

100 Essential New Zealand Films

By Hamish McDouall

Review by Jenny Argante

Here's another of Awa Press's publications that combine excellence of content with excellence of format, the beautifully-produced *100 Essential New Zealand Films*. Someone unkindly remarked when he saw it on my desk, "That many? Surely not!"

Sir, you are wrong. The compiler's problem was exactly the opposite: what to pick from New Zealand's wide range of exceptional films. Our film-makers are turning out fresh and original works of cinematic arts that continue to beat the stiff competition of the international market, and the Hollywood big guns.

You will find here intriguing essays not only on the obvious high-flyers like *Lord of the Rings* and *Whale Rider*, but less famous gems such as *Lovelock*, *Kaikohe Demolition* and *Tama Tu*. I am already raiding my local VideoEzy with a list of wanted items in my hand. I intend to start with *The Maori Merchant of Venice*. Surely a new slant on Shakespeare?

I still remember the impact *Angel at the Table* had on me while I was still living in the UK, and how hard I laughed at *Forgotten Silver*, both chosen by McDouall within his one hundred. The thrilling power of *Utu* and *Once Were Warriors*. The homely charm that's never condescending of New Zealand nuptials as revealed in *Second-Hand Wedding* and *Sione's Wedding*.

Later, watching the restrained retelling of the incidents behind *Out of the Blue*, the Aramoana tragedy, I fully acknowledged the maturity of our film industry, and why we excel in the world.

And the book's compact form fits easily into the palm or pocket, and the book itself is lavishly illustrated with stills and portraits of stars and directors. And Hamish McDouall is that rare thing, an expert who is able to convey his passion and his intellect without any hint of patronage. If you've got a film buff in the family, mark this down for Christmas or their next birthday.

(2009) McDouall, H. *100 Essential New Zealand Films*. Wellington, Awa Press. RRP \$40.