



Presents

# BRIDE FLIGHT

Directed by Ben Sombogaart

Screenplay by Marieke van der Pol

130 Minutes

Rated R - For a strong sex scene and some graphic nudity  
In Dutch and English with English Subtitles.

Press information available at:

<http://www.musicboxfilms.com/bride-flight>

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## SYNOPSIS

Spanning over five decades, BRIDE FLIGHT is inspired by the true story of the 1953 "Last Great Air Race" London-Christchurch (NZ), and follows Esther (Anna Drijver), Ada (Karina Smulders) and Marjorie (Elise Schaap), three young women who, eager to escape post-WWII Holland, emigrate to New Zealand for what they hope will be a better life.

On the plane trip overseas – dubbed the “Bride Flight” – the three become fast friends and meet Frank, a dashing young man (played by Waldemar Torenstra and Rutger Hauer in his later years) who will come to play a critical role in each of their lives. They all part ways on arrival in their new country as two of the women's fiancés await them - but their paths continue to cross in the years to come in life-altering ways.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

**Director Ben Sombogaart: “In the end, the past always catches up with you”**

### **Prehistory**

“Producer Anton Smit saw the original newscast of the Bride Flight of 1953. The images inspired him and he asked researcher Ross Fraser to look for more material. There was plenty. Not only did journalists fly in the race, but in the next years and decades they visited New Zealand to find how the emigrants were faring. The stories were fascinating. IDTV Film requested a script from Marieke van der Pol and approached me to direct it. I was immediately enthusiastic. I was touched by the subject and the stories. I’d worked with the company before on my film *Twin Sisters* which had been a very pleasant experience.

### **Fiction and reality**

“Marieke wrote first a screenplay, with three very different characters. Afterwards, together with a journalist, she visited New Zealand and interviewed a number of women who had emigrated. Many of those stories are woven into the final script. The characters are fictitious, but the experiences during the voyage and in the new country are real. One woman told us that her husband had found a war bunker on the west coast (to defend New Zealand against a Japanese invasion). He had bought the bunker and rebuilt it for her as a nice home. They lived in it for thirty years. A beautiful story that inspired Marieke to use for Ada and Derk’s home in the film. In Auckland, Marieke met a Jewish woman who owns a bridal salon. Esther is partially based on her and we are using the atmosphere of the store in the film.”

### **Emigration**

“I can still remember the stories I heard as little boy about the emigration wave. They made a deep impression on me. Thousands of people who left for the other end of the world and who you would never see again. To New Zealand or

Canada. One aunt emigrated to Australia. Those were countries I had only read about in *Abeltje*. It seemed at the time one big adventure. Later I heard why the people were leaving. After the war and the flooding, life in the Netherlands was for many people precarious and poor. There was lack of housing. Young, ambitious people had little to look forward to. That is why they went in search of happiness elsewhere.”

### **Themes**

“The core of the movie for me is that the lives of three women and one man – four intriguing and moving characters – become interwoven. One important theme is the confrontation with the past. The main characters are in search of happiness. They want to build a new life in a far away country. But they are also fleeing. Esther is Jewish. Her family was murdered by the Germans. Frank lost his family in a Japanese camp. Derk’s family drowned during the flooding. Ada and Marjorie have also their reasons for leaving the Netherlands. Just like in my film, *Twin Sisters*, they are courageous people who are trying to survive. But can you escape your past? In the end it always catches up with you. That is the tragedy for me.”

### **Ada, Esther and Marjorie**

“Because of her faith and education, feelings of guilt and sin, Ada is forced to marry a boy who she met one time one evening behind the mill. She is on her way to New Zealand to spend the rest of her life with him. That is sad. She had probably totally different dreams. How does she fare? How does Esther succeed in becoming a successful fashion designer in New Zealand in spite of her traumatic past? These are interesting questions in this film. How do people succeed in surviving and making something of their life in spite of their problems? This is also true for Marjorie. Initially she appears to be materialistic and calculating. She dreams of money, a handsome husband, beautiful children and a nice house with a sea view. Marjorie is the most homesick, she misses her father and mother. In the end she is confronted by misery, because in New Zealand everything that can go wrong, goes wrong.”

