

The Way is My Way

A review of a new Australian film

A short comment on the new film by Australian director Bill Bennett *The Way, My Way* (2024), which is based on his 2014 memoir of walking the Camino de Santiago in 2013.

It has been intriguing, but not surprising to find that this personal and indie style film continued for several weeks at the cinema. It reveals the quite extensive interest in the Camino in Australia, and possibly the numbers of people who have walked the way.

For Camino enthusiasts it is well worth seeing, and will no doubt bring back many memories. The cinematography is excellent, and of course the scenery often breathtaking and always interesting. For those who have not walked, the film provides one with a visual picture of the main stages of the way.

I don't see it as poignant as elements of the Martin Sheen film *The Way*, as its episodic dialogue style makes it somewhat uneven and a little too folksy at times. Interestingly, reviews of Bill Bennett's book on walking the way are usually glowing, particularly from pilgrims. Reading some of his notes about the making of the film on the film's website it does seem to have been more of a laboured process; for example, forty drafts in seven years.

Yes, the film has mainly non-professional actors (16 out of the 20 roles) as the idea was to connect with a number of the real pilgrims from Bill's own walk. This unfortunately does not help to provide a naturalness to the sharing scenes. Most of the 'actuals' participants seem to be caught between remembering and then acting and delivering their lines for a feature film, rather than simply being pilgrims. It sadly does not help the audience to connect with the reasons given for their walking of the way. Like other films in this genre, the range of reasons also confirms that 'the way' has become a general internal call in the context of finding one's way in life, rather than the idea of a pilgrimage that started with and focussed on God.

In terms of the actors, there is an interesting introduction and connection to one young woman (Christina played by Pia Thunderbolt), though I thought it would have worked well to leave all the meetings with her wordless and enigmatic; perhaps shot more from a distance.

The combination of monologue and discussion didn't quite gel for me. It could have been better to have the main actor Chris Haywood (playing Bill Bennett) provide more of a reflective and occasional commentary on the people he met (like *The Canterbury Tales*). It is an understated role for the well-established and always professional Haywood, and his character close-ups illustrating his whimsical expressions are a marvel to behold. And there is even an interaction with a snail (named Stanley) as part of a running joke about headroom in photography.

There seems to be a tradition among some filmmakers now (usually of a certain age) of making a film intimately connected with their own history and heritage, though usually about their childhood. This could be seen as slightly self-indulgent, or perhaps cathartic? Bill's film is more about considering his latter self and life, and like many pilgrims finding out about his limits and what he may become.

This is a personal faith film, and not a Christian faith film, and in that 'way' resonates with the individualistic foundation of our society today, so the title is apt. It is doing things Frank Sinatra's way.

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