

Een film van Rolf de Heer (*The Tracker, Ten Canoes*)

CHARLIE'S COUNTRY

Starring David Gulpilil

(*Crocodile Dundee, The Tracker, Rabbit Proof Fence*)



OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



Gouden Palm winnaar
Beste Acteur (David
Gulpilil)

PERSMAP



SYNOPSIS

Charlie woont in een afgelegen Aboriginalgemeenschap in het noorden van Australië (Arnhem Land). Naarmate de regering haar controle over de traditionele levenswijze van de gemeenschap opvoert, raakt Charlie zichzelf kwijt tussen de twee culturen. Steeds vaker botst hij met de politie en wanneer zijn geweer, zijn splinternieuwe, handgemaakte speer én de jeep van zijn beste vriend geconfisqueerd worden, is de maat vol. Charlie trekt in zijn eentje de wildernis in om er te gaan leven op de oude manier. Maar het leven is veranderd sinds de tijd van zijn voorouders. Charlie wordt ernstig ziek opgenomen in het ziekenhuis in Darwin. Vanaf dat moment gaat alles bergafwaarts. Hij maakt kennis met een groep dakloze Aboriginals en belandt uiteindelijk zelfs in de gevangenis. Maar uiteindelijk zorgen deze gebeurtenissen ervoor dat hij wijzer en een beetje gelukkiger terugkeert naar zijn gemeenschap.

CHARLIE'S COUNTRY is een film van de in Nederland geboren Australische filmmaker Rolf de Heer (*The Tracker*, *Ten Canoes*). CHARLIE'S COUNTRY is net als zijn eerdere films een realistisch relaas over de Aboriginal gemeenschap met compassie en gevoel voor humor verteld.

Rolf de Heer schreef het scenario voor CHARLIE'S COUNTRY samen met hoofdrolspeler David Gulpilil. David Gulpilil is één van de meest bekende Aboriginal acteurs van Australië. Hij speelde onder andere in *Crocodile Dundee*, *The Tracker* en *Rabbit Proof Fence*. De laatste jaren werkte hij echter nauwelijks nog omdat hij leed aan een depressie als gevolg van zijn alcoholisme. Het enige wat hij nog wilde, was een film maken met Rolf de Heer. Een film met een onderwerp dat dicht bij zijn persoonlijke leven zou staan.

CHARLIE'S COUNTRY werd geselecteerd voor de sectie UN CERTAIN REGARD van het Filmfestival van Cannes 2014 alwaar acteur David Gulpilil de Prijs voor Beste Acteur won.

VANAF 28 MEI IN DE BIOSCOOP

Australië | 2013 | 108 minuten | Engels, Yolngu gesproken | Nederlandse ondertiteling



GLOSSARY & EXPLANATIONS

Arafura Swamp: A large area of freshwater wetlands just southeast of Ramingining. The swamp extends to 130,000 hectares during the wet season and is home to an incredible variety of bird, plant and animal life, including possibly the largest biomass of crocodiles in the world.

Arnhem Land: The north-eastern part of the Northern Territory of Australia, around 100,000 square kilometers,

an area larger than that of Belgium and the Netherlands put together.

Balanda: A word meaning “white person(s)”, coming from the word “Hollander”. The Dutch were the first white people to come into contact with the Yolngu.

Dry Community: In the past, some remote Aboriginal communities themselves chose to ban the sale and consump-

tion of alcohol. Since the Intervention, many Aboriginal communities have had an enforced alcohol-free status.

Humpy: A small, occupant-built shelter, usually of corrugated iron, that can serve as an indefinite temporary home for one or more people.

Long Grasser: An alternative culture of Aboriginal people who choose to live homeless in the city and environs (particularly in Darwin), in a perceived parallel style to how they used to live before white people came.

Ramingining: A town of about 800 Yolngu people in the northern part of central Arnhem Land. The town was created in the early 1970s when Yolngu from different areas were brought to live together, some quite a long distance from their traditional lands. There are fifteen or sixteen clans represented in Ramingining and about 8 different language groups.

The Intervention: On 21 June 2007, the then Australian Government announced a ‘national emergency response to protect Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory’ from sexual abuse and family violence. This became known as the ‘NT intervention’, or more commonly,

‘The Intervention’. In the weeks that followed, the Intervention grew significantly in scope, with changes to welfare provision, law enforcement, land tenure and other measures. Though supported by numbers of Aboriginal people, not a single prosecution for child abuse arose from the Intervention. It has since been replaced by the very similar ‘Stronger Futures Policy’.

