



## JOHN BARRY: SOUNDTRACKING BOND AND BEYOND

# Walkabout

### Walkabout

Directed by: Nicolas Roeg

©: Max L. Raab-Si Litvinoff Films (P.T.Y.) Ltd.

A Max L. Raab – Si Litvinoff production

Executive Producer: Max L. Raab

Produced by: Si Litvinoff

Associate Producer: Anthony J. Hope

Associate: Irving Zeiger

Production Manager: Grahame Jennings

Assistant Director: Kevin Kavanagh

Continuity: Annabel Davis-Goff

Screenplay by: Edward Bond

From the novel by: James Vance Marshall

Photographed by: Nicolas Roeg

Special Photography: Tony Richmond

Photographed in: Eastman Color

Camera Operator: Mike Molloy

Focus: Peter Hannan

Stills: Dean Goodhill

Film Editors: Antony Gibbs, Alan Pattillo

Assistant Film Editor: Brian Mann

Production Designer: Brian Eatwell

Art Director: Terry Gough

Make-up: Linda Richmond

Music Composed and Conducted by: John Barry

Music Produced by: Phil Ramone

Location Sound Mixer: Barry Brown

Boom Operator: Kevin Kearney

Dubbing Mixer: Gerry Humphreys

Cast:

Jenny Agutter (*girl*)

Lucien John (*white boy*)

David Gumpilil (*black boy*)

John Meillon (*father*)

Robert McDara (*man*)

Pete Carver (*no hopper*)

John Illingsworth (*husband*)

Hilary Bamberger (*wife*)

Barry Donnelly (*Australian scientist*)

Noelene Brown (*German scientist*)

Carlo Manchini (*Italian scientist*)

George Roubicek (*voice of radio announcer*)\*

Australia 1970©

100 mins

Digital

\* Uncredited

The screening on Tue 5 Mar will be introduced by season curator Bob Stanley and Jason Wood, Executive Director of Public Programmes and Audiences

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**SIGHT  
AND  
SOUND**

Nic Roeg's masterpiece details the growing bond between an indigenous Australian boy, on a ritual separation from his tribe, and two white children lost in the outback. Beautifully shot, it inspired one of Barry's most emotive and deeply memorable scores, the recording of which was thought lost until it was finally issued on CD in 2016. The film itself broke several cultural barriers in Australia.

### SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

One of the best slogans I ever saw was painted on a ruined gable-end in Paddington. It read: 'More Anthropology Less Revolution'. It came to mind during Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout*. One searches first for comparisons with other films about the Australian outback. There haven't been so many, and the fact that Ted Kotcheff's *Outback* appeared in England in the same month is a strange coincidence. But Roeg's film is not really concerned with Australia itself; as Kotcheff's is. Rather he has chosen it, it seems, as a vivid example of two opposed cultures living side by side: the Europeanised, metropolitan Aussie and the Aboriginal. The real comparison is with his and Donald Cammell's earlier film, *Performance*. Even there the cultures – principally 'straight' and criminal, with all the questions that begs – were symbiotic: they preyed on one another, they lived on one another. *Walkabout* in a sense goes further, since the cultures are mutually exclusive. They derive no comfort from one another, achieve no understanding. Their meeting leads to inevitable tragedy and disintegration. The first, the modern and metropolitan, is irredeemably dismissive of the second, the Aboriginal, and that in turn is too primitive to be flexible.

The word 'primitive' of course begs all questions, and it might be fair to say that the film is an attempt to define it anew. The story is simple enough. A middle-aged Sydney businessman, oppressed by city life, drives his two children, a 14-year-old daughter (Jenny Agutter) and a 6-year-old son (Lucien John) out into the desert, apparently for a picnic. Once there, however, he tries but fails to shoot them before successfully committing suicide. They wander off aimlessly and are fortunate to find a water hole and a few berries. When this source is exhausted they encounter an Aboriginal boy (David Gumpilil) on his 'walkabout' – an extended manhood trial involving months of single-handed survival in the outback. He takes them under his protection, steering them away from contact with whites, providing for them, instructing them in the arts of survival...

There are obvious dangers in turning such an outline into a credulous fable which would accommodatingly digest all manner of fashionable preoccupations: pollution, population, angst, alienation. The gamut of pundits, from Levi-Strauss through Lorenz to McLuhan, one might feel, has been well run; and indeed the film doesn't altogether escape, at two viewings, from the suspicion that at least some of the charges might stick in an unsympathetic court. The rather pointed radio programmes discussing *pâté de foie gras*, etiquette for the housewife, maths by radio, the absurd elocution lessons the girl has in school, smack heavily of the scriptwriter Edward Bond's obsessive hand. Never one to poke you with his sword when he can use a battleaxe, he

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### The Tamarind Seed

Fri 1 Mar 20:35; Mon 11 Mar 18:10

### Walkabout

Sat 2 Mar 12:15; Tue 5 Mar 18:10 + intro by  
Jason Wood, Executive Director of Public  
Programmes and Audiences; Mon 11 Mar 20:50

### Follow Me (aka The Public Eye)

Sat 2 Mar 18:20; Tue 12 Mar 17:45

### On Her Majesty's Secret Service

Sun 3 Mar 15:00; Sun 10 Mar 18:10

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may be the one who labours the comparison between killing and eating meat on the hoof and its refined city equivalent.

What makes the film triumph over this literalness is another kind of intensity which one feels, since it's a filmmaker's, is all Roeg's. Metaphors which might otherwise be lumpish take wing by the grace of his eye and ear. Whoever devised it – and I may be doing Bond a great injustice – the moment when the little boy's tongue flicks out to pick up salt from the palm of a hand says all that need be said about our animal links, and it is convincing that the boy, being closer to the natural by virtue of his age, is more easily able than his sister to adapt to Aboriginal life. He communicates unaffectedly by signs with the Aborigine, while she is unable to devise a better way of instructing him in English than to bark commands at him.

Similarly, a rich soundtrack, built up partly from the babel of the electronic village, partly from animal cries, partly from Stockhausen's *Hymnen*, appropriately deepens the references Roeg is making with the camera. The little boy slides down a sandhill and the sand closes over his path, leaving no trace. He and his sister sleeping exhausted under a flower-embroidered net, seem to sink into the desert, to become, in sleep, a part of nature, borrowing some of the rock's immobility, breathing into it a little of their own life. Reptiles, photographed in close-up, tower like friendly dinosaurs while the boy's war-toys shrink into pettiness, taking the idea of man's wars with them. The sun, gorgeous, orange and massive, swims above the rim of the world, menacingly explosive. It's beautiful all right, and we are almost swept up by the Housman quotation which accompanies the city-pent epilogue:

'That is the land of lost content,  
I see it shining plain,  
The happy highways where I went  
And cannot come again.'

But only almost. Such an idyll cannot be taken neat. From anthropology Rung and Bone descend to mere revolution. That pleasurable complexity is betrayed by this simple conservationist message. If the film suddenly slumps into setting social problems and answering them, then we must ask other questions too. What innocence is lost? Is survival of the fittest an agreeable social plan? How else control disease, promote hygiene, comfort; the arts or culture as distinct from survival? The questions don't belong to the best parts of *Walkabout* and neither do the answers. The savage is no noble, the sophisticate not corrupt. Trying to prove it, one way or another, in the face of the camera's evidence, would be a betrayal of the film's real vision.

Gavin Millar, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1971/2