

## MELANIE NEILAN BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised in the Chicago suburb of Highland Park, IL, Melanie's ancestry is Hungarian, Russian, Lithuanian, Mongolian, Irish and French.

At the age of ten, she earned a purple belt in Karate, at which time she began to study ballet seriously. She subsequently performed in a number of principal roles for the Stella/Makkai Youth Company, most notably *The Dying Swan* and *The Nutcracker*. At thirteen, she became a founding member of the esteemed A Red Orchid Theatre Youth Ensemble—where actor Michael Shannon was also a founder of the adult ensemble—and made her theatrical debut in *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*, followed by Chopin Theatre's 10th Annual Sketchbook Festival in x = exponential, and many others.

At eighteen, Melanie landed a principal role in *Russian Transport* at the renowned Steppenwolf Theatre, for which she became fluent in Russian. Shortly thereafter, she was cast as the uber-smart teenager in Stephen Cone's coming of age film *Henry Gamble's Birthday Party* (Cone Arts), which the Chicago Tribune's Michael Phillips named "one of the top 10 films to see at the 2015 Chicago International Film Festival". *Henry Gamble's Birthday Party* also screened in competition at the Best of the Fest, and subsequently won the Silver Q Hugo Award. The film has since screened at more than twenty film festivals worldwide, including the Brooklyn Academy of Music Cinema Festival.

Upon moving to Los Angeles, Melanie was cast as the lead in Mylissa Fitzsimmons's short comedy, *My First Love*, about a teen who finds true love in a cupcake when her cheating boyfriend dumps her. It was selected and screened at this year's Miami, New Haven International, and LA Comedy film festivals.

Most recently, Melanie was invited to return to Steppenwolf Theatre to co-star in their production of *Domesticated* (following its successful world premiere at Lincoln Center), written and directed by Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Bruce Norris. Set to run December 3, 2015 -February 7, 2016, she plays the teenage daughter of Mary Beth Fisher and ensemble member Tom Irwin.

Melanie speaks six languages—Mandarin (fluently), Russian, French, German, Turkish, Hindi—and is an avid Chinese language scholar. She recently traveled to China where she was honored to perform alongside the famous singer, Zhu ZhiWen, on his national tour. Currently based in Los Angeles, she is pursuing a film and television career, and continues to dance with West Side Ballet.