

The Sapphires

Cert PG Australia 2012 103 mins

Crew

Director	Wayne Blair
Screenplay	Tony Briggs Keith Thompson
Cinematography	Warwick Thornton
Film Editing	Dany Cooper

Cast

Deborah Mailman	Gail
Jessica Mauboy	Julie
Shari Sebbens	Kay
Miranda Tapsell	Cynthia
Chris O'Dowd	Dave Lovelace

Synopsis

Australia, 1968. A trio of Aboriginal girls from a remote mission get a stony response to their country and western songs at a talent show. But Dave, a drunken Irish talent scout, thinks they have potential.

Seeing them as Australia's answer to 'The Supremes', he recruits their cousin Kay to the group, and convinces them to switch to soul songs. Then he gets the girls their first true gig - singing for the troops in the middle of the Vietnam war zone...



- Tony Briggs' original stage play was based on the story of his mother Laurel Robinson and aunt Lois Peeler, who, with their cousins Beverley Briggs and Naomi Mayers, regularly sang together in the 1960's and 70's.
- Laurel and Lois toured Vietnam in the late 1960's singing to the US troops - an extraordinary achievement considering that Aboriginal people had just received the right to vote.
- Director Wayne Blair appeared as an actor in the stage play, and he approached DoP Warwick Thornton (writer/director of *Samson & Delilah*) about making a film version.
- The Sapphires took eleven of the awards at the Australian Film Institute AACTA ceremony in January 2013.



Reviews

Based, incredibly, on a true story, and developed from a successful stage musical, this is a big-hearted, barnstorming put-on-a-show crowdpleaser. Beneath the spangly exterior, however, it has surprisingly trenchant things to say about Australian identity and the bitter legacy of institutionalised racism.

Of course, none of this would really hit home unless we believed in The Sapphires as authentic soul sisters, achieved thanks to 'Australian Idol' finalist Jessica Mauboy's sumptuous lead vocals, and astute song selections from the Motown, Stax and Atlantic songbooks.

With rising star O'Dowd in command of both the comic timing and emotional grace notes and beautifully playing off Deborah Mailman as the group's alpha female, the movie is gutsy and entertaining enough to have us forgiving its occasional credibility glitches and obviously CGI-ed battlefront visuals.

Shoring everything up, though, is a determined linking of Aboriginal and African-American civil rights causes, leading to a spectacular finale which rejigs showbiz-chronicle formula to startling and emotive purpose. A gem.

Trevor Johnson, Time Out London, October 2012

Wayne Blair's film, about a trio of Aborigine sisters and their friend who formed a group and escaped their restricted lives to sing to the troops in Vietnam, has gone down a storm in Australia where, at the time, racism was rampant and, some say, still is.

It's said to be based on truth, and you know what happens when film-makers get hold of that commodity. But it makes its point with a warm heart and authentic playing, even if there's also a certain amount of cheesiness....

If the performances carry the day, so does the music — the singing of soloist Jessica Mauboy, in particular, is great. And the fact that their moment of glory was not sustained and they went back home to become prominent in community work (apparently the unvarnished truth) is a moving tribute to their determination not to forsake their community for the sake of showbiz glory.

Derek Malcolm, Evening Standard, November 2012