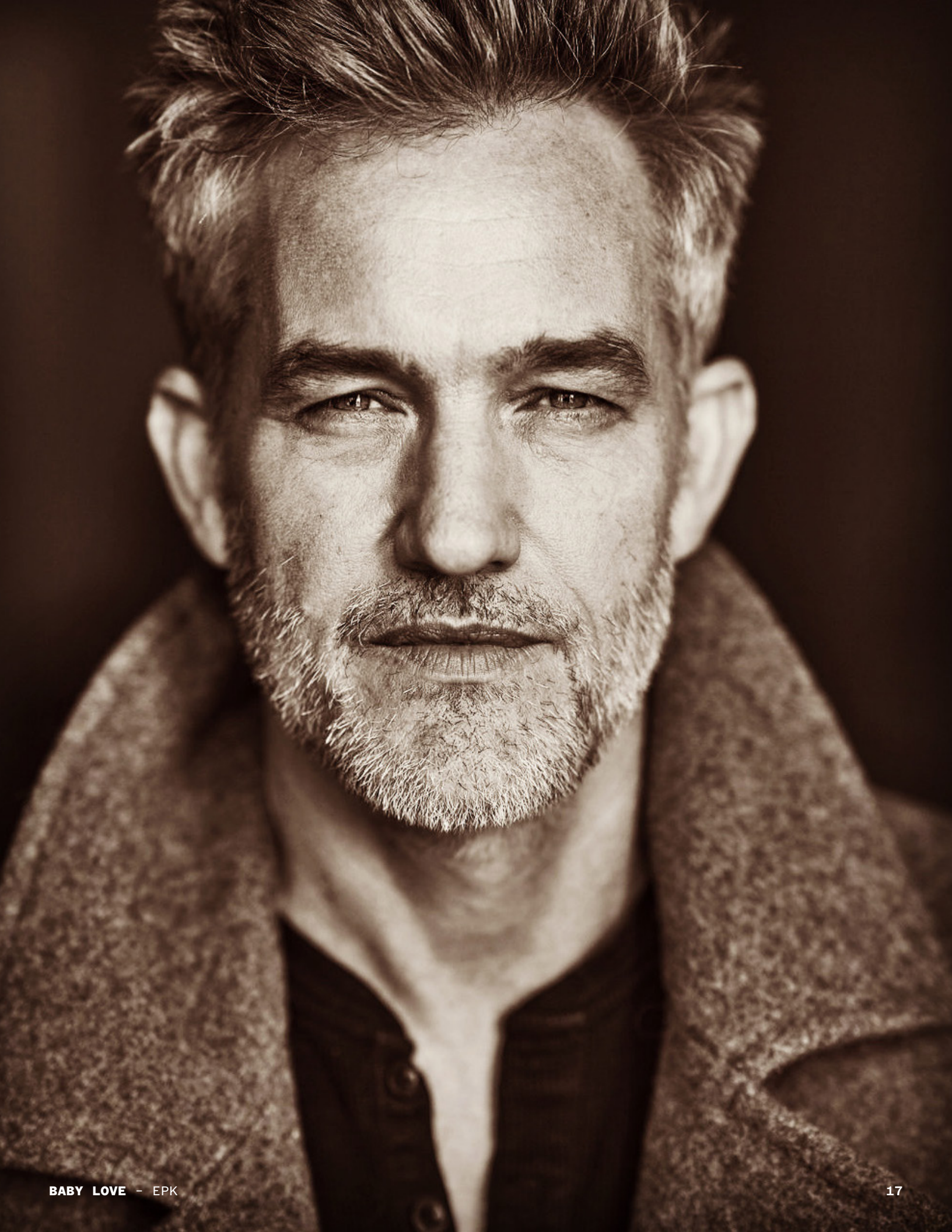
— Maria Anderson ABC FOX Reporter | **Montana Right Now**

