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Film Clips

By Derek Zemrak



Photo provided

"Free State of Jones" is based on a novel by Victoria E. Byrum that hit the bookshelves in 2003. The movie begins in 1862 during the Civil War. It tells the story of a poor, rebellious Southern farmer and Union sympathizer, Newt Knight, from Jones County, Mississippi. Knight, portrayed by Oscar-winner Matthew McConaughey ("Dallas Buyers Club"), and his extraordinary armed rebellion banded together with other small town farmers and local slaves to launch an uprising against the Confederate Army that resulted in Jones County Mississippi seceding from the Confederacy.

The movie continues with Knight taking his struggles into the Reconstruction Era that includes facing off with the Ku Klux Klan.

Writer and director Gary Ross ("Seabiscuit") delivers a straightforward depiction of the Civil War

period and a subject matter that is neglected in many Civil War discussions. Ross consulted with many Civil War experts, including Eric Foner of Columbia University and Martha Hodes, a professor at NYU. His research resulted in a detailed, riveting history lesson. Ross reportedly spent 10 years researching the truth before bringing "Free State of Jones" to the big screen. The movie illustrates three periods of US history: The Civil War, the Reconstruction Era and 1948.

As with many Hollywood movies of this genre, some of the characters are fictional: e.g. Daniel, the boy that Newt tries to protect during the Battle of Corinth. According to History vs. Hollywood, Daniel is a composite of various 7th Battalion men in real life. Always the cruel Confederate soldier, Lieutenant Barbour (Bill Tangradi) is also a fictional character.

McConaughey's performance of Newt is outstanding and he will receive attention during award season. His performance is also raised when surrounded by a strong supporting cast such as Golden Globe-winner Keri Russell ("Felicity") as Newt's first wife Serana and his common-law wife, freed slave Rachel played by the stunning Gugu MBarha-Raw ("Concussion").

"Free State of Jones" is rated R for strong, graphic violence battle scenes and sexual references. It has a total running time (TRT) of two hours and 19 minutes.

Playing this week at Lamorinda Theatres:

Rheem: "Independence Day: Resurgence," "Finding Dory" and "Now You See Me 2"

Orinda: "Free State of Jones," "Finding Dory" and "Love & Friendship"

Upcoming Events at Lamorinda Theatres:

7 p.m. July 14 - FREE Movie Night at Orinda Theatre - "Stand By Me"

7 p.m. July 23 - Live Music at the Rheem with Eileen & Brett

7 p.m. July 30 - Charlie Chaplin Festival. Come see the 1921 classic, "The Kid," with a live baby-grand piano score by Patti Liedecker.

2 p.m. July 20 - Moraga Movers Classic Movie Day - "The African Queen" hosted by Larry Swindell.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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