

Vincent Ward is Back

17 September 2008

This week at the flicks with Dan Slevin.

ARGUABLY, the most important film of the year so far opens this week.

Rain of the Children restores Vincent Ward's reputation as a singular cinema artist, after the desperate travails of *River Queen*, and uses the essential New Zealand story of Rua Kenana and the Tuhoe resistance as vivid background to a universal story of parenthood and loss.

In this film Ward returns to the subject of his first documentary, *In Spring One Plants Alone*, a film he made as a naive 21 year old back in 1979. In that film we watched as 80 year old Puhi attempted to care for her last child, the mentally ill Niki.

In *Rain*, Ward tells Puhi's whole story – from her Urewera childhood, marriage to the prophet Rua's son, and then the tragedies that bore down



upon her until she (and the rest of her community) considered herself cursed.

The full emotional impact took a while to register with me – long enough that the tears didn't start until half way through the credits. I'd need to see it again before making the call about "masterpiece" or not, but it certainly felt like that, standing numb in the Wellington rain after the Film Festival screening.