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press kit  
for  
shhh



# Shhh | about

sci-fi/fantasy/horror  
short film | ten minutes & 45 seconds

produced by What is F,  
swerve studios &  
Means of Production Inc.

## shhh

Award-winning visual effects (VFX) artists Freddy Chávez Olmos and Shervin Shoghian have co-directed and produced their first independent short film: *Shhh*. Over the years, they have worked their artistic magic on top films like *Tron Legacy*, *District 9*, *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight*, and the Oscar-winning *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*. Inspired by the childhood reverie of director Guillermo del Toro, the two friends collaborated with Toronto-based script-writer Michael Stasyna to pen a tale of their own. *Shhh* is a short film blending state-of-the-art visual and makeup effects to tell the story of a young boy who uses his imagination to overcome being bullied.

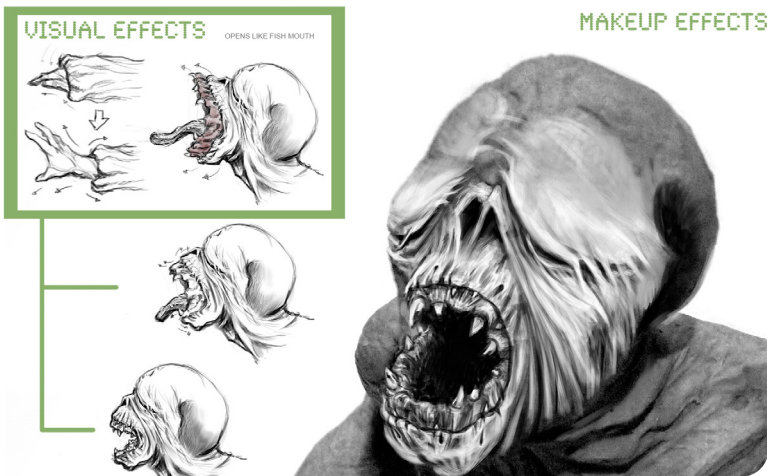
## the making of a monster

With the use of Sion Lee Widjaja's concept design, Shoghian and Chávez Olmos worked closely with Tibor Farkas to create a

Shoghian. Surprising words from someone who recently finished a world tour speaking to hundreds of audience members about the cutting-edge technology used on *Tron Legacy*. However, Shoghian and Chávez Olmos's background in visual effects and makeup effects may certainly be the very reason why the film has clear direction. "You develop an eye for what you want to work with in post-production," mentions Shoghian. "The key is to find the right balance for what can be done practically on set and what to leave in post. A sort of hybrid creation between techniques," adds Chávez Olmos. Many of the crew members didn't hesitate to join the team after seeing the amount of effort that went into the pre-production design.

## production matters

The passion of the co-directors/producers drew the attention of Heinrich Beisheim. Heinrich has worked in the film industry for over ten years and is head of production at one of Vancouver's top TV commercial production houses, Means of Production Inc. "We were lucky to have him as part of the team; he was key in organizing our production equipment rentals (including a RED camera), in securing locations, permits and local talent, and in running the budget and accounts for the shoot," notes Shoghian. A valued association that would lead to the recruitment of one of the most sought after cinematographers for his contemporary stylized work, Tico Poulakakis—winner of Cannes Film Lions Grand Prix Award for *Evolution* (2007), and Best Cinematography Award at Through Her Eyes Women's Festival in New York. "We needed someone who felt right for the project from the get-go, and after seeing Tico's past work we certainly felt we had someone who could bring a lot more to the table," adds Chávez Olmos. Tico wasn't the only one to eagerly jump on board; many of Shoghian and Chávez Olmos's colleagues at VFX studios Image Engine and Digital Domain collaborated on the film's post-production stage.



Monster concept art by Sion Lee Widjaja.

full-body prosthetic piece for the film's monster. "The monster is an abstract concept, onto which audience members are invited to project their own forms of oppression," says Shoghian. That said, "it was important that Tibor understood the psychology of our eight-year-old protagonist, in order to bring the monster to life. This would also serve as a foundation for creating our makeup effects," adds Chávez Olmos.

