

Malick comes out of seclusion to direct powerful war film

The Thin Red Line adds to director's already brilliant lustre

BY KARAN SHETTY

Terrence Malick is celluloid's answer to J.D. Salinger. The esteemed director shuns the media and makes it a point to avoid any sort of publicity. After a twenty-year absence since his last movie, the acclaimed *Days of Heaven*, Malick returned to direct an adaptation of James Jones' war novel, *The Thin Red Line*.

Most war movies are visceral. This one is isn't. Ethereal would be the most appropriate adjective to describe it. Even the battle scenes, though disturbing, have a certain lyrical, dreamlike quality. The movie's opening line, spoken in a voice-over, lays out its basic premise: "Why does nature vie with itself? Why does the land contend

with the sea?"

Malick uses the film to explore the duality of the world around us — its yin and yang. The movie, which can double as a *National Geographic* nature video, juxtaposes shots of the lush Pacific island setting with those of frenzied battle. The setting of the film is crucial to its thematic development as the tropical paradise perfectly contrasts the brutality of war.

Though the film focuses on the battle between the Americans and Japanese over the island of Guadalcanal during World War Two, there are many flashbacks to life before the war. The story unfolds in a series of vignettes which are reminiscent of the classic Tim O'Brien novel *The Things They Carried*.

The characters aren't really well developed in the movie and there is no traditional plot to speak of, but this doesn't really matter because the film is about theme —



FIELD PHILOSOPHY 101: Woody Harrelson wrangles angst, being, and nothingness with a grenade in hand.

one which is larger than its characters or any one battle. The closest thing to a main character is Private Witt (Jim Caviezel), a man who symbolizes the underlying theme of the movie in his own spiritual dichotomy. At the beginning of the movie, we find him AWOL from his platoon, hiding from the war he hates, but he later proves to be the most courageous of all the soldiers and the most devoted to his company. Another important subplot in the film involves Lt. Colonel Tall (Nick Nolte), a battle-hungry officer eager

to make a name for himself, and Captain Staros (Elias Koteas), a compassionate man who defies the Lt. Colonel's orders to protect his men from sure death.

Although this is a very good film, it is not without flaws. Malick often interrupts the surreal flow of the movie with mawkishly melodramatic scenes. Also, his use of bankable Hollywood stars in what amount to cameo roles is quite distracting.

The Thin Red Line will not be for everyone. Those who expect to watch another *Saving Private Ryan*

will come away unsatisfied. This is a very different film that does not thrive on realism the way *Private Ryan* did. Its characters, common infantrymen, think like Sartre and Kierkegaard and the numerous flashbacks and languorous camera shots give the film an ethereal feel. Both films, however, do describe the horrors of battle and the carnage involved in capturing a few square miles of land. "It's just dirt," says one character in this movie, appalled at how many lives have been sacrificed to re-draw a thin red line on a map.

Symphony Nova Scotia tribute for Martin Luther King

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It was a celebration of how all kinds of people could be united, because the quality of music and entertainment did unite everyone there.

But the best thing about the night was how accessible the music was. I am convinced most of the songs could have been played on the dance floors at just about any bar in town, and had people dancing. The Palace. The Marquee. The Velvet Olive. The Blues Corner. A rave. Because this wasn't good gospel music, which to be honest I don't know much about, this was good music. And the talent

was not a Maritime version of something better. Stevie Wonder could have slid in effortlessly.

Linda Carvery, one of the soloists, is one of the coolest ladies I have never known. Her raspy-in-a-good-way version of "Back to Canaanland" was my favourite song of the night. She was wearing a gold dress and had three back-up singers. It was like Soul Train.

Other soloists included Suzy Gangoo, Halifax R&B artist Jamie Sparks and Jackie Richardson and Jeremiah Sparks — both also starring in George Boyd's play *Consecrated Ground*.

The Nova Scotia Mass Choir, a mixed-race gospel group, came on for the second half of the

performance, and they were everything gospel is supposed to be. Pink robes, angel voices and swaying and clapping.

Oh, and a word about the conducting. I'm not sure if Symphony Nova Scotia's baton swinger Lesley Dunner gets down to Beethoven as much as he did to everything that night, but the swaying to the music and kicky exit dance he did went a long way towards making the crowd forget we were watching the symphony, with all its stuffy connotations. How many maestros keep asking the crowd if it's hot enough yet?

All in all it was probably the most fitting tribute to a great man and his dream.



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.: Fighting for civil rights in America.

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