

Murray Bramwell's Reviews

Appeared in - The Australian

Adelaide Film Festival

Shedding Light and Casting Shadows.

Australian films commissioned by Adelaide Festival and SBS Independent. Her Majesty's Theatre, Adelaide.

Until 7 March. Regional South Australian tour until 14 March.

The Adelaide Festival films have always been one of Peter Sellars' pet ideas, and they have turned out to be among his best. With various funding, including \$1.5m from the Festival, Shedding Light Director and SBS Independent executive, Bridget Ikin produced four features which premiered this week. Three of the four have Indigenous perspectives focusing on Truth and Reconciliation - as does the fifth in the series, *Beneath Clouds*, not a commission, but a debut feature by Ivan Sen, also shown for the first time.

Before the season began there was concern that the films would sit uneasily with the rest of the program, adrift from the live performance menu. The reverse has been the case. Because the Indigenous themes of the Festival have been so ubiquitous, events interact in chain reactions.

Whether visiting Ian Abdulla's evocative paintings at Flinders University's Grote Street Gallery, seeing *The Tracker* a hundred metres further down at Her Majesty's Theatre, or walking back to the square at night in time to see women from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands dancing beside the statue of Queen Victoria, the experiences reverberate. But they also need grounding, something which the strong discourses in the films provide.

Rolf de Heer said of *The Tracker* that he made the film with the context of a Festival premiere in mind. So having Graham Tardiff's elegiac music sung live by Archie Roach adds an almost operatic dimension to the screening. Set in 1922 *The Tracker* is very like a western, except that the bloke with the hat and the rifle is not the hero and no-one has a name, only a function.

Looking like William Holden and sounding like John Meillon, Gary Sweet plays the Fanatic, tyrannising the Tracker (David Gulpilil in yet another outstanding performance) in pursuit of the Fugitive (Noel Wilton) also an

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Aboriginal. Rolf de Heer's film is a kind of mythic reversal of history when the Tracker exacts some invigorating revenge. Photographed by Ian Jones, the film is all long shot and extreme close up, like Sergio Leone in *Arka-roola*. The use of paintings by Peter Coad to depict the many scenes of violence is an inspired strategy in an intriguing film.

Director Paul Goldman's *Australian Rules* has created concerns for Festival Director Sue Nattrass because events depicted in Phillip Gwynne's novel, *Deadly Unna*?, on which the screenplay is based, bear resemblance to actual events. Continuing controversy has followed the film with some calls for its withdrawal.

Already listed for the Sundance Festival, *Australian Rules*, is a story of loyalty and friendship amid the racism of a seaside town and a film destined for the kind of success that has greeted *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. With its footy backstory, strong cinematography from Mandy Walker and fine performances from Nathan Phillips, Luke Carroll and Lisa Flanagan, it has it all - youth, a well-constructed story and a genuinely tragic seam, offset with humour and romance. It will surely provide a timely entry point to the Reconciliation debate, especially for younger audiences.

This excellent, but alas, sparsely attended season, also includes *Kabbarli*, Andrew G. Taylor's collage docudrama on Daisy Bates, featuring actor Lynne Murphy, and *Walking on Water*, a carefully crafted film by Tony Ayres. Written by Roger Monk, filmed by Robert Humphreys and set in contemporary Sydney, it gives a harrowing and convincing account of an assisted death and the shadow it casts over friends and family. Vince Colosimo, Maria Theodorakis and David Bonney are part of an accomplished ensemble.

The pick of the films, though, is *Beneath Clouds*, written, directed and scored by Ivan Sen and intuitively shot by Allan Collins. The synopsis - Aboriginal boy jumps jail to visit dying mother and teams up with runaway girl, from a country town, heading for Sydney - sounds like yet another road movie. Instead it is a complex portrait of two young people, played splendidly by Danielle Hall and Damien Pitt. *Beneath Clouds* has few gratifications, but in its stillness and wordless truth, it is a film that will travel with you a long time.