

Wild Indian

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

After viewing *Smoke Signals,* the Audience Award and Filmmakers Trophy winner at the 1988 Sundance Film Festival, and the first feature film written, directed, and produced by Native Americans, I had an overwhelming desire to see more Indigenous filmmaking. Sundance Film Festival was organized around the guiding principle of giving Native American voices a platform. The 2021 Sundance Film Festival premiered a total of four Indigenous films, three short-form films, and one feature-length film, *Wild Indian* from Lyle Mitchell Corbine, Jr., (a member of the Northern Wisconsin Bad River Tribe of Lake Superior Chippewa).

Wild Indian opens with a metaphorical scene from possibly the 18th century depicting a Native-American in the woods shooting another Native-American in the distance. In a preceding scene, it is quickly revealed that Makwa, a young Anishinaabe boy, has a rough life. Heâ??s bullied at school and doesnâ??t get along well at home with his young parents. He often appears with bruises he says he got falling down, but no one believes him.

As he is being questioned in the schoolâ??s administrative office a majestic piece of cinematography provides foreshadowing. Makwa has only one friend, Ted-O. Makwa and Ted-O like to escape by playing in the woods, until the day Makwa shockingly murders a schoolmate. After covering up the crime, Makwa runs away and the two boys go on to live very different lives.

Now, as adult men, they must face the truth of what they have done and what they have become. In what feels like going through a time and space continuum, Corbine takes the narrative to California where we are introduced to Michael, a senior-level corporate executive with authority over a Jesse Eisenberg character. In addition, Michael has a stylish home and a beautiful wife. With a strong and compelling visual style that evokes both fascination and dread, it quickly becomes clear Michael, portrayed by Michael Greyeyes, has done terrible, unforgivable things.

Displaying sadomasochist tendencies, Michael is struggling to hold it all together. Meanwhile, a hard-looking adult Ted-O is being released from prison. Ted-O returns to the reservation, camping in the

woods and making amends to the murdered boyâ??s mother with the truth of what happened to her son the day Makwa murdered him. Despite making his amends, Ted-O still suffers inner conflict and decides he must track down Makwa and complete the cycle of justice.

Unfortunately for Ted-O, Michael gains the upper hand and kills Ted-O to continue his life in California while covering up any links to the past. Michael still has to face the presiding District Attorney with jurisdiction over the reservation and the accusation from the murdered boyâ??s mother, Mrs. Wolf. In a diabolical manner, Michael manages to clear himself.

Wild Indian is a compelling look into the state of Native American life. And, Michael Greyeyes delivers a gripping, enigmatic performance as a modern Native American with a dark past. In addition, Kate Bosworth portrays Michaelâ??s wife in California, with considerable depth and nuance. Jesse Eisenberg delivers a strong supporting performance and is credited as Executive Producer as well. *Wild Indian* was writer/director Corbineâ??s feature debut and is sure to become a touchstone in modern Indigenous cinema. Highly recommended.

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hollywoodglee