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Fiji makes Oscar bid with The Land Has Eyes

Sandy George in Sydney

16 September 2005

Fiji has made its first ever attempt to win an Academy Award by submitting The Land Has Eyes for the best foreign-language film category.

In order to qualify, Australian-based distributor Ronin Films opened the film at the only multiplex in the Fijian capital of Suva on September 8, where it took a respectable \$13,600 (Fiji\$23,000) from one 200-seat cinema in its first week. It was officially submitted by the Fiji Audio Visual Commission (FAVC), which funded half the cost of the transfer from digital to 35mm.

While a number of films have been shot in Fiji, this is the first made by Fijians that has achieved theatrical release. Writer-director Vilsoni Hereniko loosely based the story on his childhood on the island of Rotuma. Rena Owen is one of the only two professional actors.

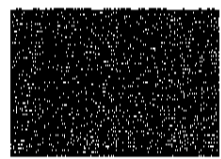
"Both countries have big Fijian communities and we hope to draw them out for this film," said Ronin's Andrew Pike of the November 10 New Zealand release and the Australian launch one or two weeks later. He has rights to Oceania. "It is doing fabulously well in Fiji for an indigenous production made on a shoestring and it will later move from Suva to the country's only other mainstream cinema."

Pike is negotiating with US distributors on behalf of producer Jeannette Paulson Hereniko, founding director of the Hawaii International Film Festival. The FAVC will represent the film at the AFM.

Meanwhile, Tsai Ming-liang's The Wayward Cloud has been chosen as Taiwan's official Oscar submission. Tsai's Goodbye, Dragon Inn was submitted for the 76th edition of the Academy Awards in 2004.

Taiwan's Government Information Office (GIO), which subsidised the film's production to the tune of \$300,000, cleared the controversial film uncut for theatrical release in March this year. It grossed over \$300,000 in the capital and is estimated to have crossed \$1m nationwide, making it the highest-grossing local film this year to date.

After winning a Silver Bear for outstanding artistic contribution at



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