



Aje lamé dress, \$695; [ajeworld.com.au](http://ajeworld.com.au). Valentino Garavani gold, coral and crystal earring, POA, and leather-rope flats, \$1,465; 02-8404 0888. OPPOSITE: Fendi cotton cardigan, \$2,100, silk shirt, \$1,350, silk shorts, \$1,650, and leather heels, \$1,290; [fendi.com](http://fendi.com). Reliquia gold-filled earrings, \$139; [reliquiajewellery.com](http://reliquiajewellery.com). Cos cotton-blend socks, \$14.95; 02-9231 3944. Ottoman from The Vault Sydney; [thevaultsydney.com](http://thevaultsydney.com)

# THE RARE BIRD

She dazzled the screen world with an AACTA-winning performance in *The Nightingale*.

Now, actor **MAGNOLIA MAYMURU** has set her sights on reframing perceptions

by **RACHEL SHARP**

photographed by **HUGH STEWART**

styled by **KATHERINE GREEN**







Prada mohair wool and glass-beaded coat, \$9,160; 02-9223 1688. Valet resin earrings, \$139; valetstudio.com. Miu Miu patent leather boots, \$2,350; 02-9223 1688. OPPOSITE: Oroton silk shirt, \$299; oroton.com







H&M Studio cotton blazer, \$210, and cotton pants, \$159; 1800 828 002. Celine by Hedi Slimane lapel pin, \$990; 02-9232 7051. Roger Vivier crystal-embellished velvet heels, \$3,100; rogervivier.com. OPPOSITE: Johanna Ortiz silk top, \$1,349, and silk skirt, \$1,549; at davidjones.com. Acne Studios brass earrings, approx \$400; 02-9232 2882. Prada leather flats, \$1,290; 02-9223 1688. Chair from The Vault Sydney; thevaultsydney.com

“I felt sick to my stomach that if I was born there back then, it would have been me; but it put a fire in my soul to tell their story”







Gucci cotton jacquard and patent leather jacket, \$4,000, cotton jacquard and patent leather pants, \$1,900, and leather boots, \$1,835; gucci.com. Reliquia gold-filled earrings, \$139; reliquiajewellery.com

**Hair:** Alan White  
**Make-up:** Sarah Tammer

## MEET MAGNOLIA

On the day Australia's answer to the Oscars revealed their 2019 award short-list, Maminydjama Maymuru, 23, was oblivious to the fact her name appeared. She was unaware she'd been nominated for the Best Supporting Actress AACTA award—alongside Oscar winner Hilary Swank and *Hotel Mumbai* star Tilda Cobham-Hervey, no less—as she was off-grid, hunting in remote East Arnhem Land.

“I knew *The Nightingale* was up for 14 awards but had no idea I was part of it until my ‘brother’ Josh Bond, who’s manager of [Indigenous dance troupe] the Chooky Boys, phoned me at 9pm,” says Maymuru. She went on to win for her heart-wrenching depiction of an Indigenous Tasmanian woman treated horrifically by British officers in the early 1800s. Her screen time in the film, directed by Jennifer Kent and co-produced by Bruna Papandrea, is relatively short but shockingly graphic. Even so, she’s captivating.

Describing herself as a proud traditional Yolngu girl from the Mangalili clan, Maymuru is the first to admit glitzy film festivals feel a world away from her hometown of Yirrkala. Located on the Gove Peninsula, a gruelling 600 kilometres on a mostly gravel road from its closest main city, Darwin, the tight-knit community of fewer than 1,000 is famous for its artwork, performers and traditional culture. In fact, Maymuru’s family tree is filled with accomplished and often famous relatives. Her great-grandmother Gulumbu Yunupingu (who passed in 2012, but Maymuru has given us permission to name) is one of Australia’s most celebrated Indigenous artists and hangs in the Louvre. Gulumbu’s brother Galarrwuy, known as the father of land rights, became Australian of the Year 1978 after lobbying the government to challenge overseas mining companies seeking to exploit traditional lands. Their brother, Mandawuy—Maymuru’s great-grandfather—was Yothu Yindi’s lead singer, while her father, Rrawun Maymuru, is lead singer of prominent rock-reggae band East Journey. His cousin, the much-celebrated Dr Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, was a nine-time ARIA winner and Australia’s top-selling Indigenous artist at the time of his passing, and her cousin, Rarriwuy Hick, is an actor on Foxtel’s *Wentworth*. The list goes on, and includes academic stars too, such as the beloved grandmother and grandfather who helped raise Maymuru, a prominent teacher and medical doctor respectively. “My family is quite successful at adapting with changing culture, but still keeping our cultural protocols,” she says thoughtfully. “So many talented Yolngu people have made a pathway for us [today].”

Maymuru, who works under her middle name Magnolia and was given the koel bird as her spiritual totem at birth, is keenly smart, polite and utterly likeable in person. Her willowy 180cm stature means she commands a room as she walks in, but ironically for someone who’s modelled since making the finals of Miss World Australia in 2016, she didn’t grow up reading fashion magazines. “I was more outdoorsy. I liked to hunt and go camping and netting with my family,”

she says, fondly recalling a childhood filled with music, dancing and play. “This is my homeland, my home,” she adds, proudly swiping through beach photos of Yirrkala on her iPhone. It was there she first encountered director Kent on a 2016 *Nightingale* casting tour. The confronting script and fact she’d have to crop her signature long hair didn’t deter her. Nor did the fact she’d have to audition and act in palawa kani, a language authentic to the movie’s remote Tasmanian setting but not one of the tongues she already spoke fluently. (Her native yolngu matha, which consists of six languages and 12 dialects, is very different.)

*The Nightingale* centres on Irish convict Clare, who seeks revenge for her family’s murder by military officers. While not based on a real story, it’s devastatingly true to the history of British troops who brought convicts to Tasmania then carried out mass genocide to “civilise” the land. The final cut helped Kent make AFI history as the first woman to win Best Film, Best Director and Best Screenplay AACTAs the same year. “From the very beginning, it punches you in the gut,” admits Maymuru of the film. “I felt sick to my stomach that if I was born there back then, it would have been me; but it put a fire in my soul to tell their story.”

Her next movie project, a drama called *High Ground* set in Kakadu in the ’30s against a backdrop of violent colonialism, stars Simon Baker and premieres at the Berlin Film Festival, starting February 20. Perhaps it’s in her blood that Maymuru isn’t afraid to tackle hard topics, especially those that impact her community today. “Last year, I dedicated myself to doing workshops on mental health and suicide prevention, travelling out to talk to our youth. There are so many children I’ve met with big dreams, but too many challenges and no opportunities. This is not limited to Australia, but when you’re a person of colour, you’re born into a society that has already passed judgement on you. There’s not much we can do but outshine it, but how can you do that if it’s all you hear and feel? I want them to be able to do something as simple as walk into a bar in the middle of Queensland, sit down and have food without thinking, ‘Why are they staring at me? Maybe I’m not wanted.’ I’ve had that happen to me so many times.”

She hopes to spark change in a professional sense, too. “I really admire women like Lupita Nyong’o, Rihanna and Naomi Campbell, who have broken through barriers in their own countries. There have been other beautiful Indigenous Australian models...like my ‘sister’ [friend] Charlee Fraser who I love so much...but [none with] my complexion. I feel like that’s always been the missing piece to my puzzle.” ■

*High Ground* premieres at the Berlin Film Festival before its Australian release later this year. Watch *The Nightingale* now on Apple TV.