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Rain of the Children

GRAEME TUCKETT || The Dominion Post
5 Stars. *****

Directed by Vincent Ward

Starring Rena Owen, Temuera Morrison, Taungaroa Emile | Rated: M | Running time: 98 min

UREWERA REVISITED: *Rain of the Children* is Vincent Ward's most poetic film.

In the late 1970s, Vincent Ward travelled into the Urewera Ranges to film something of the life of an elderly Tuhoe woman, Puhi.

Puhi lived in impoverished isolation with her schizophrenic adult son Niki. With a small film crew, Ward spent long periods with Puhi as she went about her days, cared for Niki, and shared insights into what had been an unimaginably difficult life.

Ward's film of that time, *In Spring One Plants Alone*, was released in 1980 to international acclaim. But much of Puhi's life was not yet for the telling, and watching the film today – especially Puhi's face as she mutters prayers and imprecations during her every waking moment – it is not hard to share Ward's eventual realisation that there were depths to Puhi's story that he had not been allowed to enter.

In 2006, Ward returned to the Ureweras and set about documenting a fuller history of what Puhi, and her Tuhoe iwi, had lived through. The result – *Rain of the Children* – is an idiosyncratic and near



unclassifiable film.

Puhi was a witness to the 1916 police raids that devastated the Maungapohatu community, a daughter-in-law of Tuhoe leader and prophet Rua Kenana, and mother of 14 children – nearly all of whom died or were taken from her.

Allowed access to this history – and we sense that these are the stories that the community would not entrust him within 1978 – Ward has made a docudrama that audaciously and artfully weaves together Puhi's life, the larger story of Tuhoe in the years leading up to and after the 1916 raids, and perhaps some of Ward's evolution as a storyteller.

Using swaths of his earlier film, interviews with people who knew and understood Puhi's story, and astonishingly beautiful, staged recreations of Puhi's words and visions, Ward has made something unique.

This is the most poetic and resonant film that this wonderful writer-director has produced. *Rain of the Children* is a maddening, haunting, moving and extraordinarily watchable film. Do go.