



Teuila Blakely.

Height 170 cm

Master Of Ceremony Biography
JOHNSON&LAIRD

As the feisty yet surprisingly vulnerable charge nurse Vasa Levi on Shortland Street, Teuila Blakely is one of New Zealand's most recognizable faces.

But there is far more to her career than simply that of an actor. At various stages, Teuila has been a presenter and broadcaster. And she is also a talented writer, penning her own play *Island Girls* (2003) for which the New Zealand Herald named her one of the country's best young writers.

Such an all-round combination 's made Teuila very much in-demand, so it's not surprising she's also a star of the big screen, appearing in box office smashes *Sione's Wedding* and *Sione's 2: Unfinished Business*.

As one of the most prominent Pacific Islanders in the entertainment industry, Teuila, who is a Samoan Kiwi loves representing her people.

"I'm part of the first Pacific Island family on Shortland Street and I'm very proud of that," says Teuila. "It's a great honour and it's a responsibility too.

"I know that a lot of the community think that we don't represent them properly but I always say at least we're there."

And she's continuing to keep her people in the frame—now she's working on a film adaptation of her play.

"I don't think there's been a Pacific film told from the female perspective, so I think it will be really nice to show that side," says Teuila. "The last few years I've been so busy with acting that I've been waiting for one of the other girls to do it and it hasn't happened so I guess that's a cue for me."

Teuila also has two books she hopes to publish and is a voracious reader. As a child, she became inspired by stories of human struggle and was particularly moved by the true account of Harriet Tubman, an African American suffragette who escaped slavery and rescued more than 70 of her peers.

Growing up in Tauranga, Teuila and her family were exposed to racism and she considered becoming a lawyer so she could help force change. But she decided she was more likely to have an impact as a performer.

While Teuila is passionate about her Pacific Island roots and is by definition a role model, she's also fervent about music. After starting out in radio in community talkback—which by necessity means a broad interest and knowledge of current affairs - Teuila switched tack,

becoming Flava 's first drive time host.

Then she moved to breakfast on the national Pacific Island network Niu and later filled in on Mai. Television soon came calling and Teuila became synonymous with music television across both major networks, specializing in R'n B and hip hop, although she also loves rock.

"Music is probably my greatest passion, "she says"it's my escape. My life is filled with it. "

It 's made her in-demand in the industry, particularly since the live element of broadcasting and her inherent talents as a performer have given her the ability to think on her feet and freestyle if and whenever is necessary.

But don 't be fooled into thinking this full, diverse life in the arts has come easily to Teuila. Pregnant at 16, she raised her boy single-handedly, taking whatever jobs she could to survive.

Her son is now a young man and the experiences of raising him have been invaluable. Fiercely independent, Teuila has a deep and personal understanding of struggle and self-sacrifice and consequently has a rare ability to connect with a wide range of people.

Statistically she should have failed; the fact that she didn't is inspirational—and not just to an audience of young women either. The knocks have been hard but wisdom 's been acquired along the way.

"I 've certainly learnt a lot of life lessons incredibly young because of the responsibility I've had as a young woman, "she says. "I didn't have much support so I had to learn to get on with it. "

And on top of that, providing for a little one has taught her plenty about another of her interests; how to be a damn good cook.

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