Kiana Madeira

Where do I even start? Bringing Rhiannon to life was such an honor and privilege. And the crazy part is, her name wasn't even Rhiannon until the day I started filming. To give some context: I was originally cast to play the supporting role of Sierra in the film. On the day I was scheduled to fly from New York City to Montana, literally an hour before being picked up to head to the airport, I got a call from my agent and manager saying that production had been filming for two days, and the lead of the film had to pull out. They expressed that the team would love to offer me the lead role, if I would be down to hop on the flight and jump right in upon touchdown in Montana. They were already two days behind schedule, and there was no time to waste. My initial thought was "what? Heck no. I'm not prepared to play the lead role. This is a lot to ask. Plus, I haven't been training to portray an MMA fighter, blah, blah, fear, fear." But then I realized that I had actually been halfway through the "75 Hard Challenge" and was, in fact, in great shape to portray a fighter. In terms of the ability to fight, I had played an MMA trainer in a film two years prior called Perfect Addiction. The stars seemed to be aligning. So, in a matter of seconds, with an encouraging nudge from my husband, my reaction went from fear to thrilling acceptance; I was down to dive in and discover who this character was, all while filming. I knew it would be a challenge, but I felt in my spirit that it was not one I could shy away from. Jump to today, I am incredibly proud of my decision, the entire team behind this film, and what we have created out of resilience, determination, and love. Joseph Marconi, our director, has been our anchor and north star in this entire process. From my perspective, he provided a calm within what could have been a chaotic storm from the day I arrived in Montana. Now, a close friend of mine, he's told me that he was far from feeling calm, but that's the magic of being a wonderful director; he managed to create a safe space for us all to play, express, and experiment despite every obstacle that was presented. Lysette, our fantastic producer, was there every single day with a contagious laugh and enthusiasm for all that I was bringing to the role; it propelled me forward in ways that are beyond words. My rock of a co-star and mentor, Maury Sterling, also showed me what both producing and acting entails. He welcomed me with open arms, and his generosity set the stage for the magic that was destined to manifest on screen.

Baby Love has taught, and continues to teach me, that independent filmmaking is not for the faint of heart. It is an uphill battle, but it is worth every single step. The creative team behind this film has been working for 7 years to bring this to life and share it with the world. That is inspiring and, quite frankly, absolutely astonishing. In an industry where it is way too easy to grow discouraged and give up, they never have. And I know that we never will. I pray that this film finds the home and launching pad that it deserves. I truly feel that we caught lightning in a bottle with this one. I thank God that I am a part of this team.

Kiana.



Getting to be a part of *Baby Love* was a dream come true on multiple fronts.

When my dear friend and writer/producer Joe Marconi showed me the proof of concept for Baby Love, that he and producer Lysette Urus had made, I immediately told him that I would do anything I could to help him make the feature version with no strings attached. That said, having been an actor for many years, my wife and I had recently launched our production company, Little Idea Media, and were on the hunt for projects we found inspiring and Baby Love was the exact type of thing we were looking for. A couple of weeks later when Joe asked me if I would help produce, and play the role of Daryl, I was floored.

Joe is a truly amazing creative force, storyteller, and filmmaker and a dear friend. But I knew he hadn't ask me to be in the film as a favor. He was asking me to be in the film because he believed I could play the role. A type of role that I don't usually get to play, and have always wanted to play. As and actor that vote of confidence meant the world. I felt both apprehensive and excited, things I feel when I care deeply about something. So, getting to make a film with a creator and friend I admire, about subject matter I feel strongly about (martial arts and horses), and shot in Montana (a place I love), yes, dreams come true.

The process has been scrappy, dynamic, challenging, and surprising, and through it all we have never given up, mirroring the fighting spirit of the lead character Rhiannon. My fellow producer Lysette Urus is a force and Joe has managed to pivot in hardship, create and re-create, never losing sight of his vision and the heartbeat of this story. One of the greatest things that happened to us came through and unfortunate situation in which we lost our original lead actor. But it meant that the astoundingly talented, kind, and wonderful Kiana Madeira stepped in to take over in nothing short of a miraculous fashion. Her performance is moving, fierce, honest, and beautiful.

