

# Ngati: a Tribal Drama



East Coast drovers: a scene from 'Ngati'

**Ngati, the New Zealand film chosen for the prestigious Critics' Week at the recent Cannes festival, is released locally this month. It's a movie that, in the words of its director Barry Barclay, had "hard-bitten European critics coming out of the cinema with eyes red from crying."**

Barclay is best known in the documentary field — the 1974 television series *Tangata Whenua* and the 1984 feature *The Neglected Miracle*. *Ngati*, his first dramatic feature, required a different approach:

"In many ways it was easier!" he says. "It's terrible in documentary, you're working out the content as you go. With drama, things are written up before you start — the format is more precise. You don't have that luxury with a documentary."

How does Barclay feel about the present state of New Zealand documentary making?

"We are the most impoverished documentary-making country I've been in and this wasn't so in the early 70s. Documentary is a reflection of where we are at the moment, and I feel embarrassed that we have not made an in-depth reflection regularly on our land, and what it means to stand on our land."

The director describes *Ngati* as essentially a "film about the people on the land." Tama Poata's script about the problems of the Ngati Porou on the East Cape in the late 40s was written four or five years ago for television, but "they hadn't been able to handle it."

Barclay speaks emotionally about the lack of Maori representation on our cinema and television screens:

"We formed a lobby group, Nga Tamatoa, to try and correct things. In 25 years of television drama there hasn't been a single Maori drama as I define it — which means a drama made by Maoris, written and promoted by Maoris. Things are looking better now and we're in a climate in which things are changing — we'll probably have one next year. In terms of biculturalism, the Film Commission is way ahead of other institutions."

## Craft

Barclay has been working with young Maoris creating a film workshop in which they can learn their craft in a Maori environment. The Department of Education could be doing more: "We have had 241 plays for kids in the *School Journal*. There are four from Jamaica, four from ancient China, two on stoats, two on noise, and only two in 20 years on a Maori theme — both written by a Pakeha. What an incredible way to treat a culture!"

There's a dry humour to Barclay's description of the film industry as "a war machine which is very efficient and calculated, but which doesn't leave much room for the soul." He finds though that other approaches are possible:

"I've tried to evolve a set of working principles which began in the 70s: deal with the community and not with the 'big shots.' We must involve the old people, the young people. When you apply that rule of community to a documentary, the result is totally different to a BBC or CBS type of approach."

"The same thing is true of *Ngati*. We have been brought up with the principles of Greek drama which usually involved one person (usually a man) ending up tortured and killed ... catharsis and all that."

Tama Poata and myself thought, 'Why not a drama that involves the whole people?' One person's demise is not going to make the whole tribe weep. It's been very funny when we came to do the promotion for the film when people want to know who the star

of *Ngati* is!"

## Tradition

*Ngati* has a predominantly Maori cast and this brought its own difficulties. "There are some very good young actors coming through but, for the 25 to 80 year

olds, we just have not had a European type of drama tradition. We're lucky to have Wi Kuki Kaa, who is such an unsung actor in this country. He's our Kiri te Kanawa of the theatre, one of the greatest actors this country has turned out

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# Where Pterodactyls Roam



The Pterodactyls (L-R): Martin Kean, Ken Stewart, Jeff Batts, David Ford.

**The first song the Pterodactyls ever recorded received the thumbs up from the NME. Their latest EP is like something Arfur Daley would sell from his lockup.**

'Every Time it Rains,' appeared on the BFM *Outnumbered By Sheep* compilation, and the English journal described it as a "prospective indie hit." The Pterodactyls played the occasional gig last year, finishing up with an Orientation tour around the varsities at the beginning of 1987. A five-track EP recorded in February, *We've Done It Now* has just been released on Meltdown Records.

So why would Arfur Daley be interested in buying it as a job-lot? It's a rather, er, *one-sided* record. All five tracks are on one side of the 12" — the pristine shiny flip can be used as a shaving mirror, say,

or a beer mat. "EPs are always annoying because you've got to get up and turn it over," explains Meltdown's Peter Shepherd.

