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GOING FAR?

**JOHN O'SHEA'S *RUNAWAY*
IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS
ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A FEATURE
FILM INDUSTRY IN NEW ZEALAND**

JOHN STUART REYNOLDS

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Thesis Abstract

Over the past two decades, the amount of media attention and scholarly research focused on New Zealand feature-films has greatly increased. However, because this work has emphasised directors and films from 1977 onwards, John O'Shea (1920-2001) has not received the detailed treatment called for in terms of the crucial role he played in sustaining and building film production in New Zealand through his company Pacific Films.

This thesis seeks to make a comprehensive study of one of O'Shea's most important feature films, *Runaway* (1964). The film provides a classic example of the importance of contexts in film study, and this thesis seeks to explore a variety of relevant contexts – the previous history of film production in New Zealand; the development of a general 'film culture'; O'Shea's personal background; the events leading up to the *Runaway's* production; the social, cultural, technical and financial challenges O'Shea faced in completing the film; and its reception and subsequent influence. His earlier and later feature films are also discussed in some detail.

The limited amount of previous scholarship on this topic necessitated primary research of various kinds, beginning with a study of the extensive records of Pacific Films – scripts, correspondence, music scores, flyers, press clippings, etc. Interviews were conducted with O'Shea over a six-year period. In addition, interviews were held with various people involved in the production of *Runaway*, as well as a number of writers. These included Colin Broadley, Betty Curnow, John Graham, Kevin Ireland, William Johnstone and Ian Mune.

Runaway makes an interesting case study for many reasons – its novelty as the first 35mm feature made in New Zealand for 12 years; O'Shea's struggle to create the necessary creative and technical infrastructure; the influence of contemporary European cinema; the film's portrayal of an 'Angry Young Man' combined with the New Zealand 'Man Alone' tradition; and its creative achievement in a situation when there were so few precedents or possible ways of funding film-making. This thesis seeks to expand the record of an under-researched period of our film history, to

provide insights into the dynamics of New Zealand culture at the time, and to analyse O'Shea's remarkable contribution to the development of a local film industry.

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