

A Kiwi “thing well made”

A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor

Out of the Blue stars Aramoana, a beautiful but isolated, New Zealand beach town. The opening scene superbly captures the movie. We watch footprints being made on a beautiful beach and watch the sweep of a metal detector. Knowing that people carrying metal detectors tend to live on the fringe of society, we ponder a fringe footprint on New Zealand beauty.

Out of the Blue is Dunedin-bred director Robert Sarkies second movie (his first was *Scarflies*). This is a Kiwi director telling a Kiwi story. We see a New Zealand Police force naively ill-prepared for armed violence and emergency first aid. We hear lines from children’s story book *Hairy Maclary* (authored by Lynley Dood). We recognise tunes from classic Kiwi white boy bands - Coconut Rough (Sierra Leone), The Chills (Pink Frost) and Don McGlashan.

To use a line from a song by Don McGlashan, *Out of the Blue* is a Kiwi film “well made.” The pace is superbly controlled, with repeated moments of human interaction used to heighten the escalating tension. Visual shots of the road in and out of Aramoana are used to advance the plot, while a white bach wall marks time. Camera focus is employed to portray character. The sound track (by Dave Whitehead) is clever, with silence, splashing water and sustained human breathing, used well to carry emotion. Despite minor blemishes (including inconsistent special effects) and unresolved plot threads (Did David Gray die because he was denied medical assistance in Police custody?) *Out of the Blue* proclaims that there is more to the New Zealand film industry than special effects at Weta Studios. We have Kiwi filmmakers who can tell our stories with style and maturity.

What the movie leaves unanswered is any ethical and moral reflection upon this Kiwi story.

Why does David Gray shoot thirteen people? We see his isolation, paranoia and anger, artistically mixed with shots of beautiful Aramoana. So perhaps nature is pure and one man paranoid? Yet New Zealand has lots of sleepy, isolated beach communities, with sands that remain unstained by Aramoana’s violence? We gasp at New Zealand gun laws that allow one man to stock a fridge load of weapons and ammunition. But New Zealand gun laws were lax for decades before David Gray took aim at a nation’s innocence. So was Aramoana purely and simply out of the blue? If so, pray it never happens to us.

And how do humans recover from random human violence? Should we forgive? Yet the film suggests that rather than forgive, the community of Aramoana gather to burn down David Gray’s house. Should we forget? Yet human bodies remain scarred and thirteen breakfast settings remain empty.

The place of memory and human violence occupies Princeton scholar Miroslav Volf, who reflects on the future of grace and faith after ethnic violence scarred his Balkan homeland. He argues that the Christian cross stands as a permanent marker of human violence, a reminder that humans can neither forgive nor forget. Instead, in Jesus, who faces, feels and absorbs human violence, we seek the courage to forgive, while leaving justice in the hands of an unforgetting God.

Such questions allow the Kiwi story of Aramoana to become a universal story. It allows us to move beyond a well-made docu-drama of courage under fire, to begin to ponder the moral and ethical questions of being human in a society full of metal things “well made.”

Steve Taylor
580 words

Rev Dr Steve Taylor is Senior Pastor at Opawa Baptist Church. He is Lecturer in Gospel and Film at Bible College of New Zealand throughout 2007. He is the author of The Out of Bounds Church?(Zondervan) and writes regularly at www.emergentkiwi.org.nz.