

THE FILM ARCHIVE

Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua The New Zealand Film Archive

ON DISK

*A MOVING IMAGE RESOURCE FOR
NEW ZEALAND CLASSROOMS*

NEW ZEALAND FEATURE FILMS PART TWO

NEW ZEALAND FEATURE FILMS: AN OVERVIEW PART TWO

Contents:

1990 – 2000

AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE (extract)

THE END OF THE GOLDEN WEATHER (extracts)

ONCE WERE WARRIORS (extracts)

HEAVENLY CREATURES (extracts)

VIA SATELLITE (extracts)

UNCOMFORTABLE COMFORTABLE (extracts)

POST – 2000

RAIN (extract)

WHALE RIDER (extract)

IN MY FATHER'S DEN (extract)

1990 – 2000

An Angel at My Table (extract)

Hibiscus Films. Director: Jane Campion. 1990. Duration 3:55

Classification Rating: PG

Jane Campion, who later went on to make *The Piano*, tells the story of New Zealand writer Janet Frame based on her trilogy *To the L-land*: her childhood; misdiagnosis of schizophrenia; and her rise to fame.

“There is no arguing that this is radiantly beautiful film making. *An Angel at My Table* doesn’t quite get to the poetic grandeur and dark themes that she explored later in *The Piano*, but the film is easily just as good as her dazzling debut, *Sweetie*. At almost three hours long, it could have used a trim but I’d rather it long and beautiful than short and clumsy.” Chris Cabin, *Filmcritic.com*

*Film Commission Study Guide available:

http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/resources/school_study_guides.aspx

The End of the Golden Weather (extracts)

South Pacific Pictures. Director: Ian Mune. 1991. Duration 2:15

Classification Rating: PG

Set in a 1930’s seaside community, young Geoff Crome makes friends with aspiring Olympian, Firpo. Geoff does everything he can to help Firpo achieve his dreams and in doing so risks his father’s disapproval. Ultimately Geoff realises that Firpo isn’t the man he thought he was, but a frail and vulnerable person.

“Perhaps reflecting its origins in a one-man stage show, *Golden Weather* works best in the relationship between Firpo and Geoff, two outsiders thrown together in mutual misapprehension. Whether they are two, or only one, is debatable, since Firpo might almost be Geoff’s own distorted vision of himself – presenting, with his wild outbursts, naive fantasies and knobbly, angular limbs, a cruel parody of preadolescent awkwardness. In the final shot, Geoff heads off along the beach in his school uniform, the Firpo stage of his development evidently behind him. It’s an ending, like the film as a whole, that’s just a little too pat to be poignant” – Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, February 1993.

Once Were Warriors (extracts)

Communicado. Director: Lee Tamahori. 1994. Duration 5:50

Classification Rating: R

A rarely seen representation of New Zealand as hard, violent and unforgiving: the film tells the story of alienated urban Maori and focuses on the Heke family, whose father Jake takes out his frustration through his fists.

The opening sequence is of particular interest in that it cuts from a close up of a billboard showing a rural New Zealand paradise, to the harsh city streets of South Auckland; immediately acknowledging its

digression from a typically New Zealand representation. Contemporary representations of New Zealand, especially within the genre of film, are becoming increasingly more complex and diverse, consciously using and challenging the way we have represented, and defined ourselves in the past.

“The only colors Maori had available to them for hundreds and hundreds of years were black, red, and white. These are predominantly themes in Maori art and culture. Even though we were making this film about an alienated urban family, I wanted to keep these very earthy, organic colors saturated into the picture. So through a filtering process which we did in the laboratory in order to enrich skin tones, we got a good, rich sepia look. And then, art direction-wise, we took every primary color out, except red, and just had it black, gray, and brown. It gets into your psyche, that’s the stuff that cinema can do so well.” Robert Sklar, “Social Realism with Style, an interview with Lee Tamahori”, Cineaste.

*Film Commission Study Guide available:

http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/resources/school_study_guides.aspx

Heavenly Creatures (extracts)

Wingnut Films. Director: Peter Jackson. 1994. Duration 4:00

Classification Rating: PG

Heavenly Creatures was a departure from Jackson’s splatter films and a move into the thriller genre. It told the true story of Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme who were tried and convicted in Christchurch during the 1950’s for the murder of Pauline’s mother, Honora Parker. This was the film that made Jackson respectable in the eyes of the New Zealand Film Commission. It won the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival. It also won Jackson a nomination for best screenplay at the Academy Awards and the backing of Universal.

“Just as unsettling is the way Jackson and fellow scriptwriter Frances Walsh so completely identify with the girls’ viewpoint. Castles and magical kingdoms, about which Pauline and Juliet fantasise, rise before our very eyes. The girls dance with full-size nightmare figures. In swift wish-fulfilment sequences, troublesome, intrusive adults are impaled on spikes. A very mobile camera tracks, dollies, cranes and scuttles around the girls as they frolic, coming close to reproducing the type of delirium they are experiencing. But there’s an awful tension built into all this. The fact is, Pauline’s mother Honora emerges as the film’s most sympathetic character. She is played by Sarah Pierce as a concerned, compassionate mum, inarticulate but painfully worried about her daughter and trying to do her best for her. Any pleasure we take in the film’s fantasy element has to be measured against the sheer ugliness of Honora’s murder” – Nicholas Reid, “Heavenly Jackson”, North & South.

