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NEW ZEALAND FEATURE FILMS PART ONE

NEW ZEALAND FEATURE FILMS: AN OVERVIEW

PART ONE

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PRE-1950

Venus of the South Seas (extract)

NZ Dominion. Director: James Sullivan. 1924. Duration 5:08

Hollywood produced, the New Zealand Government was upset that while “public spirited citizen’s went to great lengths to assist with finance... not only did they lose their money but when the film was released in Nelson it was never mentioned, nor even New Zealand.” Film in Aoteroa, 1992.

"The story concerns a lonely pearl-diver and his beautiful daughter, Shona. She is a child of nature, a goddess of the seas, and one moonlight night romance comes to her when she swims out to a strange boat and meets the hero. A rival pearl pirate, on the death of the old man, attempts villainy, but the young man pits himself against him, and, naturally, all ends well. Playing opposite Miss Kellerman is Mr Norman French, who does excellent acting, and makes a manly hero all through." Evening Post review 1924

Rewi’s Last Stand (extracts)

Maori War Films Ltd. Director: Rudall Hayward. 1925. Duration 4:00

Rudall Hayward was a pioneer of New Zealand silent cinema . These extracts are from the surviving sections of an historical drama based on the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s: focusing on the famous battle of Orakau Pa in 1864. While the original film was tinted, the remaining footage is black and white. It was also the first New Zealand feature film to be shown on local television.

"Every patriot worth the name should see this thrilling historical epic of Rewi Maniapoto and the Dogged Brown Heroes who fought and died at Orakau for the land they loved so well." - film publicity, 1925.

Bush Cinderella (extracts)

Rudall Hayward Productions. Director: Rudall Hayward. 1928. Duration 1:17

Classification Rating: G

The first of Rudall Hayward's films to have a contemporary setting, and his last silent feature, *Bush Cinderella* is the story of Mary whose rich uncle dies and leaves her his estate provided she reach his lawyer within a certain time. The uncle's secretary, determined to get his hands on the inheritance, kidnaps Mary until she is rescued by her suitor.

"... The pioneer of New Zealand film production now takes up the megaphone on his seventh New Zealand picture... For some of the scenes he has evolved new camera angles and effects, which bring further technical aid to his undoubted dramatic sense..."

NZ Film Pioneer, 1928.

1950-1970

Broken Barrier (trailer)

Pacific Films. Directors: Roger Mirams and John O'Shea. 1952. Duration 2:45

Classification Rating: G

John O'Shea was the only New Zealand director to make a feature film between 1940 and 1964. The film tells the tale of Tom Sullivan, a Pakeha journalist researching a series of magazine articles on Maori people, who becomes a casual labourer on an East Coast (Mahia Peninsula) farm. The relationship he forms with Rawi, a young Maori woman, subsequently exposes social prejudice and racism. The kiss between them proved to be very controversial.

"A picture of the extent to which prejudice persists in a country which has accepted racial equality as a principle. The film has clearly been influenced by documentary techniques, both in style of photography (at times very pleasant notably in some of the city scenes) and in detailed attention given to the scenes of sheep shearing, tree felling, a cattle round up, the Maori tribal customs and so on. Presumably for financial reasons, the film has no synchronised dialogue, but a commentary supplied by the various characters."

Monthly Film Bulletin, 1952.

Runaway (extract)

Pacific Films. Director: John O'Shea. 1964. Duration 7:51

Classification Rating: PG

Bored with a conventional life David Manning embarks on an adventure that not only rejects his parent's authority, but the authority and expectations of conventional society. His attitude is symbolised poignantly in the final scenes of the film when Manning, trying to escape from the police, is seen struggling unprepared and ill equipped over the snow covered slopes of the Southern Alps.

"The picture has a brooding, dream like quality, but it lacks any real sense of urgency in the young man's flight from himself, too many motives are started but never fulfilled, and the direction is deliberate. Unusual camera shots occasionally succeed in creating atmosphere and the photography of the New Zealand countryside is fine. Colin Broadley displays quite a personality as David, but Deidre McCarron is wishy- washy as Diana, and Nadja Regin is an utterly conventional vamp"
"Runaway Killer" in Kinematograph Weekly, 1965

Don't Let It Get You (trailer)

Pacific Films 1966. Director: John O'Shea. Duration 1:57

Classification Rating: PG

New Zealand's answer to the sixties pop musical, Don't Let it Get You inspired the television programme C'mon. The story centres around The Rotorua Festival and stars Howard Morrison. It was made on a budget of only \$54,000, \$2000 of which Caltex contributed in exchange for having a sequence filmed in one of their service stations.

