

"We Are the Original Storytellers"

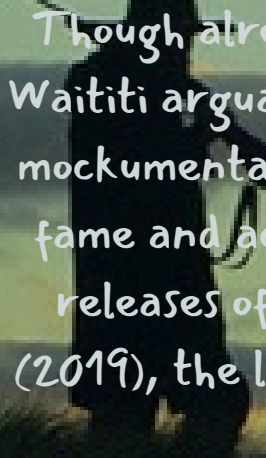
The Films of Taika Waititi
CUFA Film Club Week 1



WHO IS TAIKA WAITITI?

Upon receiving the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay for his movie *Jojo Rabbit*, Taika Waititi dedicated the award to 'all the indigenous kids in the world who want to do art...we are the original storytellers, and we can make it here as well'.

Indeed, throughout his career Waititi has demonstrated his incredible skill as a storyteller both visually and in writing, creating works that explore identity, belonging, and understanding through a vibrant, poignant, and often hilarious lens.

A silhouette of a person standing on a hill, holding a long staff or spear. The background is a dramatic sunset sky with orange and yellow clouds over a dark landscape.

Though already successful in his native New Zealand, Waititi arguably broke into the wider film scene with his mockumentary *What We Do in the Shadows* (2014). His fame and achievements reached new heights with the releases of *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) and *Jojo Rabbit* (2019), the latter of which garnered significant critical and awards success.

With the slew of other projects he has directed, produced, or acted in, Waititi has swiftly established himself as a major player in the industry, all the while advocating for diversity (particularly indigenous representation) in the film world and beyond.

WHAT MAKES A TAIKA WAITITI FILM?

1. A SHARP AND SILLY SENSE OF HUMOUR

Regardless of theme or subject matter, Waititi's films universally feature lots of comedy. This is often the dry, 'Kiwi' style of humour, deadpan and slightly dark, though Waititi always leaves room for sex jokes, toilet humour, and physical comedy.

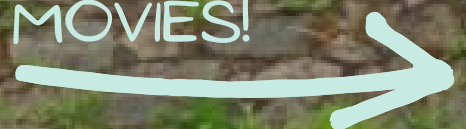
2. FOCUS ON IDENTITY

Waititi is of mixed heritage: his mother is Russian Jewish and his father Māori. Both of these aspects of his identity feature heavily in his works, and many of his films also deal with the challenge of defining oneself outside of what society demands or what one dictates for themselves.

3. QUIRKY AND VIBRANT VISUALS

This final element has been particularly pronounced in Waititi's most recent features, *Jojo Rabbit* and *Thor: Ragnarok*. In both, the composition of shots is meticulous and perhaps a bit unnatural, and the colours are loud, vibrant, and saturated.

NOW ON TO THE FEATURED MOVIES!



WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS

Year Released: 2014


Directed by: Taika Waititi & Jemaine Clement

Country of Origin: New Zealand

Available on: Amazon Prime

Running Time: 86 min

CW: Gore/Blood; violence; descriptions of sex; sexual innuendo

A promotional image for the movie 'What We Do in the Shadows' featuring the three main vampire characters: Viago, Vladislav, and Deacon. They are all shown from the chest up, wearing period-style clothing. Viago (left) has long dark hair and a goatee, Vladislav (middle) has dark wavy hair, and Deacon (right) has short dark hair. All three have blood smeared on their faces and are making playful, slightly menacing faces. The background is a solid dark red color.

Viago, Vladislav, and Deacon are three vampires living together in Wellington, New Zealand. When they invite a film crew to make a documentary about their lives, chaos, hilarity, and a plethora of dirty jokes ensue.

Arguably Waititi's first big success outside of New Zealand, with its crass humour, goofy premise, and instantly quotable punchlines *What We Do in the Shadows* has become a modern comedy classic. The film revels in its characters' stupidity, with the three vampires getting into increasingly ridiculous hijinks. The visual style of the film also stands out to the rest of Waititi's work, playing with the boundaries between cast and crew, reality and artifice, in a way that only adds to the movie's enduring appeal.

JOJO RABBIT

Year Released: 2019

Directed by: Taika Waititi

Country of Origin: USA, New Zealand

Available on: Disney+

Running Time: 108 min

CW: Depictions of Nazis/Nazism; antisemitism, mentions of genocide; violence; animal abuse

Jojo is a blindly devoted Hitler Youth member who spends his days with his imaginary friend, Adolf Hitler. However, when Jojo discovers his mother is hiding a Jewish girl, Elsa, in their home, his worldview is swiftly challenged.

Jojo Rabbit has inspired polarising opinions in its viewers. The central conceit of the film of Jojo's imaginary friend being Hitler (played by Waititi himself), as well as the film's comical tone has received criticism and praise in equal measure. For his part, Waititi stressed his desire to make a buffoon of Hitler to push back against those who continue to glorify and follow his ideology. However, what is often overlooked when analysing this film is the drama, grief, and trauma that is artfully and poignantly depicted, a dynamic that elevates Jojo Rabbit from comic satire to a truly moving, impactful, and chilling piece of WWII cinema.

HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE

Year Released: 2016

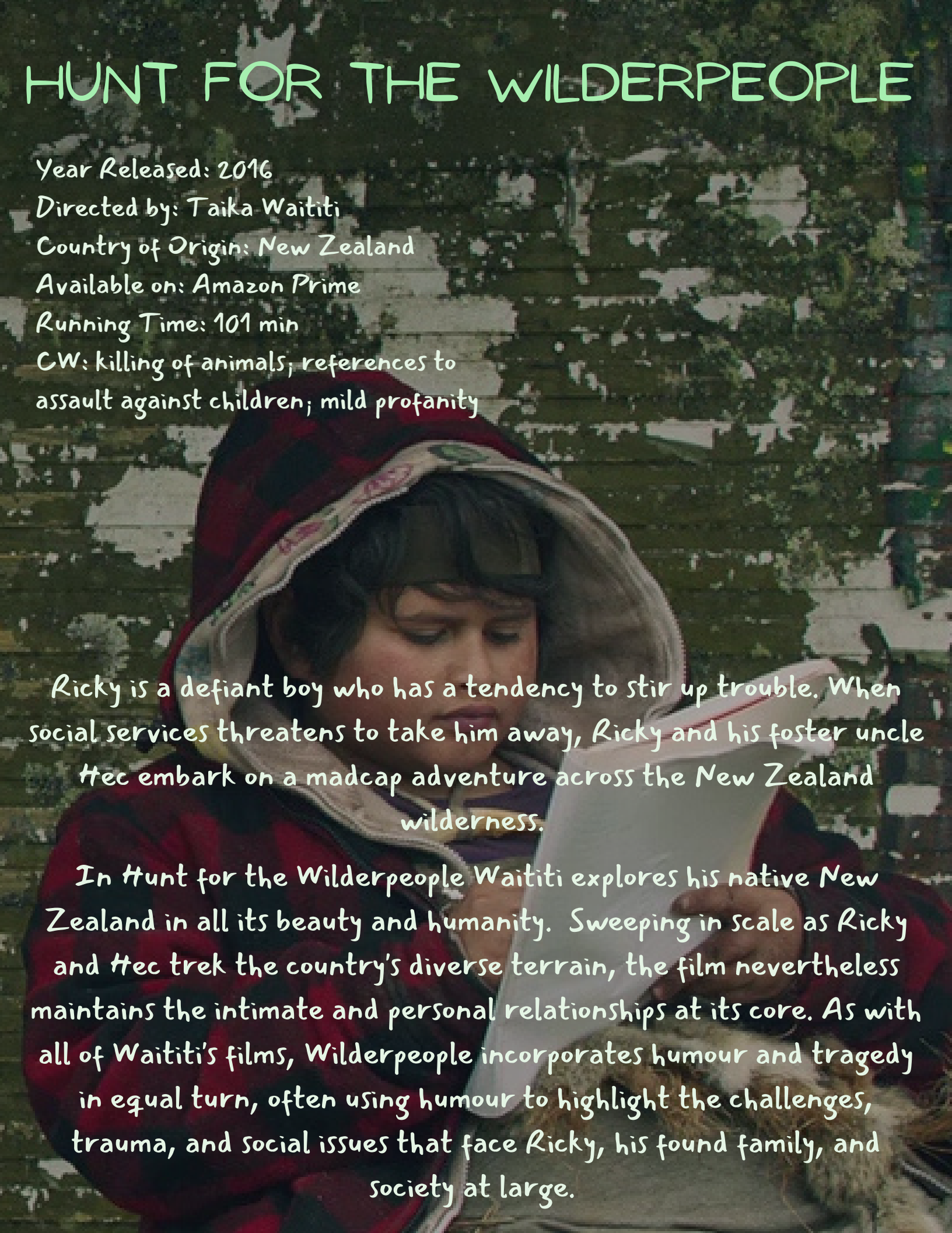
Directed by: Taika Waititi

Country of Origin: New Zealand

Available on: Amazon Prime

Running Time: 101 min

CW: killing of animals; references to assault against children; mild profanity

A young boy with dark hair, wearing a red hoodie with a patterned lining, is looking down at a piece of paper he is holding. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a path.

Ricky is a defiant boy who has a tendency to stir up trouble. When social services threatens to take him away, Ricky and his foster uncle Hec embark on a madcap adventure across the New Zealand wilderness.

In *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* Waititi explores his native New Zealand in all its beauty and humanity. Sweeping in scale as Ricky and Hec trek the country's diverse terrain, the film nevertheless maintains the intimate and personal relationships at its core. As with all of Waititi's films, *Wilderpeople* incorporates humour and tragedy in equal turn, often using humour to highlight the challenges, trauma, and social issues that face Ricky, his found family, and society at large.

MORE STUFF!

OTHER FILMS TO CHECK OUT:

Two Cars, One Night (2003)

Eagle vs Shark (2007)

Boy (2010)

Thor: Ragnarok (2017)

OTHER ARTICLES/VIDEOS:

TAIKA WAITITI | Master Class | TIFF 2018:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5D_9i5Z8l0

Taika Waititi and Stephen Merchant Break Down a Scene from 'Jojo Rabbit':

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3y3FRGCG7o8>

Writers Roundtable: Taika Waititi, Lorene Scafaria, Destin Daniel Cretton, Kasi Lemmons | Close Up:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPQo6XLtKa4>