



calling the shots

She's put the bristly *Shortland Street* character Rachel McKenna behind her and, as director of a new TV drama, Angela Bloomfield's career is on the rise again

WORDS SARAH LANG PHOTOGRAPHS EMMA BASS

YOU CAN TELL ANGELA Bloomfield is a practised multi-tasker. Curled up on the couch of her fern-fringed Oratia, West Auckland home, the pint-sized actor-director manages to play with three-year-old daughter Maya, placate four-year-old son Max and talk to me without missing a beat.

Softly spoken with a subtle sense of humour, bare-faced Angela looks implausibly girlish for a woman of 36. Apart from her locks, no longer fire-engine red but her natural sandy/strawberry blonde, she looks much the same as she did during nine years playing fiery Rachel McKenna (1992-1999, 2001-2002) on perennially-popular TV2 soap *Shortland Street*.

In 2003, after in-house training, Angela slipped behind the camera to direct the show. While going behind the scenes to direct her peers was initially "nerve-racking", those nerves soon settled.

Directing went on the backburner for three years once the kids came along, but in 2006, when Maya was six months old, Angela returned to work full time. Since then former hotel manager husband Chris has happily taken the childcare reins. Says Angela: "Knowing I wasn't going to be running out the front door yelling 'their lunches are on the table' to a nanny, I thought yeah, that'd be completely manageable. And it is," she smiles, helping Maya pull on an almost too-small sequined top. "What we do for fashion, eh Maya!" The tot responds with a torrent of what's gobbledegook to my ears but which Angela immediately understands.

While Maya's paler, more reserved brother Max has inherited his mother's delicate features, his rosy- ➔





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cheeked Shiloh lookalike sister has inherited her mum's sense of fun, taking great delight in tipping M&Ms into her pink shoes and swirling them around for a bit. En route through the lounge, Chris rescues his wife from having her face coloured in with M&Ms, as Angela asks him to remind her how long they've been married. "Six years, so we've been together for about six years-and-a-week. She stalked me," jokes Chris, an uber-affable guy with the same big grin as Maya's. Angela bursts out laughing: "Yeah, I asked him out. I asked him to marry me. I just thought 'He might not know what I'm thinking, so I better just tell him'." Adds Chris mock-soberly: "Plus there's a man drought."

Certainly a husband who cooks, cracks jokes and looks after the kids makes juggling a full-time job with motherhood a lot easier. Because *Shortland Street* shooting days stretch from 7.45am-6.30pm, some days Angela doesn't get to see the kids at all. "Sometimes I beg Chris to bring them into SPP [the soap's production company, South Pacific Pictures]. I know it's selfish. The kids get a bit more emotional then so it's a bit taxing on the one at home," she says, with a fond glance for Chris.

When not shooting, Angela usually works from home. To free up time with the kids, she often does prepping (devising detailed scene plans) and editing in one chunk in the morning or afternoon. If she needs to get a lot of

work done, she either gets stuck in when the kids are out with Chris or at kindy, or works from either SPP or her mum's house. "Once they're home that's the day done for me, I'm now there for them." If she, say, takes a Monday and Thursday morning off, she might make up that time by working at the weekend.

For her "sanity", every fifth week is a week off work "to just re-immerse ourselves in each other's lives. I'm aware that to be healthy and balanced you need to manage couple time, family time, work time and alone time. What we do compromise is not couple time but our independent time – which we all know as parents is rare!"

Despite time pressures, Angela's not averse to taking on new challenges like learning the samba for 2006's *Dancing with the Stars*, writing/starring in a 2008 48HOURS film competition entry, or stepping up from soap to drama directing. She's one of three directors calling the shots on new lighthearted drama *Go Girls*,

which comes to TV2 in February. Told through the eyes of childhood friend Kevin, it's the story of Amy, Britta and Cody who, experiencing a "quarter-century crisis" at 25, vow in one year they'll fulfil their ambitions: One to be rich, one famous and one married.