Constructing a full-body creature suit is not an easy task. It requires great creativity and technical skills: life-casting, sculpting, molding, running foam, baking, painting, applying makeup, you name it. You also need a performer to play the monster. Thanks to contemporary dancer, Ashley Whitehead, the creature had its puppeteer. After much effort, Farkas delivered an impressive prosthetic that could be enhanced in post-production with digital effects.

Throughout the process, the directors wanted to strike a balance between makeup and visual effects. "We wanted to use as many traditional forms of filmmaking and have the visual effects assist the story rather than be the story," notes

## no bullies for me

Since the film has a strong anti-bullying message, the cast and crew wore pink t-shirts on set as part of the Pink Shirt Day anti-bullying campaign. *Shhh* also supports the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Vancouver.

## the good stuff

Working within a limited budget (roughly \$15,000) and delivering a high production value has its challenges. "It's motivated us to take it to the next level," states Freddy. And with *Shhh* now hitting the festival film circuit with great success, the duo are ready for their next film: a feature.

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[www.shhh-film.com](http://www.shhh-film.com) (trailer & photo gallery)  
IMDB (full cast & crew)

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# Shhh | synopses



## **in brief**

*Shhh* is a tale of a boy who overcomes his fear and bully by using his imagination.

## **longer**

*Shhh* borders on the real and imaginary. *Guillermo*, our young protagonist, puts pen to paper as he obsessively draws what he fears most: a hair-eating monster. In fact, lurking in the shadows of the washroom, the creature is more than a figment of his imagination. Every day, *Guillermo* must feed the monster his own hair for his safeguarding. A personification of his true bully (his sister *Hellena*), *Guillermo* eventually conquers his fear only to realize that his tormentor might not be as fictitious as one may have thought.

Inspired by the childhood reveries of director and monster-creator Guillermo del Toro.

Sean Michael Kyer as *Guillermo* (left) and Ilze Burger as *Hellena*.

# Shhh | Qs & the directors...

freddy chávez olmos & shervin shoghian



Shervin (left) and Freddy.

## Why the name Shhh?

**S says:** The word *Shhh* can harbour many meanings:

to be quiet, to keep a secret or to put someone down. I think the title lent itself to the film as a whole.

**F says:** We were looking for a title that evoked different meanings and would keep audiences wondering what the film was about. *Shhh* can convey a variety of sentiments and can be applied differently to each of the film's characters. In this sense, it was the perfect title.

## You both come from a visual/makeup effects background. How has this influenced your storytelling approach?

**S says:** Films today use visual effects as a hook. A lot of money and time are spent on over-producing digitized scenes. The films I like are more about the narrative and characters—where visual effects support the story, rather than are the story.

**F says:** With horror films, my makeup and digital effects background comes into play, but like the directors I admire (Sam Raimi, Peter Jackson, Guillermo del Toro and Robert Rodriguez), it's not about big budgets or crazy shots, but having a good relatable story. If anything, special effects are more of an added bonus.

## From effects to a short film...why now?

**S says:** I have been doing visual effects for over ten years. As an industry it's becoming stagnant. I wanted to create content rather than service it.

**F says:** I've always wanted to direct my own films. *Shhh* was the perfect opportunity to learn more about the filmmaking process and the film industry. No better time than the present. (Smiles.)

## Was the anti-bullying message intentional or developed through the script-writing stage?

**S says:** We didn't intend to make an anti-bullying short. But that is the joy of writing a script—other angles develop along the way.

**F says:** We came across it as we went through script revisions. We knew that one of the film's themes was about overcom-

ing childhood fears. In writing the script, it became apparent that bullying should be one of them as well.

## A hair-eating monster...how did this come to be?

**S says:** I hate cleaning out clogged shower drains with all that wet clumpy hair. It's pretty gross and even grosser if a monster would eat it.

**F says:** We wanted our monster to do something completely different from what you typically see in the movies. Just like Shervin, hair in the drain creeps me out. A hair-eating creature would also do well to scare an audience—be it a child or adult moviegoer. Over time, the hair element became an asset in the film's overall storyline.

## Why use prosthetics over visual effects?

**S says:** We wanted to strike a balance between prosthetics and traditional makeup applications, and digital effects. It was important to the storyline and the film's visual presentation.

