

'Never Never' not worthwhile

By STEVE CARR
Staff Writer

We of the Never Never isn't a particularly bad film. It just does not possess the distinguishing creative marks that make a film worthwhile.

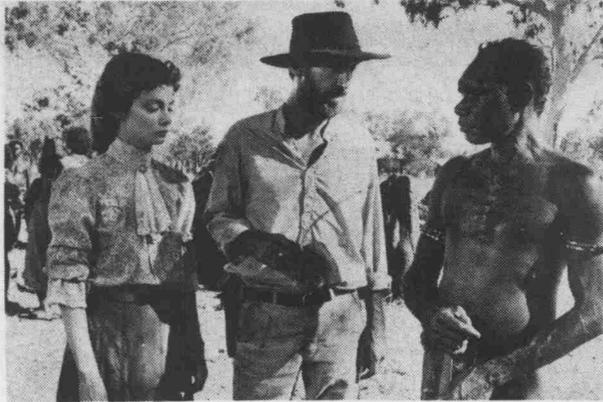
That seems to be the trouble with a lot of Australian films. They promise so much at the outset, but their resolutions are completely conventional — they hardly live up to the potential interest generated by their scenarios.

We of the Never Never has quite a bit going for it. Based on the classic Australian novel by Jeannie Gunn, it recounts Gunn's experience in an area ominously christened "the Never Never." When she arrives with her husband at his cattle station, she finds that she is the only white woman there. Instead of being treated as a rare commodity by the men there, she is loathed by them. Eventually she becomes fascinated by an oppressed aboriginal tribe and wins both their and the men's respect.

Review

Despite the many possibilities they could have explored, director Igor Auzins and screenwriter Peter Schreck treat the material in a simple, pat manner. Jeannie Gunn is always right and always wronged by the big bad men, even her husband Aeneas. Very little time is given to exploring the aboriginal culture. Instead, the Aborigines are displayed as being lazy and are treated unfairly by the white man.

Women were treated badly and British Colonialism did manage to mess up entire



Angela Punch McGregor creates problems with her husband in 'We of the Never Never' by interfering with Aborigines.

continents. People still feel the repercussions from both of these injustices. But to reduce the situations and conflicts to a good/bad dilemma does both the cause and the characters a disservice.

So much is set up to be explored. When Jeannie arrives at the post, she finds that her traditional roles as a woman have been usurped. A Chinese man does the cooking and a group of Aborigines does the housework. But this conflict is never resolved properly. It just fizzles out of the movie. Jeannie does not come to any sort of realization about herself and passively accepts her uselessness.

There are only one or two scenes that really portray Aborigines as something other than objects of injustice. A few minutes are devoted to a ritual dance, but as if director Auzins was afraid the film was getting too much away from entertainment, he suddenly has the English-

men shoot off their pistols, sending the Aborigines scurrying away. So much for culture.

The photography is the best thing in the movie, and it is good by other movies' standards as well. But Gary Hansen's impressive eye for sunsets and open spaces is undermined by just about the worst thing in the movie: the music. Only two melodies are used for 1½ hours and every bit of schmaltz is milked from each note. The soundtrack is like an eight-track of a recurring Sibelius melody. The absolute musical lowpoint comes when Jeannie and Aeneas profess their love to each other and the melody comes in — guess what instruments? — the violins.

But all in all the movie is relatively harmless. It is the type of movie the Australian film industry must love, because the countryside is absolutely beautiful — even through a lens.

'Grey Fox' provides 'warm entertainment'

By JEFF GROVE
Arts Editor

Cynics and nihilists, beware. *The Grey Fox* is not your kind of film. For those people who still believe in the irrepressibility of the human spirit, however, this quiet, unpretentious film will provide a warm, uplifting evening of entertainment.

The premise of the film is simple. Bill Miner is released from San Quentin after serving 33 years for robbing stagecoaches. It is now 1901. The world has changed — greatly — and Bill must adjust to a West which is no longer a frontier where outlaws have considerable power.

The rest of the story is not so simple. Miner tries his hand at gathering oysters in Washington state, but his sedentary existence bores him. One night in 1903 he goes to a nickelodeon and sees the first Western film, *The Great Train Robbery*. The coincidence gives birth to a new career for Miner, who assembles a motley gang and goes off in search of trains to rob.

Review

Miner and his gang botch their first hold-up and are forced to separate. Miner finds shelter in Canada but again grows restless in a factory job, so another gang is formed and another train is robbed — this time successfully. Miner seeks temporary shelter with an old associate in the isolated town of Kamloops, British Columbia. Here Miner begins to ease into a normal existence. He even falls in love with a plucky photographer, an action which shatters his complacency when the Northwest Mounted Police and a Pinkerton detective begin to close in on him.

The Grey Fox operates at so many levels that it is possible for people of vastly differing sensibilities to see it and enjoy it for different reasons. Greater rewards, however, await the person who tries to assimilate the different levels of the film.

On the surface, this is an adventure film with a twist. *The Grey Fox* exudes all the good taste of a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, but the film's world is not cloyingly sweet; violence is an everpresent force. Still, director Phillip Borsos has opted for a refreshingly old-fashioned approach to violence. Instead of showing a bottle graphically lacerating someone's face in a saloon fight, for instance, he uses careful lighting and judicious editing to

create a more horrible scene, since the audience can imagine worse details than could be created by make-up men.

The starring role is a make-or-break proposition, since the film is what would in other circumstances be called a "star vehicle." Bill Miner is rarely off-screen. Borsos made the unconventional but wise decision to cast a virtual unknown, Richard Farnsworth, in the part. Farnsworth worked as a Hollywood stunt man for 30 years, then began accepting small speaking roles. In 1979 he was nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for *Comes a Horseman*, but he remains relatively obscure. He sheds this image in *The Grey Fox*, projecting a very natural, unforced style of acting. His first leading role is memorable for its humor, poignance and pragmatism. Miner is a complex character and Farnsworth polishes every facet.

While Miner's romance with crusading photographer Kate Flynn is not the focus of *The Grey Fox*, it does provide for the film's most engaging sequence: a montage of these two older people discovering love for the first time in their lives, with all the accompanying adolescent traits of shyness and awkwardness played out while Miner's voice pleasantly rasps out a folk song. Canadian actress Jackie Burroughs sparkles as Kate, never letting her fall into a suffragette caricature. She is every bit as touching and believable as Farnsworth.

John Hunter's script is both simple and profound in this respect. It carefully delineates the characters but gives the actors room to work on their own.

Visuals in *The Grey Fox* also impress. Frank Tidy's cinematography captures the beautiful scenery of the Canadian Northwest but is more than a picture postcard; a definite and successful attempt to play warm earthy brown and gold tones against smoky blues and greens adds a sense of visual unity to the film.

Music, too, plays an important part in *The Grey Fox*. Traditional Irish music composed and played by The Chieftains blends well with Michael Conway Baker's moving original music.

There are several surprises near the end of the movie. What director, cast and crew have carefully built over 90 minutes reaches a highly engaging, appropriate finale that sends an audience out of the theater reassured that the human spirit is an unconquerable thing — it may suffer and it may see hard times, but it always wins.

Waldheim to speak

The former secretary general of the United Nations will speak here Nov. 3.

Kurt Waldheim, the U.N. secretary general from 1972 to 1982, will speak on "Peace: Do We Have A Chance?" in Room 121 of the Art Classroom Studio Building. The free lecture will begin at 8 p.m.

As secretary general, Waldheim supervised peace-keeping forces in Egypt and mediated conflicts in the Middle East, Cyprus and Southeast Asia and traveled to more than 120 countries.

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