### **Casting**

“Casting – with Marina Wijn of Kemna Casting – was a complicated process. For the three girls, we were not only looking for good actresses, but also women who did not resemble each other, not physically but also not in personality, and they had to fit together well. We looked both for talent and harmony, the perfect picture. Furthermore, for each woman we had to find a suitable man plus a fourth man, the adventurer Frank, who plays an important role in the life of all women. Finally, for the older women roles we looked for three actresses of approximately seventy years old, who not only had to fit together but also with the twenty year olds. For the younger ones, we tested at least ten actors per role, retaining always three or four serious candidates. Ultimately, it was about the three that fit together best.”

## **The actors**

“We are now a few weeks into rehearsals and what strikes me is how close the actors are to their characters. Waldemar Torenstra has an enormous personality, but has also Frank’s charm, mystery and vulnerability. Anna Drijver is not only an outstanding actress and a beautiful woman, but with her modeling background and fashion interest she has also a lot of affinity with Esther. Elisa Schaap is a great talent. She is disarming and she has precisely the stubbornness and contagious humor of Marjorie. Karina Smulders has the most acting experience and in addition she possesses the physical presence, the sensuality, the melancholy and attractiveness of the girl just arriving from the *Polder*. She is a skilful actress who gives an enormous depth to innocence. At the first great reading we were convinced of the older actresses. Willeke van Amelrooy, Pleuni Touw and Petra Laseur were our first choices and after an hour we knew that they were it.”

## **Form**

“I talked a lot with the cinematographer, Piotr Kukla, about the images and mood that we wanted to create. The story takes place in 1953, in 1963 and today. We want to give those three time periods each their own colors and camera work. For 1953 we are using the original black and white news images of the Bride Flight. Cut through those images we meet the four main characters at the London airport. The first part of the film, until arrival in Christchurch remains rather faded. The camera work is still rather static. For 1963, a more romantic period, we use a lot of pastel tints and the camera work becomes more mobile with many crane shots and moving shots. In the present, the camera work is the most dynamic, we use a lot of tele-lenses, the colors are more modern and hard, with a lot of blue tints. In this way, the viewer can feel continuously, even without intermediate titles, in what time period the story is taking place.”

## **Expectations**

“Bride Flight is a romantic and captivating epic for a broad public. Older viewers will recognize the image of the time and the historical facts, younger viewers the experiences of the three twenty year olds. It is a timeless story that touches and moves you, with recognizable emotions and characters. It is about young people in search of adventure, who long for a new beginning, their own existence and who must make important decisions.”

In 1953 the historic long distance air race took place from London to Christchurch, New Zealand, was called: “The Last Great Air Race”. One of the participating airplanes was “The Flying Dutchman”. After a voyage of 37 hours and 30 minutes they arrived first in New Zealand. The passengers on this flight were predominantly emigrants, young Dutch brides on their way to their husbands in the new homeland. For this reason, the flight was also called the

Bride Flight. Fifty years after the facts, Marieke van der Pol wrote a script that was made into a movie by Ben Sombogaart.

**Excerpts from the original travel diary of Toos van der Meulen-van der Laan, one of the brides on the flight. She kept a diary of the voyage for the *Deventer Daily* and the *Handelsblad*.**

***Deventer Daily*, October 10, 1953: In two days from London to New Zealand.**  
Bidding farewell to the Netherlands.

But coming back to the departure: our names are called and we must say goodbye. Not an easy moment, but we keep in mind that we are going to meet happiness... A last wave to the family and we are seated, and before we know it we are flying.

***Handelsblad*, October 12, 1953:**

**Three thin sheets of blue paper with the account of Liftmaster-passengers.**

A lot of turbulence right now, so we are strapped down with seat belts. No one is sick, only the ears are bothering. They are continuously serving something different: coffee, sherry or port with a salty snack or sausage. A few men who cannot sit still help out. A sheet is passed through: height 5000 m, cloudy, outside temperature 20 degrees, speed 511 km. Other than that, good night. The lights are already out in front. Everyone is asleep, reclined seat, blue blanket, pillow, what else do you want?

Rangoon, we arrive at 11:30. After 22 hours we can stick our nose outside the door for the first time. It is short, 15 minutes, but not less appreciated. Rough weather, fasten seat belts, lightning, luckily it doesn't last long.