**F says:** People always say, "If you can't do it on set leave it for post." The way I see it, you shouldn't leave it to post if you know you can do it on set. A full CG shot will always look like a full CG shot—no matter how much time you spend on it. It looks too perfect. Traditional applications never look perfect. Working with



The monster prosthetic, designed by Tibor Farkas.

makeup and digital effects techniques, you learn how to trick the eye by having the right balance between the two. *Shhh* in this sense is a true hybrid of styles.

## Where was the film shot? Why this location?

**F says:** The film was shot at the Galbraith House in New

# Shhh | ...more Qs

Westminster, BC (just outside of Vancouver). We chose this location because we were looking for a heritage house with period elements and interesting features. A claw-foot bathtub was an important component in the script and this location had it.

**S says:** It provided the perfect backdrop and texture for the film. We really lucked out with the location.

## What was it like working with child actors? How did you cast the monster?

**F says:** Luckily, we got Sean Michael Kyer (*Guillermo*) and Ilze Burger (*Hellena*) on board. Working with children can be challenging at times, but Sean and Ilze were exceptionally talented young performers. They had great chemistry on screen.

Casting the monster was equally as challenging. The prosthetic took over seven hours to apply, and required a lot of physical work, not to mention limited movement and vision. Sarah Ann Chisholm (our production manager) introduced us to Ashley Whitehead, who's a truly talented contemporary dancer. Ashley's energy and experience in performing arts truly brought the monster to life.



Sean Michael Kyer and Ashley Whitehead as *the monster*.

## Describe your directing style in 5 words.

**S says:** I shoot for the edit.

**F says:** Good story + good effects = success.

## What was it like co-directing/producing Shhh?

**S says:** A great experience. We were able to bounce ideas off each other, and in the end, create a film that matched our vision. Two heads are better than one—especially when they both offer creative ideas. It truly made the process much more enjoyable.

**F says:** Shervin has always been a very creative and talented artist. And in working with him, I've come to realize we share the same passion and ideas in terms of filmmaking. We respect and support each other. Collaborating on *Shhh* only made the film a stronger piece.

## What were the highlights and challenges of directing/producing Shhh?

**S says:** Organization. It was challenging having to schedule the cast and crew. The actual shooting was easy. Pre-production took the most time. But it was, and continues to be, an amazing ride. I've learned more from directing and producing a ten minute short than I ever did in film school or working in the post-production industry. I loved it.

**F says:** The whole filmmaking experience was a highlight. I learned a lot. *Shhh* was like a training camp; it helped us understand every aspect of the filmmaking process—with the advantage of having complete creative control. The main challenge for me was time management. We put in a lot of hours, while at the same time working our day jobs in the visual effects industry. Sometimes Shervin, Sarah Ann and I would have online meetings at three in the morning. Challenges bring out the best in people and the making of *Shhh* was no exception. From script-writing, managing people, writing budgets, to directing actors, making key decisions, and marketing ideas—this has been the best rollercoaster ride!

## As directors and producers, what have you learned about filmmaking?

**S says:** Still learning. Get back to me in ten years. (Grins.)

**F says:** It's a collaborative process. I've come to realize I'm on the right path and that I'm ready to tackle what lies ahead.

## If you could do it again, what would you do differently?

**S says:** I would create a more detailed shot list. Shot lists are uber important.

**F says:** Schedule one more day of shooting to avoid pick-ups.

## Favourite horror/fantasy films?

**S says:** Tough one...hmmm...*Pan's Labyrinth*, *Let the Right One In*, *Shutter Island*.

**F says:** *The Evil Dead*, *Dead Alive*, *Pan's Labyrinth* and *The Exorcist*.

## Which filmmakers inspire you?

**S says:** Neill Blomkamp, Duncan Jones, Gareth Edwards, Christopher Nolan, Paul Thomas Anderson and Paul W.S. Anderson.

**F says:** Charlie Chaplin, Guillermo del Toro, David Fincher, Paul Thomas Anderson, Robert Rodríguez, Neill Blomkamp and Peter Jackson.

## What's next for you two?

**S says:** Freddy and I are working on our first feature. It's more political and serious in nature. I think we'll turn a few heads; in terms of story, it has some present day relevance. It's currently in development. More to come!

