



**STORM BOY is a Third Quarter 2019 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Here's Kino Ken's review of that Australian family film.**

**11 of a possible 20 points**

**\*\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\***

**Australia 2019 color 99 minutes live action feature family drama  
Ambience Entertainment / Best FX Adelaide Producers: Michael Boughen,  
Matthew Street, Paul Ranford, and Kylie Mascord**

**Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance**

**(j) designates a juvenile performer**

**Points:**

- 1 Direction: Shawn Seet**
- 0 Editing: Denise Haratzis**
- 1 Cinematography: Bruce Young**  
**Water Cinematography: Rick Rifici**  
**Still Photography: Matt Nettheim**
- 0 Lighting: Andrew Robertson**  
**Special Visual Effects: Alistair Jamieson, Marty Pepper, Grant Lovering,  
Tony Clark, Thomas Maher, Dante Nou, Ian Cope,**

**Jennie Zeiher**

- 2**     **Screenplay: Justin Monjo based on the book by Colin Thiele**  
**Script Supervision: Susie Struth**
- 1**     **Music: Alan John**
- 1**     **Production Design: Melinda Doring**  
**Graphic Design: Bowen Ellames**  
**Art Direction: Janie Parker**  
**Set Design: Prue Parsons**  
**Set Decorations: Glen Johnson, Jonathon Hyde-Neary**  
**Set Dressing: Ben Crabtree, Cassie Sibbin**  
**Scenic Artist: Michael Wolff**  
**Props Master: Peter Malatesta    Props Maker: Greg Sweeney**  
**Costume Design: Louise McCarthy**  
**Makeup Design: Tracy Phillpot\*    Key Makeup: Jen Rossiter\***
- 2**     **Sound Design: Pete Best\*    Sound Editing Supervision: Pete Best\***  
**Sound Effects: Duncan Campbell\*, Tom Heuzenroeder\*, Alicia Slusarski\***  
**Sound Recording: Des Kenneally\***  
**Sound Rerecording Mixing: Pete Best\*, Gethin Creagh\***  
**Casting: Ann Robinson, Hannah Charlton, Louise Heesom Smith,**  
**Angela Heesom, Jodie Kirkbride, Sarah Milde**
- 1**     **Acting**
- 2**     **Creativity**
- 11 total points**

**Cast: Finn Little\* (j) (Storm Boy), Jai Courtney (Hideaway Tom), Geoffrey Rush\* (Michael Kingley), Erik Thomson (Malcolm Downer), Bradley Trent Williams (Jasper Davies), Natasha Wanganeen (Susan Franklin), Nick Launchbury (Reporter 1), Emma Bargery (Reporter 2), Trevor Jamieson (Fingerbone Bill), Morgan Davies (Madeline Downer), Michelle Nightingale (Mrs. Marks), Miraede Bhatia-Williams (Mildew), Luca Asta Sardelis (j) (Schoolgirl 1), Georgina Giessauf (j) (Schoolgirl 2), Paul Blackwell (Cal Evans), Chantal Contouri (Julie Sims), Alirio Zavarce (Mining Company Lawyer), Simone Annan (Murujuga Lawyer), Edward Boehm (j) (Young Storm Boy), Anna Bampton (Jenny), Lucy Cowan (Belle), Ksenga Logos (Sonia), Rory Walker (Murray), Martha Lott (Pearl), Brendan Rock (Hunter 1), James Smith (Hunter 2),**

**Caroline Mignone (Angela), David Gulpilil (Fingerbone Bill's Dad)**

**In case anyone might be wondering, the new film version of Colin Thiele's classic Australian novella *Storm Boy* falls considerably short of equivalent stature. Its key problem is complications resulting from director Shawn Seet's framing of the narrative as one of conservation versus development, an either / or dichotomy absent from the original plot.**

**According to this remake, senior retiree Michael Kingley is figurehead for a company planning to grant mining rights concessions in the Pilbara, a serene, sparsely populated region far to the north and west of the area where the film's main story is set. In other words, an issue of little or no concern to residents of the Coorong, Storm Boy's childhood home, is dragged into play as the chief bone of contention. That's a blatant attempt to capitalize on political correctness as defined by Greenpeace's more radical proponents. Supposedly the current dilemma there parallels an earlier disputation about whether or not to grant wildlife conservatory status to the tidelands.**

**In this 2019 film, Kingley, through flashbacks recounted orally to a grandchild, familiarizes her with a tale of bird hunters trespassing blatantly into preserve territory, menacing its pelican population in particular. This seems to contradict the species' official classification as a least threatened wildlife group in Australia, though it accords with author Thiele's basic plot. At any rate, Mr. Kingley decides to dissuade a contract-blocking minority from approval of a mining company grant, partly to keep in the good graces of granddaughter Madeline. This teen conservationist is seemingly determined to resist mineral excavation anywhere in her native land. Depriving aborigines of greatly needed cash for their regional economy is the morally right thing to do according to her lights. Michael agrees, more to keep his family united than for any ecologically sound reason. This insistence on saving pristine flora and fauna at any cost is paralleled with Grandfather's reminiscences about boyhood struggles to protect and nurture a pelican. That obsession ultimately caused a lifelong rift with his father.**

**In order to tell both tales coherently, the narrative swings back and forth, somewhat arbitrarily, between them. It weaves a complex, multi-layered texture too tangled for young screeners to puzzle out. Even an adult watching and listening is apt to find the alternating time periods and their distinct**

disagreements difficult to follow. Clarity and character development are thus sacrificed to desire for conformity to current political correctness as defined by Disney and other mass media entertainment conglomerates.

