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## Rain of the Children



(Documentary -- New Zealand) A Rialto Distribution release of a Wayward Films, New Zealand Film Commission presentation of a Forward Films production, in association with New Zealand On Air, Te Mangai Paho. (International sales: New Zealand Film Commission, Wellington.) Produced by Vincent Ward, Marg Slater, Tainui Stephens. Co-producers, Kero Te Awhimate Tait, Catherine Fitzgerald. Directed, written by Vincent Ward.

**With:** Rena Owen, Miriama Rangi, Mikaira Tawhara, Melody Wihapi, Toby Morehu, Temuera Morrison, Glenn (Kimikimi) Mane, Waihoroi Shortland, Harmony Wihapi, Mahue Tawa, Vincent Ward.

(English, Maori dialogue)

By [RICHARD KUIPERS](#)

**Unable to forget an 80-year-old Maori woman he filmed for a documentary 30 years ago, New Zealand helmer Vincent Ward reopens the file and comes up with a moving portrait of her extraordinarily eventful life in "Rain of the Children." This mix of archival footage, contemporary interviews and vividly staged dramatic re-enactments is a highly accessible personal essay and respectful tribute to Maori culture. Docu-drama has niche potential and ought to be snapped up by fests and quality broadcasters. Following its world preem in the Sydney fest's inaugural competition, local release is set for September 25.**

Ward bookends the film with a letter he has written to Puhi, who died in 1980 after appearing in his docu "In Spring One Plants Alone." A young art student at the time, Ward spent the better part of two years living in the same house as Puhi and her paranoid-schizophrenic son Niki, whom she cared for obsessively. Now, Ward says to her, "I thought I knew so much about you while I was making that film, but really I knew very little."

Appearing as onscreen narrator, Ward vigorously takes up the challenge of tracing Puhi's life and visualizing events that led locals to say she "walked between two worlds, the living and the dead." Casting a heavily made-up Rena Owen as the floating presence of old Puhi, Ward returns to her house, unearths stunning photo and newspaper archives and talks to family descendants, Maori elders and historical experts.

Discoveries are compelling and heart-wrenching. A mother at 14, Puhi was married to Whatu, the son of Rua Kenana -- a prophet, faith healer and post-Maori Wars activist about whom an entire film could be made. Beautifully shot re-enactments show Puhi's tempestuous young life in the amazing 2,000-person colony, established by Rua Kenana (played in his 40s by Temuera Morrison), that fell apart after violent police intervention in 1916.