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FILM REVIEW: Caleb Landry Jonesâ??s performance in NITRAM is brilliant!

Description



Viewed as part of the 37th Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

Based on real events and nominated for a whopping fifteen Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA) Awards with eight wins, the Caleb Landry-Jones-led *Nitram*, directed by Justin Kurzel, and written by Shaun Grant, tells the story of the worst mass-killing in modern-day Australiaâ??s history, the Port Arthur Massacre on Tasmania, April 28-29, 2006, where 35 people were killed and 23 others wounded by lone gunman Martin Bryant.

Landry-Jones portrays the mentally-challenged character known as Nitram (Martin spelled backward). Nitram, the son of an overbearing, and often condescending mother, portrayed by Judy Davis, and a compassionate and loving father portrayed by Anthony LaPaglia, suffered from depression and displayed positive psycho-social characteristics.

With an adult physical appearance and long, disheveled hair, Nitram is shown going door-to-door selling a lawnmowing service. One homeowner with her small daughter told Nitram through a cracked-opened front door that her husband cut the lawn. Nitram pushed against the door as the woman

attempted to shut the door asking, â??how much does your husband charge you to cut the grass?â?•

Landry embodied the character of Martin Bryant with a physicality displaying a slowness in mannerisms and a disassociated personality. Nevertheless, Nitram did find a homeowner, a wealthy heiress, Helen, portrayed by Essie Davis, who Nitram up on his offer to cut the grass. Helen proceeded to invite Nitram into her home and into her life. A special relationship evolved bringing joy to the socially awkward couple, seemingly.

As time passed. Nitram developed an obsession with guns after losing his father and probably causing a tragic car accident that took Helenâ??s life. Nitramâ??s mother seemingly did not possess a full capacity to exhibit love and Nitram spiraled down a dark and dangerous path culminating in a series of murders and ended with the Port Arthur Massacre on Tasmania.

Nitram will not be in the running for the feel-good film of the year. Deft cinematography combines Hollywood framing with some handheld Verite-style work and a powerful narrative give the film a polished and highly-stylized look. At its core essence, *Nitram* is a character-driven, cautionary tale full of challenging scene work. Moreover, Jones was named Best Actor at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival and the AACTA Best Lead Actor in Film, for his efforts as Nitram

While *Nitram* is not a feel-good film and has several disturbing and a couple of very violent scenes, it does attempt to shed light on the backstory of the dark days of the Port Arthur Massacre on Tasmania in its one-hour and fifty-two-minute runtime. The massacre itself was handled delicately with a closing scrolling text:

> **â??On April 28th 1996, thirty-five people were killed and another twenty-three wounded in Port Arthur, Tasmania. The lone gunman was sentenced to thirty-five life sentences. The events of that day resulted in an overhaul of Australiaâ??s gun laws and the introduction of a National Firearms Agreement. The reforms were agreed to in twelve days. Over 640,000 firearms were bought back by the government and destroyed. No State or Territory has been fully compliant with the National Firearms Agreement. There are now more firearms owned in Australia than in 1996.â?•**

Caleb Landry Jonesâ??s performance is brilliant and the supporting cast is superb. *Nitram* is highly recommended.

Category

1. #SBIFF
2. Foreign-Language
3. Santa Barbara International Film Festival

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