Verbose moralizing about family unity and protecting the environment could have been handled just as authoritatively through use of voice-over, a device which would spare audiences any necessity for a succession of jarring transformations of naïve Storm Boy into experienced Storm Grandpa and vice versa. These two very different emotional and physical embodiments of the same character war with each other. It becomes difficult to decide which incarnation a viewer ought to identify with.

Of course, outdoors maritime scenery is splendid, if somewhat diluted by hazy, diffusely focused shots supposed to represent nostalgic recollections. Thiele's compact sensory details are too often overridden by chatter which adds nothing to content. Less talk and more closeups of waves, sandhills, and clouds would have made for a considerably richer film while hewing closer to the book's vividness.

While Thiele mostly made do with about a half dozen significant characters, Seet's film crowds the screen with minor entities such as shopkeepers, schoolchildren, and townies. Gone into the void are a tugboat crew needing rescued. Instead, Hideaway Tom is overtaken by a storm at sea, a very unlikely occurrence and one completely missing from the book. Storm Boy's perception of himself as a loner different in personality and outlook from other folks is likewise eliminated. The screenplay divests Hideaway Tom and Fingerbone Bill of their occasional menacing qualities and much of their taciturnity. They are presented as invariably supportive and amiable, which isn't the way they're presented in the original narrative. One of Thiele's key points in his book was children must be permitted uniqueness. They are not mere replications of adult models. Storm Boy will not mature into a second Fingerbone Bill. Nor will he repeat all the social errors of his dad.

What will distinguish him in this 2019 film is a tragedy which begins with his own decision to attempt saving the lives of three baby pelicans whose mother, like Storm Boy's own, has been killed prematurely. He is assisted, rather tentatively, by a cooperative father and mentoring Aboriginal neighbor, whose nearby humpy makes the man Michael's closest neighbor. The strangeness of Fingerbone Bill's ancestral customs awakens the boy's curiosity as he

encounters for the first time traditions utterly unfamiliar, yet quite harmonious with land, sea, and sky.

Bill responds to his young friend's eagerness to learn with a willingness to impart nature lore to the only approximation of a son he's likely to ever encounter. Someone in dire need of a nurturing, maternal counter to aloofness of his surviving parent. This supportive role in turn supplies Fingerbone with a justification for living and a strong connection to another human being, both elements previously absent from his existence.

Storm Boy's success in keeping the trio of pelicans alive makes enemies for him in the hunting community infringing on bird feeding and breeding grounds. Two of these hunters in particular direct threats his way. They have no immediate impact. The lad continues training and coaching his pets until the inevitable day when his human housemate demands they be returned to their proper habitat and relations.

Two of the birds avail themselves of an offered opportunity to leave. One named Percival doesn't, however. He returns after a brief period of aerial independence and refuses to detach himself from his trainer ever again.

That stubbornness leads ultimately to provident rescue of Hideaway Tom when keenness to increase his fishing harvest one day overrules good judgment. He quickly finds himself out of petrol, drifting amid mounting whitecaps, too far from land to swim easily to shore. Until a rope carried out to him by Mr. Percival allows Fingerbone Bill and Storm Boy to tug him to safety on the beach. Suddenly, Mr. Percival is a celebrity. Pelican preservation becomes overwhelmingly fashionable in the Coorong. Man and bird will live amicably together forever. Except ...

Be prepared for an unexpected, turnabout ending that shatters Storm Boy's world and drives a wedge between himself and his paternal prop.

Sound recording faithfully renders noises of seasplash, rifle shots, and hungry chicks, though downplaying the fury of a Southern Ocean tempest.

Décor is adequate for the subject matter portrayed. Aboriginal makeup is exemplary.

Standout performances are turned in by Geoffrey Rush as the older and wiser Michael Kingley and by Finn Little as the sensitive, persevering title character seeking companionship simultaneously with human stranger and avian dependents. His transformation late in the film into domestic rebel is believably

enacted. Secondary roles are mostly undeveloped, including a promising cameo by David Gulpilil. He all too briefly appears as Fingerbone Bill's father in a scene of cultural transmission from older to younger generation.

Though hampered by an overload of multiple layers, Justin Monjo's screenplay compensates by ending with a thoughtfully profound payoff about family loyalty. Would that it had earlier eschewed all mining company superfluity.

Alan John's music modestly underlines proceedings onscreen, never overinflating drama or distracting from performances. It to some degree offsets frequently mistimed scene editing of Denise Haratzis, who tends to favor cuteness over momentum.

Acceptable as entertainment for ages ten and up, *STORM BOY* does include a couple profanities and several bird killings. Parents are advised this is a bittersweet drama, not a comic romp or objective nature documentary.

Does it hold its own against the 1976 forerunner version directed by native Frenchman Henri Safran, which featured David Gulpilil as Fingerbone Bill and Greg Rowe in the title role? Return to this LVCA website later this year to find out.