# Shhh | Freddy & Shervin's thoughts



There are times in life when inspiration grabs a hold of you. For me, this moment came while I was doing post-production for the film *District 9*. A friend at work shared a video clip on Mexican director Guillermo del Toro which spoke of his fascination with monsters and horror films. He spoke about how he started seeing green ants on the wall and monsters in his closet after watching an *Outer Limits* episode. That's the exact moment he made a pact with the monsters. "If you're nice to me and let me go to the bathroom, I'll devote my life to you." That's the reason del Toro started to do horror films.

I am a great admirer of del Toro's life and work. In a way, our lives have taken similar paths. As a child, I was a huge fan of *La Hora Marcada*—a Mexican horror show—which I later learned Guillermo had directed a few episodes. Del Toro also has a background in makeup effects and worked closely with prosthetic effects master Dick Smith (*The Exorcist*, *The Godfather*, *Taxi Driver*)—who is a mentor of mine. Guillermo also left his native Mexico to live abroad. I now live and work in Vancouver.

Del Toro's clip set the wheels in motion. I wanted to make a film inspired by his childhood fantasies, his obsession with monsters and the power of imagination. Not only that, I wanted to make a short where I could marry filmmaking techniques with the makeup (prosthetics) and visual effects I have learned over the years. It was the perfect opportunity to collaborate with fellow filmmakers and artists who could bring that vision to fruition.

And with that came the stepping stones to making *Shhh*. I was told "passion comes with a price" but I am a firm believer that without hard work and dedication, ideas remain concepts and are never actualized. I was fortunate to work with Michael (co-writer of *Shhh*) and Shervin. Together we penned the script and hit the ground running.

Shervin is a passionate filmmaker, talented colleague and friend. With our backgrounds in makeup and visual effects, we sought to create a film that relied on storytelling as much as its digital prowess. In many ways this project has allowed us to embark on a new chapter in our careers, as co-writers, directors and producers.

That said, *Shhh* was a collaborative effort, bringing together a group of talented professionals and artists from across Canada—not to mention our concept artists, prosthetic, makeup and visual effects designers, editors, composers, cast and crew.

Paulo Coelho said it best in *The Alchemist*: "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it." The making of *Shhh* was no exception.

– Freddy Chávez Olmos

Both Freddy and I have contributed to some pretty huge tent pole films—mostly big production and studio films. And like most big-budget flicks, they follow a rather simple formula: lots of effects equals blockbuster. I'm not saying that it's a bad thing, but it wasn't the direction Freddy and I wanted to follow.

As a filmmaker, story is and always will be paramount. Even as a digital artist, this is imperative and apparent. If you aren't able to engage an audience with your characters and the arc of your film, unfortunately, adding explosions and 3D art won't help much. Harsh words from someone in the industry? Perhaps. Visual effects are fantastic but they're best when they add to a film, but aren't the film. Think matte painting work, secondary characters and environments. Digital effects have certainly come a long way. Still, there are few films that have found the balance between story and the computer-generated component.

It's a matter of time, patience and work. Surely. Prosthetics involve more takes, realistic lighting and an actual actor in a suit, if possible. Personally, though, I'd rather have access to the object—so I can direct it and place it in the shot. As a filmmaker, it gives you a greater sense of direction through and through. Obviously, some films can't achieve this, so visual effects come into play.

Still, getting the shot is one thing—playing co-writer, director, producer and visual effects artist is quite another. In a perfect world, all filmmakers would love to do the creative and leave the juggling of financial worry and timelines for others to carry. But like every newcomer director, going through the ringer better equips you for the industry and definitely prepares you for your next project.

Any regrets? Often times your main enemy is lack of time. Looking back, I would have sat down with the Director of Photography and AD (Assistant Director) and really gone through our shot list. This would have allowed us to really nail the look and pace before a single camera was rolled onto set.

All work aside, both Freddy and I are huge fans of film. When we can, we try to watch a lot of them during film festivals. We also like to showcase our work for everyone to see...after all why make a film when only a few people can enjoy it? For this reason, we applied to as many festivals where we felt the film would be seen by a diverse audience and get maximum exposure. Obviously everyone has their favourites and there's the prestige to be invited to the big festivals. We're simply excited by the whole process. And can't wait to put our new-found knowledge to the test. Onto the next!

