

IN COMPETITION  
TORONTO INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL 2017

74  
MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE  
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA  
La Biennale di Venezia 2017  
Special Jury Prize

IN COMPETITION  
BRITISH FILM  
FESTIVAL 2017

HAMILTON  
MORRIS

BRYAN  
BROWN

SAM  
AND NEILL

A FILM BY WARWICK THORNTON {SAMSON & DELILAH}

# SWEET COUNTRY

JUSTICE ITSELF IS PUT ON TRIAL



INSPIRED BY TRUE EVENTS

SCREENPLAY BY SAMSON & DELILAH. FILM BY WARWICK THORNTON. CASTING BY JANE WILSON. COSTUME DESIGNER: JANE WILSON. HAIR AND MAKEUP: JANE WILSON. PRODUCTION DESIGNER: JANE WILSON. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: JANE WILSON, JANE WILSON. PRODUCED BY JANE WILSON. DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: JANE WILSON. EDITOR: JANE WILSON. MUSIC BY JANE WILSON. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: JANE WILSON, JANE WILSON. PRODUCED BY JANE WILSON. DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: JANE WILSON. EDITOR: JANE WILSON. MUSIC BY JANE WILSON. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: JANE WILSON, JANE WILSON. PRODUCED BY JANE WILSON. DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: JANE WILSON. EDITOR: JANE WILSON. MUSIC BY JANE WILSON.

BUNYA... [Logos and production credits]



OFFICIAL SELECTION

**tiff**

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL 2017



# SWEET COUNTRY

Ein Film von Warwick Thornton

Australien - Format: Scope - Ton: 5.1 - Dauer 112 Min.

**AB DEM 7. JUNI IM KINO**

## VERLEIH

**Praesens-Film AG**  
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## PRESSE

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## SYNOPSIS

SWEET COUNTRY beruht auf wahren Begebenheiten und spielt 1929 im tiefsten australischen Outback. Der Aborigine Sam Kelly bestellt das Land für Fred Smith, einen wohlwollenden Prediger, bei dem er in gegenseitigem Respekt lebt. Nachdem der Trunkenbold Harry March neu in die Gegend kommt und eine Farm bezieht, die ihm für geleisteten Kriegsdienste überlassen wird, greift er Sam im Alkoholrausch an, der ihn aus Notwehr tötet. Völlig schockiert und ohne Vertrauen in die Unparteilichkeit der Siedler, ergreifen Sam und seine Frau Lizzie die Flucht in eine imposante, von der Hitze und Leere geprägte Landschaft. In dieser Wildnis werden sie von Sergeant Fletcher und einer rachsüchtigen Gruppe weisser Männer gnadenlos gehetzt und gejagt. Sam bereitet sich auf die mögliche Konfrontation vor.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Warwick Thornton

*"Sweet Country* is set in Central Australia, where both me and writer David Tranter grew up. We both come from the same town and I've known him most of my life. My Kaytej tribe shares borders with David's tribe, the Alyawarra. When David came to me with a beautiful script, loosely based on stories passed down to him by his Grandfather I immediately connected to it and realised it had a lot of me in it too.

Our families went through a lot of the same things, and it's a history we would hear about growing up. In the 1920's we indigenous Australians weren't technically slaves but we worked for free, worked for rations, under the authority imposed by a law called the Native Affairs Act. So these family stories are also my inheritance - a personal part of this history that belongs to all of us.

One of these stories is the true tale of an Aboriginal man, Wilaberta Jack, who in the 1920s was arrested and tried for the murder of a white man in Central Australia. He was found innocent on the grounds of self-defence. The politics of the era didn't accept the verdict and Wilaberta Jack was the victim of a revenge killing.

Wilaberta Jack is our Sam, who has become his own character with his own original story. While Sam drives the plot and is our central character, the story is also told through the eyes of the character of Philomac. Philomac is an Aboriginal boy of 14 who lives on a cattle station, and is coming of age while caught between the social upheaval and cultural conflict of frontier life in 1920s Central Australia.

The film has all the elements of the Western genre - the frontier, confiscation of land, subordination and conquest of a people and epic sweeping landscapes.

# SWEET COUNTRY

In relation to many classic westerns however, things are turned upside down. We don't have any clear-cut heroes here, or simple ideas of good and evil projected onto a straightforward narrative.

When I was growing up, VHS tapes had opened up a large back catalogue of classic films, and I would watch a lot of classic American westerns and just not really connect, because the Indians were always the bad guys. And I'm an Indian, from an indigenous tribe connected to a country that was stolen.

But then I discovered other Western films, many of them Italian – movies like *The Good The Bad and The Ugly*, *A Fistful of Dollars*, or the Trinity series where everything was a little different. These movies featured anti-heroes, and the thieves still possessed the ability to have moral thoughts. These films inspired me to see the potential of the genre to tell my story.

With *Sweet Country* I wanted to look at all the different sides. The film isn't meant to blindly portray racism as a simple, senseless evil, but rather as a systematic reality of the time.

