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MIFF 2016: The Family is Heartbreaking and Excellent

Posted by [Sean W. Fallon](#) on Aug 10, 2016 | [0 Comments](#)

Over the next few weeks, our man in Melbourne, Sean W. Fallon, will be covering the [Melbourne International Film Festival \(MIFF\)](#) and reviewing some of his favourite movies that he catches there.

Overview: A documentary about The Family, a cult/sect operating in Melbourne, told from the points of view of survivors and the police who sought to shut it down. DCP; 2016; Not Rated; 90 minutes.

The Family: Chances are, if you're not Australian, you've never heard of The Family or Anne Hamilton-Byrne. Or maybe you half remember a news story about a yoga teacher who set up a sect in rural Melbourne, filled it with rich people and children, and pronounced herself the Messiah reborn. If you know the story or this is all new, it doesn't matter. This isn't a documentary about the story, this is a documentary about the people.

Rosie Jones' movie charts the history of The Family focusing on the events that occurred at Lake Eildon, two hours from Melbourne, where I'm writing this. Hamilton-Byrne declared herself Jesus reborn and populated her lakeside commune with the children of her followers and children adopted under shady circumstances, or stolen, to use a more accurate term. The children were to be the next shining generation once the apocalypse happened and The Family were released from the UFO they would take shelter in. They exercised, did yoga, and were home-schooled daily. They were also belittled, beaten, starved, brainwashed, bullied, and drugged.

The Children: The film is composed of re-enactments and interviews. The interview subjects are mostly the grown-up children of Lake Eildon, as well as Lex Man, the detective who made it his life's work to bring down Hamilton-Byrne, other police, journalists, former sect members, and one current sect member.

The Lake Eildon survivors are heart-breaking. Each one presents their experiences, and the scars and effects are written in mile high letters on all of them. The horrors present themselves in different ways: One of the women barely blinks and looks ready to bolt at any moment while one of the men talks with a slurred catch in his voice and can't sit still. They all stare out at the audience and tell their story, and, as broken as they are, they project bravery, resilience, and strength.

The Devout: The element that fascinated me most and, as MIFF showed this as a Q and A with the creators and Lex, I was able to ask a question about him, was the man who was still a part of the sect. He appeared throughout throwing scorn on the work of the police and the testimony of the children. He is a middle-aged man with clipped tones and confidence, who talks candidly about still believing that Anne Hamilton-Byrne (still alive) is some sort of spiritual figure. The children above didn't have a choice. Some were taken from their mothers and given to their new family, sometimes without their mothers even seeing them. They were raised in isolation by a woman and her sadistic acolytes (their 'uncles' and 'aunties'), and told the world was about to end, the police want to kill them, and if they obey their 'mother' they'll live happily

ever after.

Overall: After this movie I went home and slept like a log, exhausted from heart sickness and tears. *The Family* is a reminder that there is evil in this world of ours. True evil. The people who would prey on children and feel nothing. But it's also proof of good in the world. The survivors finish the movie talking about their own children and, in some cases, reconnecting with the sect members who abandoned or brutalised them (and in one case a survivor experiences a considerable amount of abuse at the hands of one auntie only to later find out she was his biological mother).

Jones' movie is a triumph. Bleak, terrifying, and heart-breaking, it is a powerful cautionary tale and an affirmation of the strength and resilience that people can be capable of, even in the worst of circumstances.

Grade: A

Featured Image: DCP



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Diego Christmas Retweeted

Matthew A. Cherry ✓
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So in Trumps America if you burn a flag you should be jailed but if you burn a cross you should be in his administration. Got it.

13h

GaysOfOurLives
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If fucking Camp Rock got a sequel then Lemonade Mouth sure as hell should

19m

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