

Review: *The Fringe Dwellers*

Australian Aborigines subject of film

by Lois Wadsworth

Director Bruce Beresford returns to his native Australia for this tale of a young aboriginal woman's dreams of a better life for herself and her family.

Trilby Comeaway is too bright and too determined to be daunted by the poverty and racism in which she has grown up. She and her sister Noonah are high-spirited young women with plans for the future. Noonah is training to be a nurse, and Trilby wants to work in a big city after high school. Trilby knows little of her aboriginal heritage, but she does know that she doesn't want to end up like the other women around her with a bunch of kids and a no-good husband. She's watched her remarkable mother Mollie for years trying to cope with a good-natured but unreliable breadwinner. Trilby and Noonah plea with their father Joe and overwhelm the old man with love. They want to move out of shantytown and into a real house in the nearby town.

People on the fringe live in shacks, old cars, and lean-tos. They drive odd and ancient vehicles the likes of which haven't

been seen on the screen since the Joads took off for California in *The Grapes of Wrath*. On the day the Comeaways move into town, their rickety flatbed truck is piled high with shabby furniture. Joe Comeaway atop it all in a chair, his dog at his feet. Black men, women, and children push the truck up and down the road until the driver succeeds in jump-starting it. They stir up the choking dust, and the excited dogs swarm around barking, answered by the dog on top. As the truck cruises through the little outback town on the way to the new house, belching smoke, backfiring, and brakeless, it attracts the attention of people on the street. A certain comic dignity settles on old Joe, who grins widely and waves at the startled citizens like a politician in a Cadillac convertible.

But the new life in town doesn't make Trilby's dreams come true. She's at war with all the tribal, communal past and considers herself an Australian, not an aborigine. Young and ambitious, Trilby finds herself faced by a personal dilemma which she resolves in a drastic manner. Her solution is dramatic, final, and tragic.

Director Bruce Beresford (*Crimes of the Heart*, *Breaker Morant*, *Tender Mercies*) is clearly able to get wonderful performance from the aboriginal actors in the cast. An old woman who tells stories of the past to scare the kids, played by Australian poet Kath Walker, casts a witchy spell whenever she speaks. Kristina Nehm as Trilby, Kylie Belling as Noonah, Bob Maza as Joe, and particularly Justine Saunders as Mollie Comeaway give life to a warm family caught between two worlds. Bruce and Roishin Beresford's screenplay is based on a novel by Nene Gare written in the '60s, and the not-very-political story is a little dated. Although the film is set in Australia and is specifically about the native people in that white-dominated society, it seems to me that *The Fringe Dwellers* could be about what happens anywhere in the world where racism determines who's on top. This little picture shows one family's struggling with the effect of the waning of traditional values on the young ones who want to enter the mainstream culture.

noteworthy
SO OVERWHELMING...
SO OUTRAGEOUS...
SO...

"I THOUGHT MY HEAD WOULD EXPLODE!"

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Premiere—July 17-23. Shows Fri & Sat 7:30 & 9:30. Sun, Tues thru Thurs 8 pm, Monday 7 & 9. Sunday Bargain Matinee and all shows Monday \$3.

"Beresford, whose accomplished work includes *The Getting of Wisdom*, *Breaker Morant*, *Tender Mercies* and most recently *Crimes of the Heart*, returned to Australia to produce this sensitive adaptation of Nene Gate's novel of a poor family living on the edge of a small outback town. An intimate, personal film with a large, mainly aboriginal cast. Beresford achieves a sensitive telling of the story of a wife who must cope with a lethargic husband, fractious daughters, various unwanted in-laws, and barely remembers the few aboriginal words taught to her as a child." 1987 Portland International Film Festival.

"A Wonderful Movie... beautiful performances! I urge you to see it!" —Jeffrey Lyons, Sneak Previews

"Excellent Cast! Beresford imbues this piece with the sensitivity he brought to *Tender Mercies*." —Katherine Dieckmann, Village Voice

"An Experience You Should Not Miss!" —Judith Crist

now showing

NEW TO TOWN

The Fringe Dwellers: Bruce Beresford (*Crimes of the Heart*, *Tender Mercies*) directs this story of a poor family living in a small town in the Australian outback. Opens Friday at Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Full Metal Jacket: The long-awaited Stanley (2001) Kubrick film, it never lets up revealing the mindlessness and brutality of war. Climaxing during the 1968 Tet Offensive of the Vietnam War, it continues at the McDonald (344-4343).

Jaws, the Revenge: Michael Caine and Lorraine Gray appear in this fourth man vs. shark thriller. This time, it's a personal vendetta against the human hero. Just opened at Cinema World (342-6536).

