



SUCK IT IN: Modelling can be a brutal business.

JANNA DIXON

version of the show and thought, 'at the end of my career the only continuation I could ever see is if I did a show like that but New Zealand would never do a *Top Model*.'

(He's since revised this, hosting *New Zealand's Hottest Home Baker*, and is currently in talks about roles on an Australian and a US TV show.)

Today, people approach him on the street – and in bar bathrooms. Once, strangers took his photo from behind when he was standing at the urinal in the men's room of a Wellington bar ("I was having a wazzle and there were these cameras behind me!"). Usually, the attention is welcome. In another bar, "three 20-something men said 'it's an honour to meet you', and what got me was they could pronounce my name. They were rugby boy louts!"

"I'm on a first-name basis with the country, and I love that. It's so sweet."

His belated homeland embrace was confirmed by his selection to front Tourism New Zealand's latest American advertising campaign. "That Indian guy" is now the face of New Zealand, so they can kiss my Indian ass."

Arrogant? Not in modelling terms – or television – where self-promotion is a job requirement. Which is why Mathura-Jeffree was so embarrassed

by viewer backlash against the unashamedly ambitious Hosanna Horsfall in the first season. ("Don't tell me that Hosanna wins," moaned Mary on a [www.throng.co.nz](http://www.throng.co.nz) comment thread, "She is as much of a freak as Teryl-Leigh, only she tries harder.")

Such criticism missed the point, he says. "Hosanna stood there on the platform and we were with a whole lot of internationals and clients and they all loved her. She was driven. All the other girls were standing there saying 'don't try so hard', [but] why shouldn't she try hard? It's a competition."

Modelling is a business of rejection, of long days and longer nights, he says. You need ambition and self-belief. "People say modelling's so easy because they look at the girl and she's making it look easy. But they don't know she's hanging off a cliff, it's four degrees and she's in a chiffon dress. Tomboys make the best models because they're tough: not only do you to be beautiful, you have to have a really good right hook."

First season winner Christobelle Grierson-Ryrie won him over with a flash of grit when he was privately reprimanding her for changing the order the contestants walked out in. "I said: 'Christobelle, if this was a fashion show, you would never change

the running format, who are you to do it?' She just nodded, took the telling off, but her eyes were steely. She had so much strength coming from them. And then I found out the reason she'd done it was she'd stood on a bee and had a severe bee sting."

If the show's relentless carping and culling seems harsh, it's only because this reflects the modelling world. "In modelling and fashion, we take no prisoners with comments. Like it, love it, hate it; time is money, literally down to the second. In the beautiful industry people are the most brutal."

Some would say a brutal effect of glamorous fashion modelling is the way it distorts body image and possibly fosters eating disorders among some models and non-models. This line of thinking prompted a voluntary industry code issued in June by the Australian government. The code discourages the use of super-thin models on the catwalk and of digital enhancement in magazines to make models appear even thinner, and prohibits fashion magazines

from running ads for rapid weight-loss diets and cosmetic surgery.

Mathura-Jeffree thinks the code is wrongheaded, and sees no call for one here. "The hodge-podge of a life of a teenage girl or boy

isn't just a picture in a magazine. It's their friends, it's bullying, it's whether they're trying to impress a boy or a girl, it's sexuality issues, it's a whole lot of things," he says.

"People need to lighten up: stop blaming the world's troubles on the models; we're just trying to show you how to dress."

His defence is familiar: thinnism can be as cruel as fattism; teenage models are naturally thin; clothes simply look better on slim people, actors and singers also role model thinness, why should fashion models get the rap? I'm not convinced: whatever the intention of the people in the fashion and magazine industry, the sum effect is to glamourise and normalise one body type over all others.

But this debate will keep. For now, Mathura-Jeffree's top concern is giving the *Top Model* contestants the reality-check of their lives. This time, he promises more hip-shooting and a tougher stand for his favourites. "I'm really not going to hold back. If I'm going out to fight for a girl with the other judges, I'm going to fight hard. I'm throwing out politeness."

The second season of *New Zealand's Next Top Model* debuts on TV3 this Friday at 7.30pm.

# Bad girl rising

After two years overseas, Miriama McDowell is back as a discontented go-go dancer in futuristic-thriller *This Is Not My Life*. By Sarah Lang.