***Stock Markets and News: Pioneer blood always shows***

Full speed ahead and we are flying again, enthusiastically waved off by many Dutchmen, who came to the airport especially for this. It makes you feel good. They give thumbs up as sign of strength in your new homeland and...remember that you are winners! Keep up the name of our country.

***Stock Markets and News: October 8, 1953:***

**With the "Abel Tasman" to London to participate in the Christchurch race.**

There was immediately a pleasant mood and it remained like that. Almost none of the emigrants ever flew before, but they are all talking quietly and looking outside and this in spite of the fact that you just said farewell to your fatherland, which you will remember with pride in New Zealand.

***Handelsblad*, October 9, 1953:**

**Impressions of an emigrant:**

When at 4:10 our plane taxied to the runway, we were waved off by thousands of enthusiastic spectators. In our cabin the tension had reached a peak. Another 20

seconds and then full power ahead! The race has started. A spontaneous "hurray" sounded in our plane and we sang at the top of our lungs "*Hup Holland, hup.*" Every passenger feels at ease, like at home. Once in a while one of the passengers gets upon and chats pleasantly with a fellow passengers. It is like we have known each other for years."

***Deventer Daily, October 13, 1953: In the Liftmaster from London to Karachi.***

The inside of the plane is very nice for a freight plane. Blue floor covering, white nets for the luggage, blue seats, which can be placed in a marvelous position by the press of a button. The curtains are new.

***Deventer Daily, October 14, 1953: In slippers over Pakistan.***

To Rangoon, seven hours flight. But we don't care anymore. When we are tired of sitting still, we go for a little walk and a chat. Of course, we are talking about New Zealand and our plans. I haven't heard anyone who is not full of courage. Pioneer blood always shows.

## ABOUT DIRECTOR BEN SOMBOGAART

Award-winning director Ben Sombogaart is a graduate of the Netherlands Film and Television Academy. He has directed many documentaries and TV series both in Holland and abroad. He has also been involved in developing children's programming for Dutch broadcaster VPRO TV and BOS BROS Film- TV Productions. His 2002 film *TWIN SISTERS* was one of the five nominees for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and was released in the United States.

### SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2009	THE STORM
2008	BRIDE FLIGHT
2006	CRUSADE IN JEANS
2004	PLUK VAN DE PETTEFLET
2002	TWIN SISTERS
1996	THE BOY WHO STOPPED TALKING
1989	MY FATHER LIVES IN RIO

### CAST BIOGRAPHIES

#### **Elise Schaap (Young Marjorie)**

*Bride Flight* is Elise Schaap's feature film debut. A graduate of the Amsterdam Theatre School, her previous work includes commercials and television, including *Hot News*, *Keyzer & de Boer Advocaten*, *Costa*, *Security*, *The Swing Girls* and *Heading West*.

#### **Karina Smulders (Young Ada)**

Karina Smulders made her feature film debut in 2000 in *De Vriendschap*, before she graduated from the Amsterdam Theatre School in 2002. She gained attention for her role as German pop star Nina Hagen in *Wild Romance* and has recently appeared in a number of films including *A Thousand Kisses*, *Ober*, *Wolfsbergen* and *Don't Touch My Children*, along with roles in several television series.

#### **Anna Drijver (Young Esther)**

A graduate of the Amsterdam Theatre School, film and television actress Anna Drijver is best known to Dutch audiences for her starring role in the popular television series *Bitches*. Her feature film credits include *Flirt*, *Feestje* and *Loft*. Drijver has also appeared on stage in productions of *De bloedbruiloft* and *Buitengewoon binnen*. A model since she was 15, she has graced the covers of Dutch and international magazines as well as walked the runways of Diesel, Tommy Hilfiger and Dutch designers a.o. Mart Visser and Frans Molenaar.

#### **Waldemar Torenstra (Young Frank)**

Waldemar Torenstra has acted in such feature films as *Tiramisu*, *Zomerhitte*, *Diep*, *Johan*, *Ja zuster, nee zuster* and *The Happy Housewife* and studied at the Amsterdam Theatre School. Torenstra has been part of a diverse group of theatre companies including Bos Theaterproducties, Orkater, Ro Theater, De Trust and Noord Nederlands Toneel.