Revenge of the Nerds II: Nerds in Paradise: Sequel to the 1984 comedy about some doofy college guys. Continues at Movieland (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Robocop: Sci-fi comedy about a cyborg employed to clean up in Detroit lowlife. Opens Friday at Movieland (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Squeeze: Suspense. With Michael Keaton and Rae Dawn Chong, it continues at Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Swimming to Cambodia: By Jonathan Demme (*Stop Making Sense*, *Something Wild*), it brings to the screen the lone-person show by Spalding Gray, about his role in *The Killing Fields* and other topics. With music by Laurie Anderson, it opens Wednesday, July 22, at the Bijou (686-2458).

Whitewater Summer: Kevin Bacon and Sean Astin brave the rapids in this adventure. Continues its run as a double feature with returning *Stand By Me* at Movieland (342-4142).

CONTINUING/RETURNING

The Believers: A psychiatrist finds himself drawn to the occult. With Martin Sheen and Helen Shaver, it's a double feature with *Platoon* at Springfield Fine Arts (747-2201).

Benji, The Hunted: Rated G, and filmed in Oregon, this nostalgic Disney movie pairs canine Benji with wild animals. Movieland (342-4142).

Beverly Hills Cop II: As off-beat cop Axel Foley, Eddie Murphy laughs again. Brigitte Nielsen plays villainess. Movieland (342-4142).

Black Widow: Spine-tingling thriller, with Debra Winger and wicked Theresa Russell. Returns to town as late-night feature at the Bijou (686-2458).

Dagnet 1987: Dan Aykroyd portrays the nephew of "Just-the-Facts" Sergeant Friday, and Tom Hanks plays his side-kick, in a spoof of the TV series. Cinema World (342-6536).

Innerspace: In this science fiction comedy about a secret government project, Dennis Quaid plays a man reduced to miniature, then injected into another person played by Martin Short. Cinema World (342-6536).

Platoon: Best picture and director of 1986, according to the Oscar-namers. A no-holds-barred view of life as a foot soldier during the Vietnam War, starring Charlie Sheen, Tom Berenger, and Willem Dafoe. Writer-director Oliver Stone was there. Double feature with *The Believers* at Springfield Fine Arts (747-2201).

Predator: An unknown force pursues muscle man Arnold Schwarzenegger. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Roxanne: Steve Martin, with the longest nose since Pinocchio, and Daryl Hannah star in a modern-day comedy based on the story of Cyrano de Bergerac. Cinema World (342-6536).

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: The 1937 technicolor Disney classic returns to town Friday at Movieland (342-4142) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Space Balls: Mel Brooks spoofs Star Wars. Brooks plays the U.S. president, and Daphne Zuniga "Her Spoiled Highness." Movieland (342-4142).

Stand By Me: Filmed locally, it's a buddy story about four adolescent boys plunged into the evils of a less-innocent world. Returns to town Friday as a double feature with *Whitewater Summer* at Movieland (342-4142).

The Untouchables: Robert De Niro, Kevin Costner and Sean Connery revisit the Al Capone era of Chicago in the 1930s. Brian De Palma directs. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

Witches of Eastwick: Jack Nicholson as the devil, with Cher, Michelle Pfeiffer and Susan Sarandon, star in this adaptation of a John Updike novel. National (344-3431).

Thursday, July 16 is the last night for: Will Vinton's Festival of Claymation at Cinema 7, and Working Girls at the Bijou.

LATE NIGHT AT THE BIJOU ONE WEEK ONLY! Fri. July 17-Thur. July 23

BLACK WIDOW

DEBRA WINGER and THERESA RUSSELL star in this complex psychological thriller about a beautiful serial killer whose victims are wealthy men. A lonely federal agent (Winger) tracks down the alluring seductress (Russell), until the two meet and toy with each other over a rich lover. Fri-Sat 11:30 / Sun-Thur 11:00 \$2.50 R

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Director Lizzie Borden's unorthodox movie about life in a genteel Manhattan brothel... gives a matter-of-fact, amusing and non-judgmental picture of women who have chosen to sell sex. —Judy Stone, S.F. Examiner

*No one under 18 will be admitted

SPALDING GRAY'S SWIMMING CAMBODIA EUGENE PREMIERE!

A JONATHAN DEMME PICTURE

STARTS WEDNESDAY JULY 22! Wed-Thur 7:00 & 9:00 / Fri-Sat 7:30 & 9:30

"AMAZING... TWO ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP!" —Sakel & Ebert & The Movies

Hilarious, horrifying and mesmerizing: it's an evening that's over only too soon. Director Jonathan Demme (Stop Making Sense) choreographs the filming of Gray's ruminations - a sprawling tour through Gray's mangle mind as he recounts various events occurring during the filming of 1984's "The Killing Fields" - so that it seems to fly by, an illusion helped by wizardly editing and mysterious musical effects by Laurie Anderson. —L.A. Times

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