THE FUTURE is shiny, serene, and boring. A future you can imagine happening – and happening soon. Talking micro-cars with carbon-credit allowances; replica homes devoid of individualism; public spaces with lots of soothing blue and grey; workstations without stationery; curtains that open with an arm motion. Forget *The Jetsons* – the world of TV One's new thriller series *This Is Not My Life* is our world, just jazzed up a little.

Directed by *Out of the Blue*'s Rob Sarkies, this brainchild of *Outrageous Fortune* co-creator Rachel Lang and fellow veteran Gavin Strawhan is shaping up to be a pearler. A kind of cross between *Edge of Darkness* and *The Truman Show*, with a splash of *Lost* and *The Matrix*.

In Thursday's double-episode premiere, Alec Ross (*Outrageous Fortune*'s Charles Measure with hair) woke up to his picture-perfect family in utopian community Waimoana, but could remember nothing about his life.

The doctor's story is that Alec has temporary amnesia from a bump to the head, but really, his brain chip hasn't "taken". Before they have another go at "restoring his memory", he records a video message to himself saying he isn't Alec Ross and shouldn't trust anyone, not even his worried wife Kelly (Tandi Wright). That message from the past reawakens his suspicions and efforts to figure out what's really going on, even though that could endanger his life. Big Brother is watching.

This Thursday, Alec crosses paths with pole-dancing prostitute Jessica Wilmott (Miriama McDowell). The discontented beauty, who was sacked after an office tryst at Alec's workplace Waimoana Water, is now a "hostess" in the Go-Go Club. Yes, even a utopian community provides a strip club to meet all its residents' needs. "Stripping is the new aerobics," declares McDowell as she shows me round her low-rent apartment on set, where a bed unfurls at the touch of a button. "I was really surprised how mainstream stripping and pole dancing are these days. People you'd never expect said 'oh yeah, I can show you how to do that'. And I watched Carmen Electra on the *Strip Tease Workout Video*."

Yep, the 30-year-old felt the pressure to shape up. "The revealing outfits can be a bit of a challenge, so I was going hard with a personal trainer."

Exuding a quiet calm and serenity, McDowell seems nothing like the flamboyant characters she often plays. The rising star of theatre, film and TV, whom you may remember as drama queen Hibiscus in New Zealand film *No. 2* or TK's prostitute friend Holly on *Shortland Street*, isn't worried about being typecast as a bad girl. "That just means I get to play really interesting dark, broody, sexy characters, which I like."

Like Alec, Jessica is questioning the reality of the world around her. "She has issues, a dark past. She's at a stage in her life where she never gets a break so she feels it doesn't matter what she does. She expects the worst. I actually really like her because she

changes her mind all the time, and that's what human beings are like."

Don't expect Jessica to stay a hooker for long. The scratches I spy on McDowell's body didn't come from bedroom scenes. "They're from my stunts: mainly being chased, running away, falling over, being dragged off." The inspiration to do her own stunts came from stuntman-turned-actor Steven A. Davis, who plays Jessica's suitor/stalker Gordy. "Gordy is one of those boys who loves you no matter what you do, which is really boring. You'd rather have someone who makes you work a bit harder. Jessica falls in love with a real man." She won't say who, though I'm guessing it's Alec. "It's a beautiful thing to play when you have a magnetic connection with someone the first time your eyes meet."

After two years in London with her filmmaker boyfriend – broken by a four-month stint back here last year to film *TINML* – McDowell moved back to Auckland this year. Currently she's juggling writing a mystery screenplay about a famous New Zealander with radio voiceover work and theatre gigs. "Theatre is my life blood. But I like TV for the short bursts of adrenalin." And there's plenty of adrenalin in *TINML*.

"Sometimes you need to take jobs, so it's exciting to work on a project that you know is really special. I scored."

What particularly attracted her was the premise of a utopian/dystopian future. "One where all the social rules, from feminism to fertility, have changed. I really like the idea that the choices we're making today – well, my character's paying for those choices in the future."

The show asks some really big questions, she says. "If we could have everything we wanted, what would it actually be like? And if you choose the perfect society, what do you have to give up and was it worth it? It's going to be a real mindbender."

*This Is Not My Life* plays on TV One, Thursdays at 8.30pm.

MEETING: Prostitute Jessica Wilmott meets Alec Ross – will they fall in love?

