

<p>Volume 28 Number 1 January 2025</p>		<p>Website https://www.williamstown-film-society.org Email michaeljslee58@gmail.com Phone 0490 863 602</p>
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Council Chamber of the Town Hall, 104 Ferguson St, Williamstown, 7.30pm, Wednesday 28th January, 2025.

BRAN NUE DAE

Bran Nue Dae, a delightful musical trip about a teenage Aborigine in 1960's northwestern Australia, began in the 1980s with the songs by writer/musician Jimmy Chi and his band Kuckles. A story based on the experiences of Chi and his bandmates ties together their popular songs. The resulting stage show premiered at the Perth Festival in 1990 and then toured the country as the first Aboriginal musical. Using about half the original songs from the show, and several of the original cast members, the movie version returns to the real places from their lives.

In the remote coastal town of Broome, Willie (handsome Rocky McKenzie) makes eyes at the lovely Rosie (Jessica Mauboy, an *Australian Idol* winner) as she sings in the church choir. Out of church, she is being recruited by another suitor, Lester (Dan Sultan), to sing with his band at a notorious local honky-tonk with its enthusiastic dirty dancers. Meanwhile, Willie's mother wants him to study to be a priest and sends him off to Perth, over 1,300 miles away, to a Catholic boarding school under the strict, paternalistic supervision of German missionary Father Benedictus (Geoffrey Rush). For all the rigid and quirky priest's oppression of Aborigine culture (though not quite as oppressive as the school in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*), the dormitory life unites the rebellious boys—and provides Willie with back-up singers and tap dancers for the musical's catchiest lyric: "There's nothing I would rather be than to be an Aborigine!"

Willie escapes to return home to Broome (and Rosie), and *Bran Nue Dae* becomes a road movie through the red dust of the outback, where he meets its colorful denizens (including a randy Roadhouse Betty played by *Kath & Kim*'s Magda Szubanski), with the implacable priest in hot pursuit. Willie's guide is a wily old hobo he affectionately calls Uncle Tadpole (Ernie Dingo), who left Broome 15 years earlier. They hitch a ride in a VW bus with a hippie (Missy Higgins, a best-selling singer-songwriter, who gets to warble a couple of tunes here) and a young German tourist who has come to Australia to find his real father. (Yes, you can see the Gilbert-and-Sullivan-like twist coming, but it's all in good fun.)

The wonderful songs, some with exotic-sounding instrumentation, reflect the wide range of mingled cultures—rock, reggae, Indonesian, and indigenous chants. (The use of traditional dancers and body paint for the moving "Listen to the News," that bemoans the future for the bush people, had to be negotiated with tribal elders.) The rocking mix of genres, let alone hippies, feels somewhat like *Hair*, including a "Black Girl" ballad Lester sings to Rosie.

If you object to exhilarating singing and dancing as misrepresenting the extent of the challenges facing young Aborigines today, just wait until next month's U.S. release of Warwick Thornton's morose, realistic romance *Samson and Delilah*, which was probably an answer to this show's popularity. The rest of us will hum the ensemble reprise of "There's nothing I would rather be than to be an Aborigine!"

Nora Lee Mandel September 12, 2010 film-forward.com

Starbox Results

	5	4	3	2	1	Average
The Ladykillers	23	13	3	0	0	4.5

To watch a trailer (& read more) head to the 2024 program on our website

[https://: www.williamstown-film-society.org](https://www.williamstown-film-society.org)