

TANNA

Australia, Vanuatu (2015) 104 minutes

Directors: Martin Butler, Bentley Dean

Cast: Mungau Dain (Dain), Marie Wawa (Wawa),
Marceline Rofit (Selin), Charlie Kahla (Chief Charlie)



Screening 28 February 2018 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

Tanna is a Romeo and Juliet story set in one of the world's last true tribal societies. Set in the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu, in a village called Yakel, it depicts a forbidden love affair that challenges the traditional and pure "Kastom" system of laws and beliefs.

Reviews



This glowing, anthropologically flavoured drama – Australia's nominee for the foreign-language film Oscar – features an unlikely cameo from Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip by way of an argument for arranged marriage. It's one way in which *Tanna*, set among the tribes of the eponymous Pacific island in the Vanuatu archipelago, outlines its interest in how indigenous peoples experience broader human truths: in this case, how society always exacts its price from the individual.

Chieftain's son Dain, the villager with the flyest fern headdress, falls for broad-smiling beauty Wawa, but their attraction threatens neighbouring tribal bonds. It could be something from Renaissance drama. In fact, it is: Romeo and Juliet (almost). With such lush locations, it must have been a temptation for directors Martin Butler and Bentley Dean to epically frame the lovers ad nauseam. But they restrict themselves to one silhouetted shot against the local volcanic eruption, and spend more time in proximity to fantastically vital performances from the Yakel-tribe cast.

... *Tanna* is an open-throated and universal call for change from within.

Phil Hood, The Guardian

There's something thrilling about a movie that introduces us to a corner of the world we never knew existed. *Tanna* is that kind of film. It was shot on the remote South Pacific island that gives the movie its name with a cast composed entirely of local non-actors. The people of Yakel village live off the land, ignoring the modern world while adhering to a set of traditional rules known as the Kastom.

... The movie's Australian directors, Martin Butler and Bentley Dean, who wrote the script with John Collee, have an attention to earthly detail that gives the movie a beauty to rival a nature documentary. But they also have a keen anthropological eye. The pair spent seven months with the tribe, getting to know its members and their traditions and rituals, which are seamlessly integrated into the plot, educating the viewer without making the tribe's experience seem overly exotic.

... At times, the movie appears to favour the careful study of Yakel's culture over the emotion of the story, which takes some of the wallop out of the climax. Even so, the movie is a tremendous accomplishment, especially considering that the cast had never seen cameras before — much less movies — yet still agreed to star in the drama. Their performances are as stunning as the setting, and that's truly saying something.

Stephanie Merry, Washington Post

Film Facts

- Bentley Dean and his family spent seven months in 2014 living with the Yakel tribe.
- The plot and script developed after the Australian filmmaker heard a Yakel song about star crossed lovers.
- The film, with an entire cast of tribespeople, was nominated for Foreign Language Film at the 2017 Oscars.

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