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#CINEMAFORTHESENSES Byron Bay Film Festival 6 – 15 October 2017

Trouble and triumphs on screen at Byron's film fiesta

The second half of the **Byron Bay Film Festival** contains some of its 'heavy hitters' – feature-scale dramas and documentaries from around the world.

Let's leave aside the rock n roll explosion that is ***Rumble: The Indians Who Rocked the World*** ... although this revelatory doco is a hard one to ignore. The pelvic reverberations from **Link Wray's** 1957 power chord creation will forever set rebellious hearts beating. And after hearing the influence of traditional "Indian" (that is, Native American) music, you'll never listen to rock, the blues, or even jazz, the same way again.

Rumble sparked the career choice of untold wannabe musos – Iggy Pop, among them – making it the perfect theme song for the Gala Closing Party this Saturday, with music, memories, and not a little mayhem.

And let us pass over, for a moment, the festival's other hymn to popular music, ***An American in Texas***, whose ferocious punk energy and drug-fuelled protagonists seize our sympathies, their social deviance reflecting the madness of the world they inhabit, dominated by the industrial-military complex. **Anthony Pedone** can answer all of your questions at the **World Premiere** of his film on Friday night.

Turn your attention to Wednesday, October 11 for a drama with all the dark terrors you'd expect from director **Greg McLean**, of ***Wolf Creek*** fame.

Jungle – based on the real life (and near-death) experiences of Mullumbimby man **Yossi Ghinsberg** – places a posse of adventurous but naïve gringos deep into the Amazonian rainforest, led by a less than reliable guide. The deeper they go into this hostile environment, the more sinister things become.

The Yossi character, played by **Daniel Radcliffe** (***Harry Potter***), is assaulted by a natural world of an almost fiendish malevolence, including brain-burrowing worms and sucking mud pools.

In reality, some of the travellers died on this mad expedition; whether Ghinsberg was one of them, you'll have to find out for yourself. McLean, Radcliffe and **Joel Jackson** (Peter Allen in *Peter Allen; Not the Boy Next Door* and Charles Bean in *Deadline Gallipoli*) bring the story to shocking life.

Jungle is also screening in Byron on Sunday and closes the Murwillumbah festival on Sunday night. Prepare for nightmares.

The details of another Australian film, ***Watch the Sunset***, will also stay with you. This time, however, the evil comes in human form – amoral, violent, drug-dealing crims who don't take kindly to one of their number trying to "go square", especially as they have also removed an item of their property. Not drugs or money, for once, but a human being, just another victim of the ice scourge besetting rural Victoria, where this is set.

The film was shot in one take, a steady, remorseless tracking towards its inevitable conclusion. It is not the only artful aspect to this topical work: the leads **Tristan Barr** (who also directed) and **Chelsea Zeller** turn in superb naturalistic performances.

City of Joy on Thursday also makes for harrowing viewing, but here documented reality presents a real glimmer of hope, as the title suggests.

The city in war-torn Eastern Congo is a safe haven for girls and young women who have suffered to an unimaginable degree at the hands of every goon with a gun: rape as a weapon of war, torture, kidnapping – they have survived the abuse and found support, therapy, new meaning in the city, and are able to take their stories forward with them. Love and community help them move through the trauma, and turn it into positive action.

The city is the creation of Congolese doctor and Nobel Peace Prize nominee **Denis Mukwege**, human rights activist **Christine Schuler-Deschryver** and **Eve Ensler**, the author of ***The Vagina Monologues***, who has described the gender violence here and elsewhere as "nothing short of femicide".

More than a glimmer of hope is provided by ***Westwind: Djalul's Legacy***, screening later on Thursday, ***Amplify Her*** (Saturday, Community Centre), and ***Crazywise*** (Brunswick Picture House, Thursday at 7pm).

They all tell stories of recovery, of the conservation of ancient cultures through radical new channels, of untrammelled creative expression empowering young women, and of a revolutionary new way of looking at mental illness – not as a disease, but a gift to be nurtured for its visionary possibilities.

Yolngu elder **Djalul Gurruwiwi** enlists the help of pop star **Gotye** to save the Songlines of his clan, which are in danger of being lost in the hurly burly and temptations of the modern world. Together they give new life and a future to the ancient knowledge, in this heart-warming and at times amusing cross-cultural experience.

The young women in ***Amplify Her***, some of them lost or troubled, find their meaning in creating electronic dance music. It is male-dominated, but the audience-empathy they bring, the creativity and feminine sexual energy that fuels their beats, earns them places at the gigs, where the throbbing power and crowd-connection can make for an orgasmic experience.

The music itself is a reason to see this, but its combination of in-your-face sexuality and fuck-you feminism means it's not a film for mummy's boys, or the diehard chauvinist.

Then again ... perhaps it is. Just as ***Fade to Black***, the story of one man's fight for the right to die with dignity, should be seen by those opposed to voluntary euthanasia for its humanising of the debate.

The festival – film itself – holds a mirror up to the world. There is darkness, suffering.

But there is also ***Brigsby Bear***, at the Pighthouse Flicks two nights this coming weekend, capturing all the innocent joys of childhood. And ***That's Not Me***, a comedy of modern fame (Brunswick, Sunday), and ***Ellipsis***, **David Wenham's** uplifting dramedy set in Sydney over the course of a night brimming with romantic potential, and ***Melanie***, the record of an offbeat obsession.

All reasons to be cheerful.

Byron Bay Film Festival runs until October 15. Tickets available at www.bbff.com.au