"Floored and flattered" to be asked to direct, Angela took 16 weeks off *Shortland Street* and did little else but work, eat and sleep. Even family time was cut short during 16-days-in-a-row shoots and the editing/prepping crossover at each end of the two shows. "It was six months of hell, then we came out the other side and Chris was like 'Oh that wasn't too bad!' I was shattered and looked it! But working on *Go Girls* was amazing and if it went [on-air] again, I'd be waving my hand to direct."

Something else she's putting her hand up for is more acting. While the star of mid-90s films *The Frighteners* and *Bonjour Timothy* did some auditioning post her *Street* role, it wasn't until TV2's 2007 boy-racer drama *Ride With The Devil* that the right part came along: As brassy solo mum Shona. Playing a mother for the first time, Angela found it "very easy to source that emotion. I think having children creates a shift within an actor: The giving over of yourself. You lose your ego and your impatience, which I find very sobering and calming."

Admitting she misses the "euphoric" acting buzz, Angela gets an almost dreamy look. And she's obviously →





ABOVE: Angela's *Shortland Street* character Rachel McKenna led a turbulent life. In 1994 (left) Rachel married boyfriend Nick Harrison to qualify for a student allowance. And, in 2001 (right) she was kidnapped by the villainous Jack Hewitt, who forced her to take part in a mock wedding ceremony then threw himself in front of a car.

still got the goods, judging by her nomination as best supporting actress at 2008's Qantas Film and Television Awards (for her *Ride With The Devil* part).

Despite the years that have passed, Angela's still trying to shrug off Rachel's shadow (and not just because people still yell out "Rachel!" on the street). "Sometimes I get auditions and I think they're looking for Rachel McKenna. But I can't really source her. It worked for a while, but we're entirely different people." Indeed, warm, relaxed Angela comes across as the polar opposite of hostile and sarcastic Rachel, who went through incarnations as a schoolgirl, student, bar manager, HR manager and social worker.

Although being struck by lightning and marrying for a student allowance are both up there, the storyline Angela most relished was Rachel's alcoholism. But in 2003 she quit, weary of the destructive road the character was heading down (and getting a flat-out no to her request to adjust the character a bit). Storylines included Rachel getting her tubes tied without telling then-boyfriend Chris, and practically shaking a baby.

"I wanted to get married and have children, and playing someone who really didn't, felt like I was affirming the wrong things five days a week." Still, if she could go back in time she'd join the cast at 19 and spend her 20s in the spotlight all over again.

Naturally petite Angela's always been able to eat without deprivation: including her biggest weakness, chocolate. "But I was always body-conscious. Nowadays I feel really comfortable in my body." Swimming and half-hour runs every few mornings (she's up at 6.15 and usually in bed by 9.30pm) help maintain her figure.

Reminding her she was dubbed *Shortland Street*'s sexiest-ever woman and "New Zealand's hottest actress"



by online fans, and in 2006 was voted by 1500 Kiwi women as having New Zealand's best breasts, gives Angela the giggles. "It was a massive laugh... I mean best breasts! But I think they had an old pre-kids photo. I was like 'Which boobs are you talking about?'"

She wanted to keep those assets under wraps when Rachel returned for a brief Chris-Warner-bedding reprise in 2007. What made the bedroom scenes particularly weird was that Michael Galvin was, by then, married to Angela's best friend Melissa (they were each other's bridesmaids). "I wrapped the sheet all the way around me so all you could see were my arms and head poking out!"

This from the woman who got her kit off for a *Ralph* magazine spread in 1999. Shot tastefully in black-and-white, with Angela culling the racier photos, she doesn't regret it. "I'm glad I have these wicked shots of myself. It's all about loving your body or at least trying to, because it is just a body. People try to use it as though it's a reflection of who you are, but it isn't."

Angela, whose blog on www.thewire.co.nz reveals the trials and tribulations of motherhood, admits she's not always so confident in her parenting. "A lot of it is incredibly instinctual," she says. On issues such as the kids being fussy eaters and Max liking guns, she and Chris "try to figure out the best approach together".

With Max getting tetchy that a stranger's usurping his Mum, and Maya bringing out the potty, it's time to go. Later Angela will text to say she'll drop off my forgotten sunglasses when she comes into town that evening. Rachel McKenna would have made me pick them up. ▀