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SYNDICATION



Reviews: *The Caterpillar Wish* Wriggles Successfully

Posted on Saturday, 03 June 2006 @ 20:03:36 by [Tim Milfull](#)

Swirley writes:



Written and directed by Sandra Sciberras, and produced by a talented team of filmmakers, *The Caterpillar Wish* is one of the most engaging films I have seen this year, and showcases more than one generation of Australian talent.

At first the title might seem a little obscure. The film opens as fifteen-year-old Emily Woodbridge's (Victoria Thaine) face, with a distinct facial mole, emerges from under the warm blanket. The bedroom window is filled with early morning winter and a clunking, tinkling crystal butterfly mobile. Emily's mother, Susan (Susie Porter) is yet to wake, snuggling with the latest male schoolteacher in town. Later, when she tells Emily of her own childhood dreams, they are characterised by flying dragons delivering Susan to the queen. Susan has her own wish for Emily, and her fantasy never goes beyond that.



Emily, however, is on the verge of emerging into life; struggling with the cocoon of the small coastal town she lived in with her mother; her father a mystery. Emily shows the people around her that there are possibilities for transformation within all of us. The storyline gives no easy answers but does remind us of the importance of asking, of wishing and daring to move forward.

Caterpillar Wish gives a fresh perspective on adolescence, offering hope and natural wisdom of the heart in place of the typical teenager representing conflict in dramas. Here, the adults have long ago given up trying. Perhaps youth isn't delusional in its idealism; perhaps it is more useful than the defensive position of adult cynicism, after all of life's setbacks. Victoria Thaine skilfully expressing a teenager's broad range of emotions, trying to free herself from past horizons. In the absence of any worldly power, she rides her bike on roads designed for cars wearing only a woolly ear-flapped hat for protection. Emily wants to know who her father was; she wants her mother to have a healthy loving relationship with someone she cares about. She no longer wants to be the excuse. She wants to understand how her grandparents could reject her mother and her. She wants her boyfriend, Joel (emerging actor Khan Chittedon) to stop being secretive. Like the drawings of her that Joel magically pins up around her garden, evocative of the magic they share, this magic spreads so that others are forced to see different portraits or possibilities all around them, outside of any comfort zones.



Alongside an ensemble of conflicted characters, Susan, has been a single parent from the age of fifteen after refusing to name the Emily's father. Supporting herself and Emily with topless bar work, she no longer risks real feelings, instead sleeps serially with men she is uninterested in. Her religious parents, Emily's grandparents, (Elspeth Ballantyne and Bruce Myles) are estranged and isolated from their own natural instincts, living out of town. The loathsome middle-aged policeman (Philip Quast well-known in the United Kingdom for winning Lawrence Olivier awards for theatre work, is best

known here for 17 years of *Play School*) trawls the after-school crossings and any other avenue for vulnerable targets. (Possibly the only flaw in his characterisation is the number of attractive women who fall for him, but maybe I don't understand small country town boredom or have overlooked his obvious kerbside ticket-writing charm.) Multiple AFI Award winner, Wendy Hughes plays Elizabeth, his neglected wife, confident of her husbands lies and infidelities but is unsure about scripting a life ahead. Elizabeth is irresistibly funny in explaining some implications to their youngest child. Their son Joel (Khan Chittenden) is Emily's secret boyfriend, adoring of her and wanting to protect her from his parents disdain. Meanwhile, Joel's uncle (Elizabeth's brother), Stephen (Robert Mammone) is still heartbroken and haunted by the tragic murder-suicide of his wife and child.

Sandra Sciberras and producer, Kate Whitbread first took a tightly written script to the Australian Film Commission's 2005 IndiVision lab. Sciberras is on



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record in an interview for the Australian Film Commission as saying the great atmosphere and experienced talent there helped her bring the two concepts of low budget and independent films together. The result is beautifully paced, edited by Jason Ballantine, the sole editor of *Wolf Creek*. Award winning stills photographer, Greig Fraser shot on 35mm film stock and makes good use of fog and cloud to build atmosphere.



This film is beautifully crafted, and avoids 'hot chocolate moments' by using meaningful natural dialogue. When Stephen takes a sledgehammer to the walls in his house, Elizabeth walks in on her brother's renovations and becomes distressed. The only reason she can give him for stopping is respect for his departed wife and his old life.

Elizabeth hears the strangeness of her own voice faltering, and suddenly we realize the ridiculousness of remaining in the museum of the past, how can something that no longer exists be destroyed in the promise of the new, the unknown?

The Caterpillar Wish is about the boldness of re-imagining our present, and working towards a future we want rather than one dictated by our pasts. As such it concerns all of us. Sometimes in investing too much in preserving the past, nothing is saved. New possibilities are prevented from flowing into our lives. Sciberras confirms that secrets don't have to be smashed with the sledgehammers of rebellion; they can be spoken out against with confidence and free thinking, laid to waste when dreams are followed through on, no matter what setbacks. She highlights the universal isolation of all genders trapped by the histories of past relationships and offers gritty hope for personal empowerment.

The Caterpillar Wish
2006

Writer/Director: Sandra Sciberras

Producer: Kate Whitbread

Executive Producers: Zelda Rosenbaum and Antonio Zeccola

Director of Photography: Greig Fraser

Editor: Jason Ballantine

Cast: Susie Porter, Victoria Thaine, Robert Mammone, Wendy Hughes, Philip Quast, Khan Chittenden, Will Traeger, Elspeth Ballantyne, Bruce Myles, Nicholas Bell

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