I am so proud of this film and cannot thank enough all of the people who came together to make it happen; our crew in Montana were amazing, Shea and Ariel O'Neill who trained us and took us into their home and school and provided all kinds of support, everyone in the post production process, and our family and friends who have all supported us.

I am so grateful to be a part of this film.

Maury.

Director’s Statement

You could say this is a boxing movie, but this isn't a boxing movie. Not in the traditional sense, anyway. Not to me. For me, it's about what happens after you break. It's about the hopes and the dreams we work toward, sometimes foolishly, and then the floor falls out from under you. "Baby Love" began more as a feeling than an idea or a story. Sure, the world of fighting was attractive both narratively and stylistically, but I was more interested in what happened outside the arena. What did these athletes go through to stand tall on the canvas on a Saturday night? What kind of madness did they subject themselves to?

I heard about equine therapy on a podcast. It was said in passing, but it did that thing where a little seed falls into your mind and digs its roots way down deep and becomes an itch you just can't quite scratch until it's 3 AM, and you're like, "Fine! What do you want?!" Once I started digging around, I had the basic formula for something I would spend the next six years working on: a talented fighter with a traumatic brain injury whose only recourse is through therapy sessions with a rescue horse.

Montana became of interest because I knew some fighters up there and quickly started making inroads with the fighting and equine communities. I'm from the Hudson Valley in New York, so I liked the idea of somewhere a bit more country and remote. But there was also a certain authenticity I wanted, and while researching for the script, I spent time with local fighters, equine therapists, veterans, and police officers, many of whom had experienced head trauma and some who had actually been through the equine program. They helped give me incredible insight and nuance into their experiences, the effects and treatment for head trauma, and how the relationships with their horses helped them dramatically improve their lives.

In early 2024, we finally managed to raise the funds to go into production, but from the onset, I learned the inherent impossibility of filmmaking. We lost our lead on day two of shooting. That's a death blow for a fourteen-day shoot. It was that moment where time stood still, and a thousand possible futures raced through my mind. We considered shutting down production, but I just couldn't turn around and go home. Not after the last six years of non-stop believing, struggling through dozens of revisions, losing hope, gaining it back, and losing it all over again. And then finally scraping together just over $250,000 to fly to Montana and do it anyway after everyone else told us "no." Giving up wasn't an option.

Kiana Madeira was cast in a supporting role in the film, and she was literally boarding the plane when we called her to ask if she wanted the lead. She'd read the whole script, of course, but she hadn't prepared for the lead. And by pure virtue of the film gods, she'd done an MMA film previously, so she had some chops in the cage. But this role was a different animal. Our hearts went into atrial fibrillation waiting for her decision, but when she landed six hours later, we had a new lead.

You have to take chances when making indie films, but this felt dangerous. I didn't know

what to expect. But Kiana stepped on set and became Rhiannon Mitchell. It was sorcery. She made the character completely her own; unexpected and raw. She breathed fire into all of us. We went to Montana expecting to make one film, but quickly realized we were making something entirely new, something we had to figure out as we went along. Each night, I was up late doing rewrites. We lost locations, actors, horses, even cities. My producers worked overtime, huddled over drab hotel lobby furniture till midnight, masterfully keeping the production in working order.

The most common question over the years has been, “Why does she fight?” This is a curious question to me. It wasn’t a question that ever really crossed my mind. Would they ask the same of a male fighter? I don’t know. But for me, the idea of looking into the arena as an outsider was more compelling. How can you achieve something you’ve never known? I could see parallels to my own life, I guess. Some vague notions from my subconscious that glimmer into focus every now and then, a little “hello” to let me know I’m on the right path. I connect to the opportunity of recovery, the gift of letting go that somehow has directed my feet exactly where I needed to go.

Joe.

PHOTO BY MARY KATE TESKE

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