"Don't Let it Get You (1966) deals with popular entertainers, many of whom, including the star, are Polynesians. There is no reference at any stage to racial groups and integration is taken as a norm of life in New Zealand. Set in the Maori centre of Rotorua, the film presents its star as a swinging international star (which, in real life, he is) and places many of its musical numbers against backgrounds of Maori carvings, decorations, and meeting houses"

John O'Shea, Don't Let it Get You Victoria University Press, 1999, p 70

1970-1990

Sleeping Dogs (extract)

Aardvark Films. Director: Roger Donaldson. 1977. Duration 3:10

Classification Rating: PG

Sleeping Dogs, a film based on CK Stead's novel *Smith's Dream*, is influenced by American cinema of the time. Set in contemporary New Zealand, the country is in a state of chaos: the prime minister has fabricated a series of events and declared a state of emergency so that he can create an authoritarian government. Smith, the protagonist, who has left his wife because she has had an adulterous affair, gets caught up in the politics of the time despite his best intentions not to.

"I think *Sleeping Dogs* has something important to say about New Zealand. Civil liberties are declining fast in this country. Although there haven't been any events as violent as those in the movie, there have been plenty of indications in the last few years that NZ is becoming a constricted democracy. In NZ, as in other countries, there are people who are prepared to have total disregard for the rights of individuals, people who feel that the end justifies the means. If *Sleeping Dogs* has a lesson, it is that we should beware of giving anyone too much power in the belief that he won't abuse it. If power is not controlled, then it very likely will be abused"

Roger Donaldson in "Worth the Ulcers" by Roger Horrocks Craccum, 3 October 1977.

*Film Commission Study Guide available:

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

Goodbye Pork Pie (trailer)

AMA 1981. Director: Geoff Murphy. Duration 2:07

Classification Rating: PG

Billed as a New Zealand's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, Gerry, John and Shirl are on their way south when they accidentally steal \$10.70 worth of petrol, and find themselves on the run from the police. Cast and crew travelled the length of the country and shot on location giving the film an authentically local feel. Television programmers censored footage after complaints were received about the way the police were portrayed.

"Inflation was running at double figures, people were beginning to queue at the dole office, Maori people outraged to find themselves treated as second-class citizens were being dubbed as 'radicals', and the country was beginning to slip downhill economically, socially, and racially. Suddenly here was a film where the heroes didn't buy any of this shit. And it was funny. ... It was the last laugh."

Geoff Murphy, 1992.

Smash Palace (extracts)

Aardvark Films. Director: Roger Donaldson. 1981. Duration 3:22

Classification Rating: R16

Al Shaw is a racing car driver who met his French born wife Jacqui in Europe. The couple live near National Park in the central North Island, and with their seven year old daughter Georgie, run a car wrecking yard. When the couple separate, Al is prevented from seeing Georgie by a court order, so he kidnaps her and terrorises the pursuing police. Another anti-authoritarian film, *Smash Palace* adopts the popular New Zealand notion of 'Man Alone' from the seminal work of John Mulgan.

"A disturbing and emotionally raw film about a marriage breakup, which is one of finest films to emerge out of NZ in the 1980s and remains Donaldson's single best film."

Richard Scheik, 1990.

Vigil (extracts)

John Maynard Productions. Director: Vincent Ward. 1984. Duration 3:42

Classification Rating: PG

The notion of 'Man Alone' is reinforced in the film *Vigil*. A lonely young girl is frightened by a hunter who comes to help on her family farm after the death of her father in a farm accident. Filmed through a filtered blue lens in a Taranaki winter the dark, stormy atmosphere of the film develop the sense of the land as a threat and force to overcome.

"As a child growing up on a farm, you are alone for long periods of time. You invent imaginary worlds. *Vigil* is precisely that: the story of a solitary child who watches, fantasises and dreams. The fragments of reality she perceives are put together according to her own logic".

Vincent Ward quoted from unknown source.

Utu (extract)

Utu Productions 1983. Director: Geoff Murphy. Duration 5:31

Classification Rating: PG

A very different film from Murphy's first feature *Goodbye Pork Pie*, *Utu* is set during the Maori land wars of the 1860's and tells the tale of a Maori uprising, exploring issues of colonisation and war.

"Unlike some of the products of the New Hollywood, films such as *Utu* are not meant to be totally consumed in the cinema but are designed to start people talking. *Utu* was an uneven film but it succeeded in stirring up more discussion of New Zealand history than any recent book has done. Roger Horrocks, *Headlands*, MCA 1992.

