

<p>Volume 27 Number 3 MAR 2024</p>		<p>Website https://www.williamstown-film-society.org Email michaeljslee58@gmail.com Phone 0478 624 528</p>
---	--	--

Council Chamber of the Town Hall, 104 Ferguson St, Williamstown, 7.30pm, Wednesday 27th March, 2024.

Mahana

It's been a good year for New Zealand films with Taika Waititi's very funny [Hunt For The Wilderpeople](#) and Arepa Kahi's excellent documentary [Poi E \(The Story of our Song\)](#). Now comes this powerful family drama which marks the return of Lee Tamahori to the New Zealand screen for the first time since his directorial debut in 1994 with the astounding [Once Were Warriors](#). Since then, he's been in Hollywood directing a host of thrillers, action movies and even an instalment of the James Bond franchise. *Mahana* is quite a gear shift, focusing much more on characters and their relationships.

The story comes from the novel 'Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies' by Witi Ihimaera (who also wrote the novel on which Niki Caro's 2002 movie [Whale Rider](#) was based). It's been beautifully adapted for the screen by John Collee who, apart from his Oscar-nominated screenplay for Peter Weir's [Master and Commander](#) (2003) and his Oscar-winning screenplay for [Happy Feet](#) (2006), co-wrote this year's lyrical islander love story, [Tanna](#), with Martin Butler and Bentley Dean. From its clever opening scene where all the lines of power and struggle are sharply established through a disarmingly comedic road race between the Mahanas and the Poatas, each trying to be the first to arrive at an important funeral, to the poignancy of the revelations in the final act, his screenplay lets the story unfold with a warmth and depth that captures both Māori culture and a universality of generational conflict in equal measure.

The glorious New Zealand countryside is stunningly captured by cinematographer Ginny Loane and the early'60s time-frame is lovingly evoked by Mark Robins' production design and art direction by Ross McGarva and Peter Sweeney. But it's the performances that really lift the story off the screen. Morrison is compelling as the grandfather. He smoulders through scene after scene exuding the authority of the patriarch whilst Keefe counters that role with equal strength, embodying rebellious and idealistic youth. Their clashes are terrific. But it's Brunning who is pivotal to the drama with a performance that is, at first, unassuming but slowly gathers pace as her importance to the story slowly becomes clearer.

Those hoping that Tamahori's filmic home-coming would produce something with the confronting narrative and violent edge of *Once Were Warriors* will no doubt find this film a bit on the gentle side and it is reminiscent of 1970s period dramas with their carefully measured narratives. But those with a taste for a family story told through strong and engaging characters should find *Mahana* to be just the ticket.

By Chris Thompson, cinephilia.net.au



Starbox Results

	5	4	3	2	1	Average
Delicious	25	13	1	1	0	4.5

To watch a trailer (& read more) head to the 2024 program on our website

[https://: www.williamstown-film-society.org](https://www.williamstown-film-society.org)