

THE BUTLER

Director's statement

Ten years ago I made a film called TEN YEARS AFTER, TEN YEARS OLDER. It was about my family's migration to this country, viewed from the perspective of a trip I made back to Cyprus after ten years in Australia. A decade later, another film has emerged in me which is in many ways the continuation of the story which began with my family's decision to come to this country twenty years ago.

I sometimes wonder why these films keep coming to the surface demanding to be told? One possible reason is that in the telling of my experiences, and my family's, I can understand the pain and loss of migration. I need to express myself, and through it to understand. I also hope to be understood. I was surprised to discover with my first film, KANNAVA YOU CAN'AV'ER, only one minute long, that people were identifying and understanding.

It was then I decided to become a filmmaker. My work, documentary or drama, has been autobiographical and personal. How I perceive the events in my life is at the core of it. These perceptions I interpret on film, and although the story is primarily the same, with each new telling and each new film it's being told from different angles, with more detail given to different aspects.

Until now, I was the one through whom my story was told. My mum, George and Nino have always been part of it, but now they are essential as it is about them also. The process of sharing on screen myself and those close to me is heart breaking, but in the end I believe a film such as THE BUTLER is very special.

TEN YEARS AFTER... was set against the beauty of my small island of birth, Cyprus, and images of my grandmother. THE BUTLER is set against the warmth of Nino and my family. Through observed sequences, re-enactments of childhood ceremonies, my brother's and father's early amateur films and my thoughts and stories, it tackles several threads simultaneously. It deals with the here and now, our past in Cyprus, our past in Australia and our future in the new generation of Kannaivas in our new country. It is this complexity which makes THE BUTLER special and a fascinating challenge for me - to depict our unusual family of survivors and share with everyone else our sad and happy experiences.

Engraved in myself and my brothers' psyches are the three children who suddenly found themselves in a strange new world. It's only now through writing THE BUTLER that I realise both George's and my first films were set against some alien planet in the universe. Creating our own world - our reality - was the way we survived. And sharing the melancholic beauty of this unique world is what drives me to make THE BUTLER.