

Film reviews

May 18, 2020

In my Blood it Runs

PG ****

This documentary grew out of director Maya Newell's decade-long film-making relationship with Arrernte Elders and families at Akeyulerre (akeyulerre.org.au), the centre they established to teach and practise cultural knowledge systems and thus enable young people to develop pride in their culture.

Shot over three years in Alice Springs, Sandy Bore Homeland and Borrooloola Community in the NT, *In my Blood it Runs* examines the treatment of Indigenous kids by the authorities. It follows a young Arrernte boy, Djujan, as he grows from 10 to 13, coming perilously close to ending up in juvenile detention en route. Djujan tells, in his own words, about growing up Aboriginal in 21st century Australia. Various members of his family and community also recount their individual experiences and explain their beliefs around how best to provide leadership and direction in the education, wellbeing and development of their children.



Djujan lives with his two brothers, his mother Megan, and her mother Carol, to whom he is extremely close. Carol would prefer to be back at Sandy Bore, but she and the other Aunties agree that the kids have to be “educated both ways”. She is Djujan’s mentor, forever trying to ensure that his inherited healing powers stay intact. As Djujan expresses it, on Country his healing powers feel “straight like a line”, but, in town they feel “wobbly”.

Although he is well-versed in cultural knowledge and is able to eloquently express his spiritual sense of Aboriginality, his disruptive behaviour at school in Alice Springs eventually leads to him being “dispended”. The family fears that he will end up in Don Dale. How the community, his maternal Arrernte family and his paternal Garrwa family at Borrooloola turn his life around is enlightening and revelatory. Though this is an intensely personal film, it is infinitely informative about how past and present government policies impinge upon the daily lives of Aborigines.

Following the acclaim that *In my Blood it Runs* received at Festivals around the world, Djujan became the youngest person ever to address the United Nations, when he spoke to the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva in September 2019.

Because Covid-19 has curtailed the film's cinema release, the film is available free to all schools in Australia and New Zealand from 30 April to the end of Reconciliation Week on 3 June.

Classroom resources and a Professional learning resource for teachers written by Reconciliation Australia Narragunnawali are available on inmyblooditrans.com/education

Schools can watch the 54 minute television version or the 84 minute feature version.

Hearts and Bones

M****

Directed by acclaimed documentary maker Ben Lawrence, *Hearts and Bones* highlights the plight of refugees battling to begin a new life in Australia while haunted by traumatic memories of the past horrors that drove them to flee their homeland. Lawrence worked with the South Sudanese community to ensure the integrity of the screenplay, which he developed with Beatrix Christian. We see refugees having to work multiple jobs in order to make a meagre living and support a family. Such intimate insight, combined with meticulous casting, endows the film with a sense of authenticity.

Hearts and Bones also brings into focus the role and ethics of war zone photojournalism. The pre-title sequence succinctly illustrates what photojournalist Dan Fisher (Hugo Weaving) daily exposes himself to, both physically and mentally, in pursuit of his profession. Back in Sydney, we see the extent to which decades of repeat exposure to small artillery fire and witnessing war zone horrors have left him neurologically and emotionally damaged. His anxiety is exacerbated by the metaphorical bombshell that his partner Josie (Hayley McElhinney) drops shortly after his return.

She endeavours to distract him with his upcoming war photography exhibition, which she is co-curating. However, when Sudanese taxi-driver Sebastian (Andrew Luri) hears Dan being interviewed on radio by Fran Kelly, he seeks out the photographer to persuade him not to display photos taken of the massacre in his village 15 years prior. Sebastian worries that, far from feeling empathetic, Australians may misinterpret these photos. As his wife Anishka (a stand-out performance from Bolude Watson) explains, "There are no pictures of you during the worst moments of your life ... then people showed respect and looked the other way."

The screenplay, co-written by Lawrence and Beatrix Christian, examines how past trauma can affect an individual's subsequent relationships. Both Dan and Sebastian must come to terms with the past, if they are to build a future with their respective partners. They are supported by one another and various other people, notably Dan's brother (Alan Dukes) and Sebastian's choir of African refugees who sing to "shake off the bad spirit" of PTSD.

Hearts and Bones is a well-told story that raises a host of philosophical, social and ethical issues. Music supervisor Andrew Kotatko, composer Rafael May and cinematographer Hugh Miller ensure the film sounds and looks very impressive.

Hearts and Bones is available digitally from iTunes, Google Play, YouTube, Sony Playstation, Telstra & Fetch TV from 6 May, and on DVD from 3 June.

Dark Waters

M****

In this enthralling film from Todd Haynes, Mark Ruffalo gives a gently compelling performance as Rob Bilott, described by journalist Nathaniel Rich in the *New York Times* as "the lawyer who became DuPont's worst nightmare".