Via Satellite (extracts)

Satellite Films. Director: Anthony McCarten. 1998. Duration 4:23

Classification Rating: M

Twenty-year old Carol Dunn seems all set to win a surprise medal for New Zealand in the Olympic Pool. Back home, along with the rest of the nation, her family is caught up in the euphoria and nervously awaits the arrival of television director Brian Stanning. No one is prepared for the riot of recrimination and

revelation that erupts during the build up to the fateful broadcast. Finally the television pictures that emerge from the Dunn household moments after Carol's amazing feat, are, in spite of everything, glorious. Together, with Carol beamed into their lives via satellite, the Dunn's celebrate the awful, awesome triumph that is family life.

"A fine ensemble of eccentric Kiwi characters – not caricatures – makes this tale of trans-global fraternal rivalry and miscommunication a hilarious and touching delight that treats suburban Kiwiana with considerable respect (...) Via Satellite comes as a breath of fresh air to audiences starved for local product. Without pretension to high art or pandering to a particular demographic, Via Satellite is proof that we can tell stories that are as funny, moving and as well-crafted as anything Hollywood or Britain can muster, and we can do it on a shoestring" – Matthew Grainger, "Via Satellite Proves We Can Match Hollywood's Humour", The Dominion, 16 October 1998.

Uncomfortable Comfortable (extracts)

Gordon Productions. Director: Campbell Walker. 1999. Duration 6:02

Classification Rating: M

Uncomfortable Comfortable was New Zealand's first feature length drama shot on video. It is the story of Dale and Alice whose relationship is at a standstill. Avoiding conventional narrative structures and plot flagposts, the film was scripted from improvisations and played out in real time.

"We wanted it to be that everything wasn't conveyed just in the dialogue but also in the physical interaction between two people. That's partly also why it's shot in the style of a two shot where you've always got both people there, where it's not moving around much, so you're forced to watch both the people and the space between.(...) These characters are doing things in an annoying way, you want them to make decisions, to get up and do something. I wasn't preventing it being annoying, I was preventing it being slick and organised. I think it's more realistic, it's closer to how people act in a real situation" – Campbell Walker in, Chris Holm, "Unkiwi Kiwi Flick in Real Time", City Voice, 15 July 1999

POST – 2000

Rain (trailer)

Rose Road/Communicado. Director: Christine Jeffs. 2001. Duration 2:24

Classification Rating: M

Adapted from the acclaimed novel by Kirsty Gunn, Rain is the story of a family's emotional disconnection and a young girl's sexual awakening. Set during the 1970's on a beach holiday, our sentimental views of childhood are torn apart. Visually evocative (although criticised by some for looking like a television commercial), this film was hugely successful grossing \$500,000 by the end of the third month.

"The film is so expertly structured and paced that its denouement knocks you off your feet." – Los Angeles Times.

"A visual beauty. A precocious and dangerously innocent perception of the mysterious grown-up world." – The New York Times.

*Film Commission Study Guide available:

http://www.nzfilm.co.nz/resources/school_study_guides.aspx

Whale Rider (trailer)

South Pacific Pictures. Director: Niki Caro 2002. Duration 2:04

Classification Rating: PG

Also a literary adaptation, *Whale Rider* is based on Witi Ihimaera's novel of the same name. When Pai is born heir to the local chiefdom, her grandfather Koro cannot accept that she is a female and searches for the 'true' leader amongst the local boys. He believes that Pai is bringing misfortune on the community, and despite her love for him Pai must fight Koro to fulfil her destiny

"*Whale Rider* arrives in theaters already proven as one of the great audience-grabbers of recent years. It won the audience awards as the most popular film at both the Toronto and Sundance film festivals, played to standing ovations, left audiences in tears. I recite these facts right at the top of this review because I fear you might make a hasty judgement that you don't want to see a movie about a 12-year-old Maori girl who dreams of becoming the chief of her people. Sounds too ethnic, uplifting and feminist, right? The genius of the

movie is the way it side-steps all of the obvious clichés of the underlying story and makes itself fresh, observant, tough and genuinely moving. There is a vast difference between movies for 12-year-old girls, and movies about 12-year-old girls, and *Whale Rider* proves it." – Los Angeles Times, 2003

In My Father's Den (extracts)

T. H. E. Film/Little Bird. Director: Brad McCann. 2004. Duration 4:36

Classification Rating: R16

Another book adaptation *In My Father's Den* is based on Maurice Gee's novel. Paul Prior, a war photojournalist, returns to New Zealand to settle his deceased father's estate. Here he encounters his past: his religious brother; his brother's repressed wife; his ex-girlfriend who has never forgiven him for leaving; her daughter Celia; and his father's secret den. Celia and Paul form a close friendship, despite their age difference, and when Celia goes missing this friendship is called into question.

"Brad McCann's brilliant, involving and ultimately devastating version of *In My Father's Den* is that rare type of adaptation: one that doesn't just successfully translate a great book (although that's rare enough), but just as successfully updates it and refreshes it, finding new ways into its difficult emotions, amplifying and renewing its themes. The key to Maurice Gee's novel – and this film – is that great New Zealand urge: the need to get away, to get out. The corollary of that is an equally typical New Zealand feeling: the fear or disappointment faced when coming back." Philip Matthews, *The Listener* 2004