*Film Commission Study Guide available:

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

Trial Run (extract)

Cinema and Television Productions. Director: Melanie Read. 1984. Duration 5.18

Classification Rating: M

A feminist take on the horror genre: Rosemary Edmonds, who is training for a marathon, takes up a residency in a small house on the Otago Coast to study the yellow eyed penguin. Increasingly she feels under threat from her male neighbour.

"Writer-director Melanie Read announced that *Trial Run* as a 'non-exploitation horror film'. She initially set out to make it with an all-woman crew. But as with several other feminist films - other examples include *The Slumber Party Massacre* (1982) and the also New Zealand-produced *Mr Wrong* (1985) - the attempt to make a horror film that counters the inherent misogyny of the slasher cycle and its victimization of women ended up being more a case of 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. It seemed that when offered the opportunity to make films that didn't victimize women that all the said feminist filmmakers ended up making were films about men victimizing women".

Richard Schrieb, 1990.

The Quiet Earth (extract)

Cinepro/Pillsbury Films. Director: Geoff Murphy. 1985. Duration 3:52

Classification Rating: PG

When an atomic experiment malfunctions and leaves one of it's scientists alone on the planet - the joys of excess quickly give way to loneliness.

"A multilevel picture, the film discusses the ethics of science, and who has the right to own knowledge."

Geoff Murphy, Onfilm, Wellington 1985

“The Quiet Earth obviously is deeply felt. It’s no accident that these tragic visions of depopulation come from a tiny country that has declared itself a nuclear- free zone. Or that one of the central characters is Maori, a tribe very nearly extinguished by the early white settlers, then earnestly ‘saved’ and assimilated in this century, at the cost of their tribal culture”

Sheila Benson, “Earth, Star Are Out Of This World”, Los Angeles Times, 18/10/1985

Footrot Flats: The Dog’s Tale (extract)

Magpie Productions. Director: Murray Ball. 1986. Duration 6:19

Classification Rating: PG

Based on Murry Ball’s cartoon strip a team of animators drew 100,000 frames for this 70 minute feature. It is New Zealand’s full length feature film using cell animation. ‘A Dog’s Tail’ is the story of Wal, his sheep farm in the Urewera’s, and his dog , named Dog. The film grossed \$2.2 million at the New Zealand box office in a 28 print release. Dave Dobbyn and Herbs wrote the theme song ‘Slice of Heaven’ which became the biggest selling record in Australia for 1987.

Ngati(extracts)

Pacific Films. Director: Barry Barclay. 1987. Duration: 6:00

Classification Rating: PG

Filmed on location in the small communities from Tolaga Bay to Rotary on the East Coast. Ngati is the first New Zealand feature film ever written and directed by a Maori. Unusually long shots of up to 70 seconds are what make the film feel so gentle.

"Ngati ‘ (‘s) images are composed with a wistful and pensive restraint and its pace is easy and friendly. Yet bubbling beneath its surface is the most powerful political statement about Maoridom - and by extension all indigenous culture - our cinema has yet managed" - (Peter Calder, "New Zealand’s finest", New Zealand Herald, 1987)

*Film Commission Study Guide available:

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

Bad Taste (extract)

Wingnut Films. Director: Peter Jackson. 1988. Duration 6:24

Classification Rating: R16

The first full feature film by director Peter Jackson. At 17 , Jackson began making the short film 'Roast of the Day' with his friends and work colleagues. Over the next four years the film evolved into what became the full length feature film 'Bad Taste'.

In 'Bad Taste' Giles, a charity collector who is attacked by humanoid aliens in a deserted rural town. Meanwhile Astro Investigation and Defence (the Boys) are sent by Internal Affairs in response to a distress call coming from the region. They find the entire town have been murdered and packed into cardboard boxes to be sent to the alien's planet and used in the fast food chain 'Crumb's Crunchy Delight'

"Comedy comes first. The idea of making an outrageous, over- the- top movie has appealed to me since I used to watch Monty Python's Flying Circus as a kid. I used to play around a lot making special effects and shooting them in little super 8 movies with my parents' camera. I made little monsters and animated them frame by frame and I made little model spaceships and tried to get them to fly and film them (...) As an only child you're on your own a lot, so you invent your own playmates and little games with toys. It definitely trains your mind to be imaginative and not rely so much on other people"

Peter Jackson in Harvey Clark's "Kiwi movie maker on the offensive", New Zealand Herald.