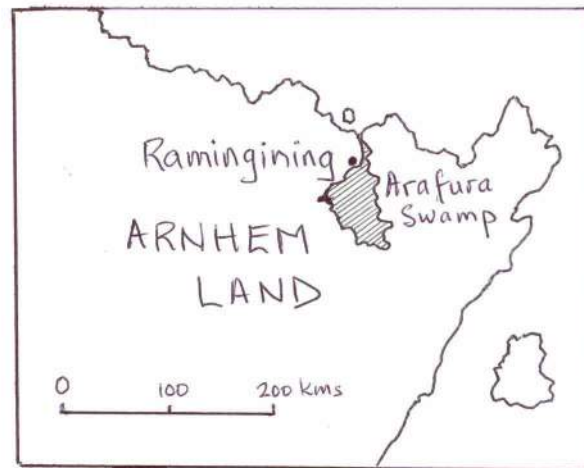
Yolngu: The literal translation is simply, “person” or “people”. It is used nowadays to describe the group of Australian Indigenous or Aboriginal people living in or originating from northeast Arnhem Land in Australia’s Northern Territory.



BACKGROUND

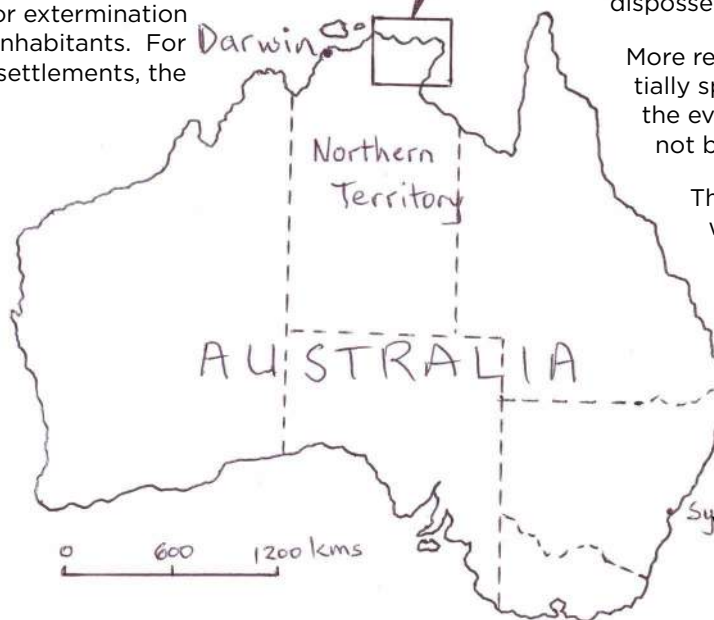
Aboriginal people in different parts of Australia experienced the incursions of colonialism in very different ways, though the consequence was almost always dispossession.

The first white settlement started in 1788 and rapidly expanded throughout the early 1800's. In some places there were genuine attempts at co-existence, but they were usually unsuccessful due to the expansionary needs of the incoming culture. The breakdown of goodwill would often lead to violence, resulting in the dispossession or extermination of the original inhabitants. For the rest of the settlements, the



process of colonization would start with the violence and only end up with co-existence once dispossession was complete.

More remote and inhospitable regions were initially spared the worst of these excesses, though the eventual result of cultural dispossession has not been much better.



Though the history between black and white in Arnhem Land (where much of the film is set) is not pretty either, it is unusual in that the region's indigenous people were never fully vanquished nor dispossessed. From the 1890's on, white pastoralists made a number of attempts to take over traditional Aboriginal lands there for the purposes of cattle ranching, but each such foray was fought in wars of attrition that were very costly to the Aboriginal inhabitants but resulted in the expulsion of the cattlemen.

At the urging of the National Missionary Council of Australia and others, the whole of Arnhem Land was proclaimed Aboriginal Reserve in 1931, affording significant protection to its people before dispossession had occurred. Consequently more of its people's traditional culture and languages remain than in most parts of Australia.

Massacres of Aboriginal people were recorded well into the 1930's. As late as the mid-1950's in some parts of Australia, Aboriginal people who were detained were still routinely placed in neck-chains for extended periods of time.





