RAIN OF THE CHILDREN: DVD

SYNOPSIS:
Vincent Ward pieces together the life of Puhî, an 84 year old Tuhoe tribal woman who was related to Maori prophet Rua Kenana, reconstructing the story as dramatized documentary with several contemporary interviews.

Review by Andrew L. Urban:
The spontaneous haka by some of the Maori guests in the cinema after the 2008 Brisbane Film Festival screening of Vincent Ward’s fascinating and moving documentary, Rain Of The Children, is symbolic of the film’s power to reach into Maori culture for this special story. Yet it is as much a story of the human condition in general, with its sweeping family saga and its secrets, demons and superstitions.

Vincent Ward made a short doco about this family 30 years ago when he lived with them as a student, and he returns to explore a nagging suspicion that there is more to the story of Puhî’s family than he had learnt. In the reconstruction, we meet Puhî, or Nanny, in her 80s, a frail, bent figure, yet she still cares for her schizophrenic son Niki, living in rural isolation. Ward, as the sympathetic, gently probing, curious on-camera investigator, takes us back in time through Puhî’s extraordinary and often tragic life.

Ward uses the voices of descendants and locals to reveal much of the surrounding colour and texture of the long history with which Puhî was associated, often at the wrong end of events, losing children almost as quickly as she brought them into the world.

Ward uses his cinematic gifts to the full, contrasting stark monochrome segments with a warm colour palette for the interviews, and sensitive yet powerful re-enactments, using many of the descendants of the people represented. The universal and the intimately human are brought together in the embrace of the spiritual aspects of the story, in which talk of a curse gradually grows more tangible - and credible.

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