Just as Murphy's Law ran the Pterodactyls Orientation tour, so too with their recording session at Harlequin on Waitangi Day. Dance Exponent Brian Jones produced, but no sooner had the band plugged their amps in than the whole of the upper North Island suffered a powercut. Of course, that gave them more time to get in tune ... Then there's the liner notes. They may be the funniest ever seen on a local record, but the songs aren't in the order claimed: just a ploy to

discover how alert the public are, "nothing to do with Jeff making a mistake with the artwork."

The Pterodactyls, in abeyance at the moment due to the dispersal of their members, are/were Martin Kean, who wrote 'Hidden Bay' for his old band the Chills, guitarist Jeff Batts, not from the Bats but the Stones, drummer David Ford and Ken Stewart, who "hasn't been in any famous bands but gave up a promising civil service career and bought lots of paisley shirts to be in this one." Stewart's BFM kiwi music show is sorely missed since his exile to Dunedin.

Next up from Meltdown are albums from Three Leaning Men and Fane Flaws: his I Am Joe's Music LP, plus Sam Hunt's poetry set to music.

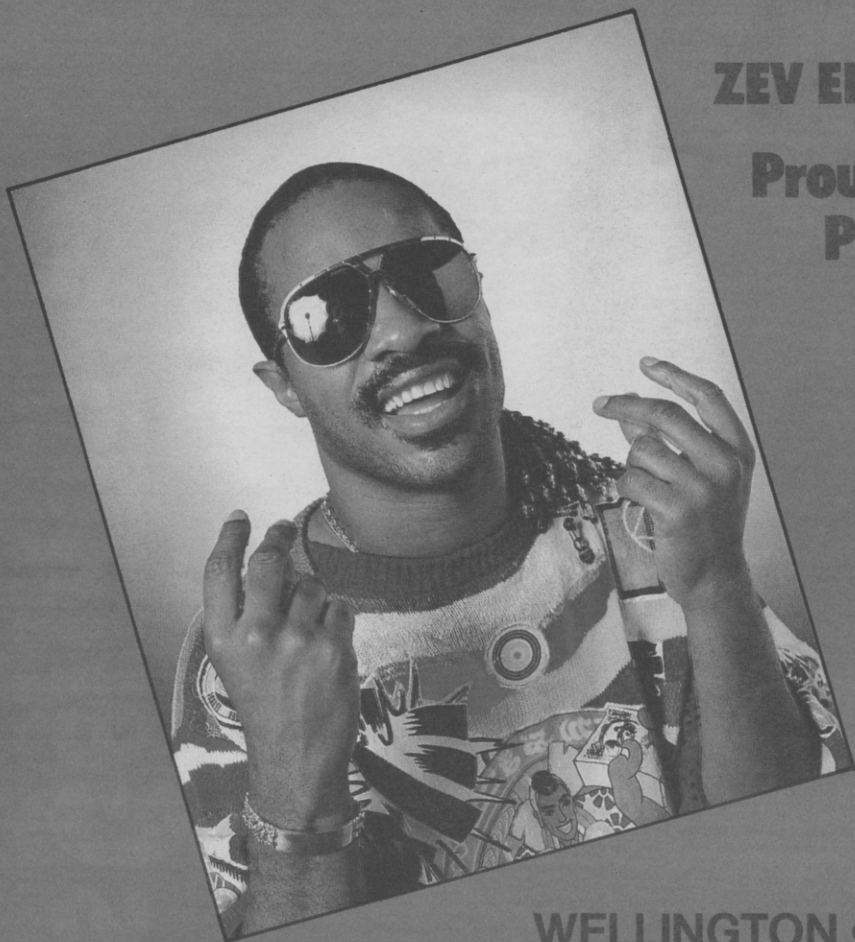
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