

## Disorderly behaviour

>> Isabelle Blais gives a brave and commanding performance in the sexually explicit local drama *Borderline*



PROMISCUOUS GIRL: Blais

by MALCOLM FRASER

Up to now, Isabelle Blais has been a low-key but steady fixture on the local arts scene. She appeared in *The Barbarian Invasions* (as Rémi Girard's daughter), as well as several movies, TV shows and plays, and she sings for local rockers Caïman Fu. But from the opening credits of *Borderline*, in which she pours a bottle of red wine over her naked body, she asserts herself as a bold and commanding presence.

Blais plays an aspiring novelist named Kiki Labrèche; given that the film is based on two autobiographical novels by Marie-Sissi Labrèche, it's not too much of a stretch to assume she's a stand-in for the writer. In an acting tour de force, Blais plays Kiki at age 20 as a promiscuous, self-destructive trainwreck, and at 30, when she's settled down somewhat, but still has multiple issues, notably an affair with her married literature professor (Jean-Hugues Anglade). Working through her writer's block, she revisits her troubled childhood, her relationships with her institutionalized mother (Sylvie Drapeau) and shut-in grandmother (Angèle Coutu), and an epic list of ill-advised romantic entanglements.

The film is likely to cause much chatter with its frequent and explicit sex scenes, and indeed Blais goes above and beyond the call of duty in this regard. But in the era of the "real sex" film (*Shortbus*, *9 Songs* et al.), that's not such a big deal; it's not the physical nudity but the emotional rawness that makes Blais's performance so brave.

There's a memorable scene where, in a drunken rage, she strips completely naked at a party, pushing away the well-intentioned souls who try to cover her up. Anyone who's dealt directly or indirectly with borderline personalities will recognize the irrational lashing out, the misguided desperation for attention, and it's both painful and impressive to see it captured so perfectly.

Director Lyne Charlebois, who co-wrote the film with Labrèche, makes a few missteps—the resolution, in particular, is both pat and uncertain—but considering it's her first feature, she has quite a sure hand with the atmosphere and performances. [At any rate, Blais is a shoo-in for Québécois and Canadian acting awards, and an actor to keep an eye on in the future.](#)

***Borderline* opens  
this Friday, Feb. 8**

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