*Sweet Country* was shot in the MacDonnell Ranges. This is mesmerising country, it's where I grew up. The landscape is truly another character in the film, especially in the scenes with the posse chasing Sam and Lizzie across the countryside.

*Sweet Country* uses the vast spaces of the desert and its silence to emphasise the story of our characters and the hardships they face. The Aboriginal characters' communication reflects the authenticity of the local culture - using looks, hand signals and that understanding between them, rather than being all in the dialogue.

# SWEET COUNTRY

From the beginning I decided there wouldn't be music in the film. I didn't want to use the score as an overarching emotion. I wanted to keep the reality based in this time, in this place, in each scene as it played out. Getting rid of the score helped me focus entirely on the story and the characters, and move towards the narrowing of truth I wanted to find with the film.

The world of Sweet Country has been newly established by the British Crown through the forceful taking of Indigenous lands. Yet these are lands which did and still do possess a deep and complex web of ancient Indigenous laws, customs and life.

Here on this frontier outpost in 1929, the different cultural worlds collide in an epic and beautiful desert landscape. It is a place where Indigenous, and non-Indigenous people push against each other like tectonic plates. It is a clash of cultures, ideologies and spirits that still continues today from when the colonisers first arrived in Australia.

It's a history that isn't taught or spoken about much outside of specialised departments at the university. The issues raised in Sweet Country rarely find their way into mainstream consciousness.

In that sense there's a deep connection between Sweet Country and my other films. What we see in Sweet Country is directly connected to the world we saw in Samson and Delilah. This is its foundational history. The taking of country, the belittling, the racism – these things become generational.

My aim has been to use the accessibility of the genre for audiences to enter and be drawn into this world, and so experience the issues faced by an occupied people. The film's immersive approach is designed to break down the cultural boundaries between us and bring us together.”

## CAST & CREW

Sergeant Fletcher

Sam Kelly

Mick Kennedy

Harry March

Archie

Lizzie

Judge Taylor

Nell

Philomac

Fred Smith

Bryan Brown

Hamilton Morris

Thomas M. Wright

Ewen Leslie

Gibson John

Natassia Gorey-Furber

Matt Day

Anni Finsterer

Tremayne Doolan and Trevon Doolan

Sam Neill

Director

Producers

Writers

Script Editor

Co-Producer

Line Producer

Cinematographer

Second Unit Director/DOP

Editor

Production Designer

Costume Designer Heather Wallace

Hair and Make Up Designer

First Assistant Director

Sound Recordists

Horse Supervisors

Colourist

Online, VFX Supervisor

Sound Designers

Re-Recording Mixer

Warwick Thornton

Greer Simpkin, David Jowsey

David Tranter, Steven McGregor

Stephen Cleary

David Tranter

Fiona Lanyon

Warwick Thornton

Dylan River

Nick Meyers

Tony Cronin

Jen Rossiter

Thomas Read

David Tranter, Will Sheridan

Jim and Tom Willoughby

Trish Cahill

Craig Deeker

Sam Gain-Emery, Thom Kellar

Phil Heywood

Warwick Thornton

## **DIRECTOR / DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Warwick Thornton is an internationally-recognised director, screenwriter and cinematographer. Born and raised in remote Alice Springs, Australia, Warwick travelled to Sydney to study cinematography at Australia's prestigious film school AFTRS.

Warwick quickly established a strong presence in the industry shooting, directing and writing a series of short films, focusing on contemporary Indigenous Australian stories. Both *Nana* and *Greenbush* were premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival – *Nana* winning the Crystal Bear for Best Short Film -establishing Warwick as an important voice in Australian cinema.

Following the success of these films Warwick began work on his first feature *Samson and Delilah* - a confronting look at the relationship between two young Aboriginal teenagers in Alice Springs. The film premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009, winning the *Caméra d'Or*. *Samson and Delilah* collected many other awards including best film at the Asia-Pacific Screen Awards, the AFI awards, and the Film Critics Circle awards.

Next, Warwick completed his next feature *The Darkside*, a film which presents well known Australian actors retelling Indigenous ghost stories. This became Warwick's third film invited to premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival.

Following this he directed and shot the opening segment of Tim Winton's *The Turning*, and the opening segment of Guillermo Arriaga's *Words With Gods* –which was invited to premiere at Venice 2014.



Although Warwick has solidified a name for himself as director and screenwriter he is also widely regarded for his work as a cinematographer. His work as DOP on the 2012 hit musical *The Sapphires* once again highlighted Warwick's ability to present diverse and exciting Indigenous stories. He went on to shoot with the same director Wayne Blair on their next collaboration *Septembers of Shiraz* -starring Adrian Brody and Salma Hayek.

Most recently, Warwick has directed the feature documentary *We Don't Need A Map*, which explores Australia's relationship to the Southern Cross. The film premiered as the Opening Night film at the Sydney Film Festival in June 2017.

BUNYA  
PRODUCTIONS



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