– Shervin Shoghian

# Shhh | cast & crew...

## freddy chávez olmos

co-writer, director & producer  
what is f



Influenced from an early age by horror movies and music, Freddy started his career creating his own productions with his family and friends in Puebla, Mexico. Consequently, he found a way to convert his hobby into a profession. Freddy is a graduate of the Film Production program at the Vancouver Film School in Canada.

Interested in learning more about special effect techniques, he went to Los Angeles to pursue his studies in makeup effects at the Cinema Makeup School. After graduating, he was accepted into the Advanced Prosthetic program led by the legendary godfather of makeup effects, Dick Smith—whose past protégés include Mexican director, Guillermo del Toro and Academy Award-winning makeup artist, Rick Baker. Freddy was selected as one of eight contestants to compete in the International Makeup Artist Tradeshow in Pasadena, California and gained an internship at the Makeup & Effects Laboratories Inc., a renowned effects studio in North Hollywood.

With Vancouver quickly becoming a hot spot for film production, Freddy decided to make it his permanent home. He continued expanding his traditional effects background by gaining more digital knowledge and thus, completing his studies in 3D animation and visual effects at the Vancouver Film School. His talent in visual effects has afforded him the opportunity to work on acclaimed Hollywood productions such as *District 9*, *The Thing*, *Tron Legacy*, *Watchmen*, *The Incredible Hulk* and *The Dark Knight*, among others. He recently wrapped up on Neill Blomkamp's highly anticipated film *Elysium*. Chávez Olmos is currently working at world-renowned visual effects company Industrial Light & Magic for Guillermo del Toro's next film, *Pacific Rim*.

To date, *Shhh* is his greatest achievement yet. Freddy is currently developing his feature film debut along with Shervin.

## shervin shoghian

co-writer, director & producer  
swerve studios



A new and inventive computer graphic artist, Shervin Shoghian has done it all: from concept design to creating captivating visual effects.

A graduate of the Advanced Computer Animation and Modeling program at the University of Toronto and the Advanced Film and Television program at Sheridan College, Shoghian has applied his artistic vision to such critically acclaimed films as *Watchmen*, the Oscar-winning *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *X-Men: The Last Stand*, *The Fantastic Four*, *Outlander*, *The Incredible Hulk* and *District 9*, for which he won a 2009 Visual Effects Society (VES) Award for Best Visual Effects Compositing for the feature.

In addition to his work as a digital artist, Shervin has designed presentations for the public sector including online marketing presentations and corporate videos for the Town of Markham, the Region of Peel and Environment Canada. He has also created branding strategies for national companies such as Concord Transportation, Admiral Canada, Venture Steel, Canpar Logistics and the Athens 2004 Summer Olympics pitch for CBC, in which he won a Broadcaster Design Award.

Shervin continues to lend his talents to visual effects studios throughout Canada, including soho vfx, Mr. X Inc., SPINVFX, CIS Vancouver, Image Engine and Digital Domain.

# Shhh | cast & crew...

## **michael stasyna**

co-writer  
WEB



Mike Stasyna is a Toronto-based scriptwriter focused on writing feature films and festival shorts for Canadian and international production teams, including Island Verve, a firm that professionally formats, rewrites and structures scripts.

Art-trained at the University of Toronto, Stasyna has had the pleasure to work across the globe—from England, Australia, Vanuatu, to the Dominican Republic and the United States. He is currently working on two features and three shorts for five production teams.

## **tico poulakakis**

director of photography  
WEB



Tico Poulakakis is a Toronto-based director of photography. Renowned for his attention to detail, he's a true jack of all trades—leading his vision and skills to commercial, music video, television and film worlds.

Poulakakis is the recipient of the Cannes Film Lions Grand Prix Award (2007), in addition to winning the Best Cinematography Award at Through Her Eyes Women Film Festival, among others. He continues to leave his creative mark mixing mediums in ad campaigns and staging brilliant images on the big screen.