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The story of CHARLIE'S COUNTRY is rooted in the Aboriginal people of Australia - their culture, their way of life, their history - but the core of the film comes from my friend, David Gulpilil. The story of "Charlie" the character starts with the story of David the person.

From a young age, David had battled with the demon of drink and, to a lesser extent, other substances that came his way, starting when he was a naïve sixteen-year-old on his first film, *Walkabout*, where he learned to drink.

For much of his adult life, David had lived in Ramingining, a "dry" community that helped him control the worst of his predilections. After a tribal dispute I was never quite allowed to know the details of, David left the community in 2004 to become a long grasser in Darwin. David was supposed to come back to Ramingining and co-direct with me, and star in, the film *Ten Canoes*, but his fear of returning prevented him. With nothing in Darwin to hold him back, David went into slow decline. I saw less and less of him. I heard rumors, and none of them sounded very good. Then, in 2011, I learned that David was in jail.

I went to visit him, 3,800 kilometers away. On my first visit he was fragile, depressed, almost lifeless (David is one of the most fiercely alive people I've met). But there was one thing he wanted, which was to make another film...with me. I realized that

it was the only thing I might be able to do for him. It might give him a renewed sense of purpose, of belief in himself.

For David to find any sort of rehabilitation out of this, the strength of the film had to come through him. He had to dominate in a way he had never done in any film before. I decided that there would be no formal written dialogue, so David could speak either Yolngu or English as it came to him. The character also needed to be personal to David, so he could improvise more easily and understand the who, where, and why of the character at any point in the story.



We met first at the jail and later at a live-in drug and alcohol rehabilitation center for Aboriginal people. David would talk, disjointed and fragmented but with some life coming back into his delivery, while I made notes, sifting David's words for ideas, scenes, dialogue, anything. The more we talked, the more excited David became ("This is my film, about me!" is how he describes it, though the 'about me' mostly means 'authentic to my experience'). David has strong political ideas and passions about race, culture and the effect on his people of cultural dislocation caused by white colonization. He wanted to make the film political and meaningful, and I was only too happy to oblige.

Having successfully given up alcohol, David was free on parole. Now we faced the last great test of whether the film was really possible - returning to the community from which he'd been exiled. I knew the people in Ramingining had no problems, it was David who had to overcome his. And he did, when he saw that the community welcomed him back with open arms. He was home.

Towards the end of the trip, we took a boat to Gulparil, David's country in the Arafura Swamp and the place of his birth. At one point David jumped off the boat and ran off, yelling at me to follow. We headed to a grove of trees and David's excitement turned into an intense focus as he acted out his birth story - the tree under which he'd been born, the rock where his father had sat waiting for him...It was his beginning, sixty years before. In that moment, I understood more about my troubled friend David than I had in all the previous twelve years of knowing him.



Some months later we struggled through a shoot, as one does, and we made a film called Charlie's Country, in which David is as exceptional as I'd hoped he'd be. Remarkably though, it's a film that speaks as loudly for David the man as it does for David the actor. He goes through deep emotion when watching it. He laughs, he trembles on the brink of crying, and the politics of it make him angry with the world.

David never lived in Ramingining during the "Intervention". He's never gone bush to live the old way, attacked a police car or gone back home to teach dance to young kids. Although he may do any of those things in the future, for now those things are all Charlie. But the film is about David nevertheless. It is about his journey, his journey towards redeeming himself. "It's my movie! It's about me!"





ROLF DE HEER - DIRECTOR / PRODUCER

Director Rolf de Heer has been making feature films for thirty years now, and in that time he's managed to complete fourteen of them (there are numbers of others that haven't been completed, one way or the other). The films are usually low of budget but high in impact; they generally have something to say about the human condition despite conventional wisdom that it's wiser to the contrary; and, more often than not, each succeeding film is quite, quite different from the previous.

With those fourteen films, however, Rolf has had some measure of success: four different films in Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival (including the Jury Prize for *Ten Canoes* in Un Certain Regard); two films in Competition at the Venice Film Festival (including *Bad Boy Bubby*, which won both the Jury Prize and the Critics' Prize); films selected for Berlin, Toronto, Telluride, London... the list goes on.

He's also had a measure of failure with some of them, the odd one or two disappearing without a trace, even though for someone, somewhere, it's their favorite film of all time...and some of these films have in fact turned a small profit, a rare thing in the film world.



