

<p>Volume 25 Number 3 MAR 2022</p>		<p>Website https://www.williamstown-film-society.org Email michaeljslee58@gmail.com Phone 0478 624 528</p>
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In the Supper Room of the Town Hall, 104 Ferguson St, Williamstown, 7.30pm, Wednesday 30th March, 2022.

2022 Program

Mystery Road

By Sarah Ward, 16 October 2013, Screenhub

Returning to his outback stomping ground with a sly swagger in his step, Jay Swan (Aaron Pederson, *Bad Karma*) just wants to move forward; instead, he spends his dismal days stuck in a loop. The murder of a local teenage girl marks the newly-minted detective’s homecoming, but his efforts to ascertain the details of her death are met with anger and apprehension. As he asks questions no one wants to answer, Swan’s pursuit of resolution sees him literally driving around in circles.

With patience and precision, Ivan Sen’s minimalistic *Mystery Road* charts his spiralling journey – one indicative of the insular nature of isolated communities, but not limited to it. Every turn he takes around the town is a revelation and a roadblock, each revolution plunging him further into the depths of closely-kept secrets. Though acrimony follows his footsteps – from the sergeant (Tony Barry, TV’s *The Time of Our Lives*) and drug squad cop (Hugo Weaving, *Tim Winton’s The Turning*) wary of his city-trained ways, to the ex-wife (Tasma Walton, *City Homicide*) and teenage daughter (debutant Tricia Whitton) still wielding woes from his absence – the mystery begs to be solved.

In his fourth feature following *Beneath Clouds*, *Dreamland* and *Toomelah*, writer/director Sen slowly establishes a film steeped in two genres, crafting a noir-leaning crime thriller grounded within the western tradition. Having skipped between stories and styles in and across previous works, his ability to combine the two is never cause for concern, nor is the interweaving of his continued focus of the plight of indigenous Australians. Sen’s central idea – a modern, localised turncoat story, with allegiances murky and moving throughout, and stand-offs physical and otherwise always slipping into view – provides a perfect premise for the gun-slinging outsider tale to unfold.

Indeed, with the most meticulous of deliberation – both within the narrative, and in the film’s construction – *Mystery Road* subtly combines the circular and the shifting, its protagonist always ambling around, its inner details ever-ambiguous, and its scenic rural setting reflecting the continual thematic change. Courtesy of the pristine lensing of Sen as cinematographer (with editing and scoring credits also on his resume), the inescapable vastness of the latter becomes the feature’s anchor. In the emptiness of the arid plains lies the truth – of the tension-riddled central quest, of the technical savvy that ensures the story immerses from start to finish, and of a film ever-so methodically but affectingly realised.

Firmly in the middle sits Pederson, the second mooring in an effort marked by its purposeful meandering. With stoicism and undeniable sympathy, his troubled cop remains the film’s touchstone, in a role all others in his twenty-year career now seem to have been working towards. A plethora of other Australian acting talent – Jack Thompson (*The Great Gatsby*), Ryan Kwanten (*Not Suitable for Children*), Damian Walshe-Howling (*The Reef*) and David Field (*Careless Love*) among them – aptly fill out the cast in small but substantial roles; however, never is Pederson in danger of being eclipsed as the film’s central fascination. It is through his eyes that *Mystery Road* transforms from sparse to intricate, and inscrutable to involving; it is in his performance that the feature becomes elemental, existential and essential. (2013, *Colour*, 122 mins, rated - M, 4 out of 5 stars)

To watch a trailer head to the program on our website

<http://www.williamstown-film-society.org>

Starbox Results

	5	4	3	2	1	Average
Woman in Gold	23	12	2	0	0	4.6