**Rutger Hauer (Frank)**

*Bride Flight* is Award winning actor Rutger Hauer's first Dutch feature film in over 25 years. In 1969 he became a national celebrity with a starring role in the television series *Floris*, directed by Paul Verhoeven. Hauer and Verhoeven collaborated on several feature films including *Turks Fruit*, *Keetje Tippel*, *Soldaat van Oranje* and *Spetters*. Hauer starred opposite Sylvester Stallone in *Nighthawks* and Harrison Ford in *Blade Runner* and during the course of his career has appeared in many international productions including *Ladyhawke*, *Flesh+Blood*, *The Hitcher*, *Escape from Sobibor*, *The Legend of the Holy Drinker*, *Fatherland*, *The 10th Kingdom*, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, *Smallville*, *Sin City*, *Batman Begins* and *The Rite*. Hauer's latest film *Hobo With a Shotgun* made its debut at the Sundance Film Festival.

**Pleuni Touw (Ada)**

Pleuni Touw graduated from the Theatre School in Arnhem and has appeared in many theatre productions. Her feature film work includes *Rufus* and *Zwaarmoedige verhalen voor bij de centrale verwarming*, *Het debuut*, *Lieve jongens*, *Het verboden bacchanaal*, *De tussentijd*, *Filmpje!*, *De Vriendschap* and *De dominee*.

**Petra Laseur (Marjorie)**

Award winning actress Petra Laseur has appeared in *Oom Wanja*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Groot en klein*, *Flanagan*, *De Mannetjesmaker*, *Antonia*, *Familie*, *The Discovery of Heaven* and *Leef!* She has been tied to several theatre companies including Nederlandse Comedie, Globe, het Publiekstheater, Toneelgroep Amsterdam.

**Willeke van Ammelrooy (Esther)**

Veteran award-winning film, television and stage actress Willeke van Ammelrooy starred in the title role of the Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Language *Antonia's Line*. First noticed for her lead performance in *Mira*, she went on to star in feature films *De inbreker*, *Frank en Eva*, *The Family*, *Help, de dokter verzuipt!*, *Alicia*, *Het jaar van de kreeft*, *Wan Pipel*, *Grijpstra & De Gier*, *Een vlucht regenwulpen*, *De lift*, *Ciske de rat*, *Mariken*, *De schippers van de Kameleon*, *Dennis P. and The Hell of '63*. She made her debut as a director in 1994 with the feature film *De vlinder tilt de kat op*.



### **About the producers: IDTV Film**

Acclaimed Dutch production company IDTV Film was established in 1999 by producers Hanneke Niens and Anton Smit. It has enjoyed great success at home and abroad with films such as *Godforsaken* (Pieter Kuijpers), *Family* (Maria Goos and Willem van de Sande Bakhuyzen), *Cloaca* (Willem van de Sande Bakhuyzen en Maria Goos), *Life!* (Maria Goos and Willem van de Sande Bakhuyzen), *A Thousand Kisses* (Willem van de Sande Bakhuyzen), *Escort* (Frank Ketelaar) and *Twin Sisters* (Ben Sombogaart) which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2004.

### **About Music Box Films**

Founded in 2007, Music Box Films has quickly established itself as one of the leading distributors of non-English language feature films in the US in theatres, on DVD/Blu-ray and via Video-on-Demand. Music Box's release of Guillaume Canet's TELL NO ONE was the most popular foreign-language film of 2008 and in 2010, the film adaptations of Stieg Larsson trilogy of international mega sellers dominated the foreign-language film market. The first in the series, THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO, with over \$10 million in US box office was one the most popular international releases of the decade. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation which also owns and operates The Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premiere venue for independent and foreign films.

## CAST

Ada	KARINA SMULDERS
Marjorie	ELISE SCHAAP
Esther	ANNA DRIJVER
Frank	WALDEMAR TORENSTRA
Old Frank	RUTGER HAUER
Old Ada	PLEUNI TOUW
Old Marjorie	PETRA LASEUR
Old Esther	WILLEKE VAN AMMELROOY

## CREW

Director	Ben Sombogaart
Screenplay	Marieke van der Pol
Cinematography	Piotr Kukla
Producers	IDTV Film: Anton Smit & Hanneke Niens (The Netherlands)
Co-producers	Samsa Film: Jani Thiltges (Luxembourg) NCRV (Dutch public broadcaster)
A film from	DTV Film, in co-production with Samsa Film & NCRV (Dutch broadcaster)