ROLF AND DAVID - WRITERS

Rolf de Heer is a classically educated (French, Latin, German, English, Philosophy, etc.) writer who generally doesn't collaborate much on the screenplays he writes since, as the producer/director of said screenplays, he has a fair sense of what it is the producer and the director might want.

David Gulpilil is a classically uneducated (a little bit of schooling in Maningrida in a language he couldn't really speak) non-writer who is full of ideas for all sorts of screenplays, from Westerns to action movies to thrillers, but who is without the proper means of expressing those ideas.

It seemed like a fair basis for collaborating, which is precisely what they decided to do. David talked a lot, Rolf listened, talked a little and wrote a lot, and then they talked some more. *Charlie's Country* is the result. They're both happy with the result, and they're still friends.





“CHARLIE” - DAVID GULPILIL, OAM

When, as a seventeen year-old, David Gulpilil lit up the cinema screen in Nicolas Roeg’s *Walkabout*, he did more than play a role. The performance was so strong, so imbued with a new type of graceful naturalism, that it re-defined perceptions of Aboriginality, especially in the field of screen acting.

Over the next decade, David became the iconic Aboriginal actor of his generation, paving the way in the resurgence of the Australian film industry for more parts to be written for Aboriginal people, for more Aboriginal stories to be told. His charismatic, engaging and unforgettable performances in films like *Storm Boy*, *The Last Wave* and *Crocodile Dundee* helped bring Aboriginality into the mainstream of the screen arts.

In his later work, including *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, *The Tracker*, *Australia* and *Satellite Boy*, David has brought tremendous dignity to the depiction of what it is to be Aboriginal. Through his performances he has brought an incalculable amount of self-esteem to his community.

David is not just a screen actor, however. He was a peerless dancer, for a time perhaps the most renowned traditional dancer in Australia. He has written the text for two volumes of children’s stories based on his people’s beliefs. He has performed a one-man autobiographical show to great acclaim on the stages of the Adelaide Festival of Arts and Sydney’s Belvoir Street Theatre. And he paints, in his own distinct but traditionally evolved style. The paintings convey his reverence for the landscape, people and traditional culture of his homeland.



“BLACK PETE” - PETER DJIGIRR

Peter Djigirr is a man of many talents. He’s a Gurruwiling Ranger for the South-East Arafura Catchment, close to his traditional tribal lands. He’s also the primary crocodile egg collector for Ramingining, earning his people significant royalties. In addition to playing Black Pete, Peter was also co-producer of the film.



“POLICEMAN LUKE” - LUKE FORD

Luke Ford throws himself into varied roles with an enthusiasm and intensity that bring just reward. On set, the fight between Policeman Luke and Charlie was something to behold. David Gulpilil and Luke took to each other like magnets and drove each other’s performances to greater and greater levels.



“FAITH” - JENNIFER BUDUKPUDUK GAYKAMANGU

The role of long-grasser Faith in *CHARLIE’S COUNTRY* is Jennifer Budukpuduk’s first performance as an actor, cast on instinct by de Heer and Gulpilil. It can surely be said that their instinct didn’t fail them. Jennifer is a mother, a grandmother, and a fluent artist in the style of Johnny Dain-gangan, her father.



“OLD LULU” - PETER MINYGULULU

Minygululu is an intensely traditional Yolngu man born and brought up in the bush. He cares enormously about the culture of his birth, and sees himself as one of the guardians of it. Minygululu volunteered to be available for *CHARLIE’S COUNTRY*, and he played his part with great sensitivity. He was also chief cultural advisor on the film.





MAIN CAST

Charlie
Black Pete
Policeman Luke
Old Lulu
Faith

David Gulpilil
Peter Djigirr
Luke Ford
Peter Minygululu
Jennifer Buduk-
puduk Gaykamangu



MAIN CREW

Presented by

Screen Australia
Domenico Procacci

Written by

Rolf de Heer
David Gulpilil

Directed by

Rolf de Heer

Produced by

Nils Erik Nielsen
Peter Djigirr
Rolf de Heer

Line Producer

Julie Byrne

Executive Producers

Domenico Procacci
Bryce Menzies
Sue Murray
Troy Lum
Peter McMahon
Frances Djulibing

Associate Producer

Production/
Costum Design
Film Editor
Sound Design

Beverley Freeman
Tania Nehme
James Currie
Tom Heuzenroeder
Graham Tardiff

Music by

Deze film wordt gedistribueerd door



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