

**Sione's Wedding. A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor
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“Not just a domestic.” Remember that slogan? It was central to an extensive media campaign that sought to raise awareness regarding the tragedy that is domestic violence.

So how do you respond to a New Zealand movie in which a young boy opens the door to ask “Have you come to give [your girlfriend] the bash?” It is a scene that occurs not once, but twice, in the recently released *Sione's Wedding*. Should you laugh? Or should you cry? Is this comedy? Or is this a bleak lament on relationships within New Zealand culture?

Boys and girls and their relationships are the plot around which *Sione's Wedding* revolves. Albert (Oscar Keightley), Michael (Robbie Magavisa), Sefa (Shimpal Lelisi) and Stanley (Iaheto Ah Hi) are the Duck Rockers, four Pacific Island friends with a littered history of disturbing weddings. When Michael's younger brother announces his plans to marry, the Duck Rockers are banned. Unless, that is, they can find girlfriends. As the movie declares, “Girls keep boys under control.”

It is a line worth pondering. Is this comedy, or a sad commentary on the shallowness of relationships between women and men within contemporary Pacific Island culture?

Four boys, and their need for four girlfriends, becomes the quest around which *Sione's Wedding* evolves. Can good looking Michael, with a girl in every suburb, form a relationship that lasts beyond the bedroom? Could Albert ever summon the courage to ask a girl out? Will Stanley's phone fantasies ever become reality? Can Sefa remain sober long enough to confront his immaturities? The acting of these four main male characters is believable and their lines are well-timed.

Sadly, the female characters remain cardboard and cutout. Princess (MaryJane McKibbin-Schwenke) is scarcely believable, turning from shy Island girl to sexual aggressor. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine a husband leaving his wife at a wedding. But such an unlikely event allows “White Girl from Remuera” (Rachel Gilchrist), to become available for another sexual adventure with Michael. And so the gender stereotypes are reinforced. Not only do women keep boys under control, but they do so through sex. And again we face the same question. Should we laugh in comic relief? Or weep at the shallow portrayal of relationships between women and men?

This is a New Zealand movie. It opens with loving shots of Waitemata Harbour. It moves through Auckland streets to the beat of Pacific hip hop stars including Adeaze, Ladi 6, Nesian Mystic and Dei Hamo. *Sione's Wedding* is written by Oscar Keightley. Sadly, his skills in comedy, applauded in the Naked Samoans comedy theatre group and honed in Bro'town, are less evident in *Sione's Wedding*. The movie exposes the viewer to the reality of domestic violence and to narrow sexualized portrayals of women. It faced us with the continuous and excessive consumption of alcohol. If this is New Zealand comedy, then I am not sure when to laugh.

493 words

Steve is Senior Pastor at Opawa Baptist Church and Lecturer in Gospel and Film at Bible College of New Zealand. He is the author of The Out of Bounds Church?(Zondervan, 2005) and writes regularly at www.emergentkiwi.org.nz.