In 1998, shortly after he was made a partner of Taft Law, specialists in corporate defence, Rob Bilott receives an unexpected visit from Wilbur and Jim Tennant, farmers from just outside Petersburg, West Virginia, where Rob's grandmother lives. The Tennants explain that the Dupont Chemical factory has been dumping toxic landfill near their farms, polluting their creek and killing 200 of their cattle. Desperate to find a lawyer to represent them, they had contacted Rob's grandmother.

Rob's nostalgia for the area impels him to visit Petersburg. What he observes there so alarms him that he decides to pursue this "small matter for a family friend" and files a complaint against DuPont. Over the next fifteen years, he painstakingly examines truckloads of documents in his pursuit of the company through the courts, determined to reveal Dupont's wilfully duplicitous cover-up of what is essentially mass poisoning.

Even when cancer clusters appear amongst the workers and their families, the power of Petersburg's largest employer is such that most townsfolk remain nominally loyal to DuPont. However, a minority doggedly persevere despite the dubious tactics employed by DuPont's executives and legal team to intimidate them. It is for these people that Dan continues to fight, despite the toll it takes on himself and his family.

Filmed on location in Cincinnati, *Dark Water* reeks of authenticity. Most of the actors were able to meet with the people they portray in the film. Anne Hathaway actually wears Sarah Bilott's own clothes. Petersburg

resident Bucky Bailey, born with major deformities attributable to C8 (the long chain fluoro-carbon known as Teflon), has a cameo role.

The degree of corporate malfeasance revealed by Rob Blot is staggering. Sadly, DuPont is not the only large company or government to deny responsibility for such blatant environmental pollution. They just got caught.

Ironically, DuPont's web page claims "At DuPont, we're working to make the world a safer, healthier, and better place to live".

Dark Waters is now available digitally on Amazon.

Miss Fisher and the Crypt of Tears

M ***

This feature-length episode of Miss Phryne Fisher's daring escapades is ideal iso-escapism. Even if you caught it on the big screen before cinemas closed, *Miss Fisher and the Crypt of Tears* is easy viewing the second time around ... and then some.

Essie Davis and her fellow ABCTV *Miss Fisher Murder Mysteries'* cast regulars, Nathan Page (DI Jack Robinson), Ashleigh Cummings (Dot) and Miriam Margolyes (Aunt Prudence) are now so completely at ease with their characters that finding themselves in exotic locations seems quite natural. The romantic relationship between Phryne and Jack remains deliciously tantalising. Impeccably coutured by costume designer Margot Wilson, Phryne looks stunning wherever she is — Jerusalem, the Sahara desert, London or her family's stately home.

Deb Cox's screenplay is based on Kerry Greenwood's Miss Fisher murder mystery novels. Filmed in Morocco and Melbourne by Roger Lanser and directed by Tony Tilse, *Miss Fisher and the Crypt of Tears* benefits from the cast and crew being such a well-oiled machine.

Miss Fisher and the Crypt of Tears is currently available for streaming on AcornTV

The Trip to Greece

M ***

'Well-oiled' also describes this, the fourth of their *Trip* films, as Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon eat their way around Greece, swapping banter and impersonations with side dishes of fictional "personal" stories. Coogan plays his unctuous, narcissistic persona with ease, as does Brydon play the long-suffering sidekick.

The real stars are the food and the scenery, both of which look glorious!

Directed by Michael Winterbottom, this is easy viewing indeed.

The Trip to Greece is available digitally from 20 May on iTunes, Google Play, YouTube, Sony PlayStation, Telstra and Fetch TV. The DVD is out on 3 June.

Greed

MA ***

Like *The Trip to Greece*, *Greed* stars Steve Coogan and was written and directed by Michael Winterbottom. This satirical film is about celebrity entrepreneur Sir Richard McCreadie, dubbed 'Greedy McCreadie' by the press. A bully and cheat from his schooldays onwards, Richard has bullied and cheated his way through life to attain the status of billionaire fashion mogul, much to the delighted approval of his shrewish doting mother Margaret (Shirley Henderson). Little do they care that his empire is built on ruthless exploitation of workers in third-world sweatshops.

Lavish preparations are underway on Mykonos for Richard's 60th birthday extravaganza. As celebrities arrive en masse, so do the problems: refugees camped on the beach spoil the view, the erection of the plywood coliseum is behind schedule, and the lion is as unassuming as the journalist Nick (David Mitchell) sent to cover the stellar event for *The Sunday Times*.

What is a filthy rich narcissist to do?

Well, this is Greece, so perhaps his fate lies in the lap of the Gods ... and they traditionally frown on hubris.

This film is worth a watch.

Greed will be released on DVD in mid-July

Agniyogana
G ***

Directed by Emma Balnaves and shot in Nepal and India, *Agniyogana* is both a fascinating, colourful travelogue and an informative documentary on the history, philosophy and practice of Hatha Yoga. It is gentle on the eyes and the soul.

Available on Vimeo On Demand

Tricia Youlden is a retired Drama teacher, who is very proud of her former profession. She is also very angry at the disdain with which teachers are treated by the press and politicians, not least the PM.