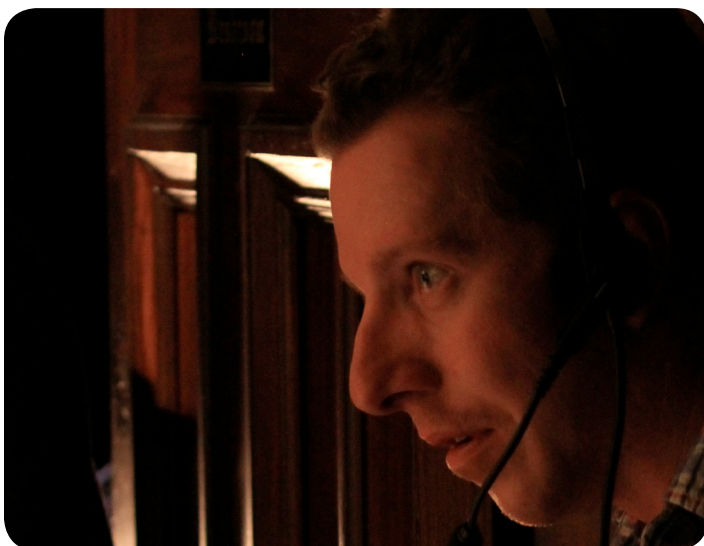
## **heinrich beisheim**

producer  
means of production inc.

Heinrich Beisheim is a native of South Africa. After graduating from the theatre program at University of Stellenbosch, Heinrich segued into Cape Town's vibrant film community. Here he quickly worked his way up from electric to camera assistant to production coordinator on commercial, film and television projects for producers from all over the world.

A desire to travel the world and a chance meeting with a Canadian producer proved serendipitous, leading him to Vancouver, where he joined the TV commercial and film industry.

Heinrich is currently working as Head of Production for both Means of Production Inc.'s TV commercial and film division. He's been instrumental in developing content for MoP Films, establishing relationships with foreign producers and setting up tax credit strategies for visiting production companies. Heinrich has produced and co-produced over a dozen short films.



# Shhh | cast & crew...

## **sion lee widjaja**

monster concept artist  
WEB



Born and raised on an island of Java, Indonesia, Sion has always had a passion for the arts. After completing his studies in graphic design in Toronto, Canada, he worked as a graphic artist for various projects—from storyboarding, illustration and concept design.

In 2009, he moved to Vancouver to pursue further studies in the field of digital media and 3D modeling. Through hard work and good fortune, he met the talented and passionate people working on the short film *Shhh*. Inspired by their passion and determination, he joined the team and created concept art and storyboard for this amazing project. He is truly grateful to have had the chance to become part of something so special.

## **ashley whitehead**

cast as *the monster*

Ashley Whitehead is a Vancouver-based professional contemporary dancer. With extensive training and experience in gymnastics, jazz and hip hop, Ashley has spent the last few years focusing on her contemporary development in the Modus Operandi Training Company, under the direction of Tiffany Tregarthen and David Raymond.

Ashley teaches locally, and trains with several groups of innovative dancers of varying styles. Ashley has started exploring her choreographic career, and her love of acting through movement.

## **tibor farkas**

prosthetic & monster designer  
IMDB



Tibor spent the majority of his childhood playing with creatures, monsters and aliens in his father's prosthetic shop. His first set experience was at the age of three when he was brought to the studio where they were filming *The Death of the Incredible Hulk*, starring Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno. This wouldn't be the last either.

By the time he was in kindergarten, he began to sculpt. As he grew older, Tibor focused on honing the art of makeup effects, absorbing every bit of information from his father as he could. By the age of seven, Tibor had produced his first full-face prosthetic.

Tibor Farkas is the owner of Theta Effect, a prosthetic and character creature design company in Vancouver, BC. Theta Effects recently wrapped on *Caesar: Rise of the Apes* and continues to push the limits of organic realism.



# Shhh | ...cast & crew

**sean michael kyer**

cast as *guillermo*



Sean Michael Kyer was born for the screen, making his acting debut at the ripe age of two. Since then he's been a set regular, being featured in TV spots and films such as *Fringe*, *Everything and Everyone* (2011), and of course, *Shhh* (2011).

A creative soul, Kyer hopes to meld his love of the craft with his many other interests: sports, video games and chess.

**ilze burger**

cast as *hellena*



Ilze Burger began her foray into the film industry at the age of five when she began participating in modeling competitions in her native South Africa.

After her family moved to Vancouver, she began performing in a variety of stage musicals such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Guys and Dolls* and *Mary Poppins*—putting her three-octave range to good use. Most recently, Burger has taken to the film set, leading in *Shhh* and starring in the TV series, *Standing Alone*.

