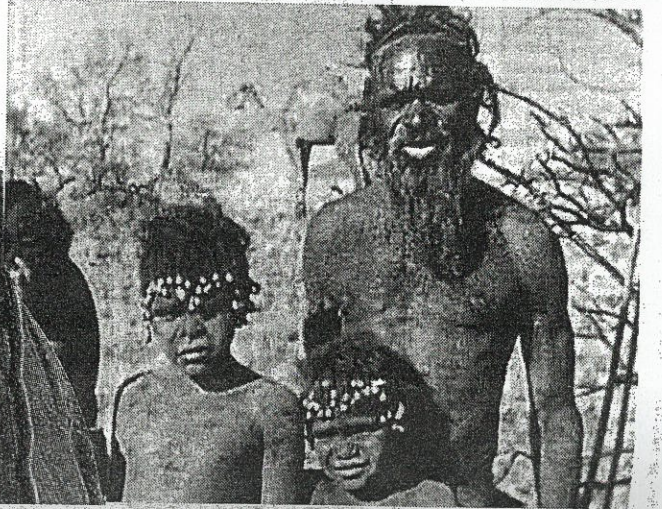
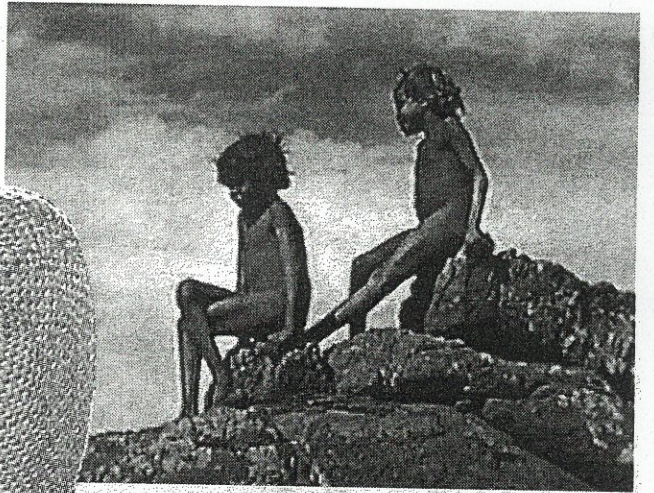
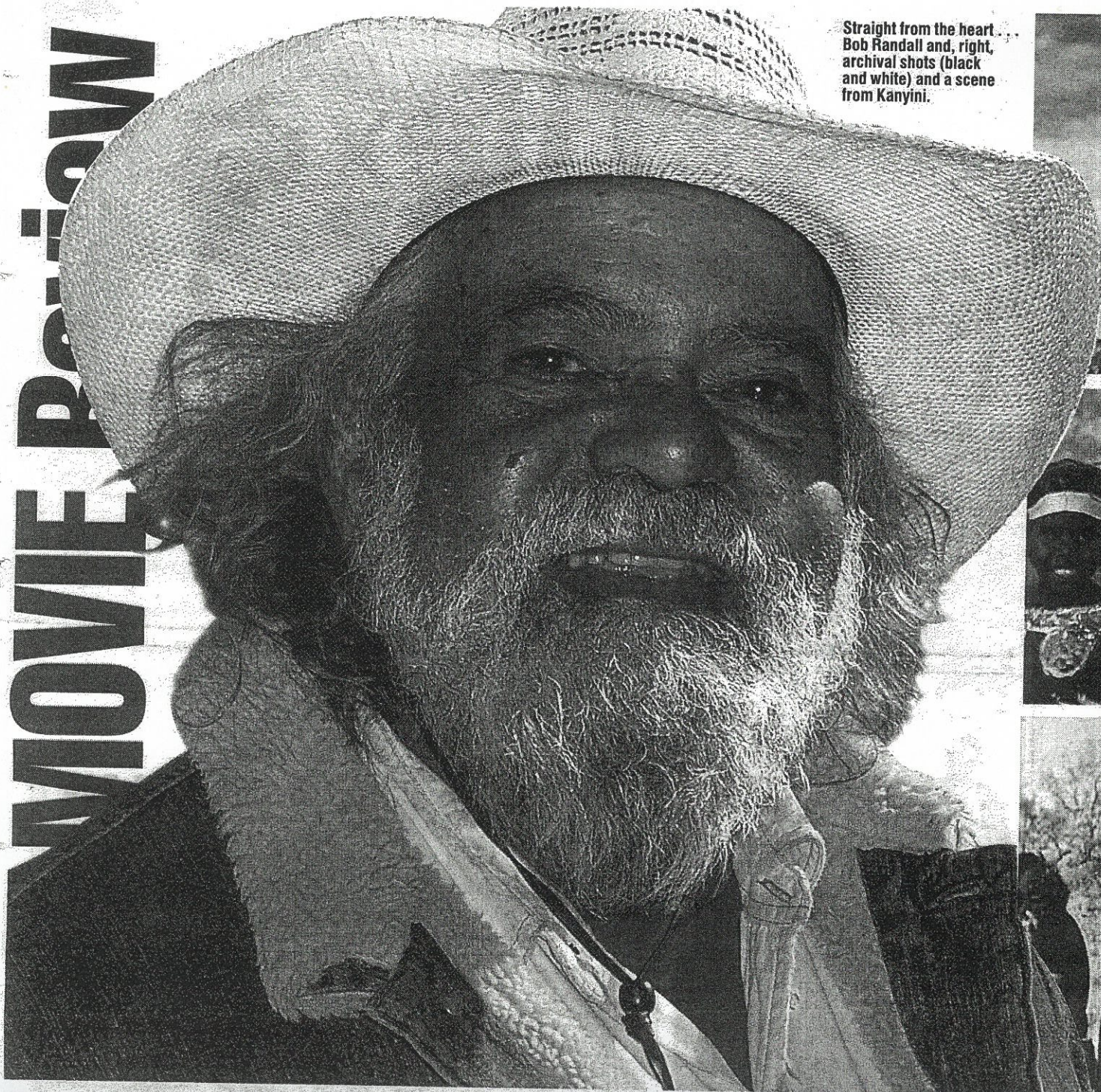


Straight from the heart... Bob Randall and, right, archival shots (black and white) and a scene from *Kanyini*.



Straight from the heart

A new documentary on the life of Aboriginal leader Bob Randall is a moving plea for understanding, writes STAN JAMES.

THERE have been two recent, important steps forward on the big screen for Australia's indigenous people. Rolf de Heer's unique *Ten Canoes* delivered a marvellous slice of ancient Aboriginal culture. Narrated by veteran Aboriginal actor David Gulpilil, with a cast of non-actors, it also scored at the box office.

It was followed by Ray Lawrence's ensemble drama, *Jindabyne*, where the Aboriginal culture in the Snowy Mountains town was vital to the complex plot of human relationships and social responsibility.

The learning process takes another step with the release later this month of *Kanyini*, a documentary by director Melanie Hogan.

It is presented straight from the heart by Aboriginal leader, author, communicator, songwriter and 2004 Indigenous Person of the Year Bob Randall. *Kanyini* covers the time of the lost generation to the present day.

Randall, 72, was born on Tempe Station, as a member of the Yankunytjatjara people, one of the traditional owners of Uluru. His mother was a housemaid on a cattle station. He lived with his extended family, away from the main house and had little contact with his father. A very young Bob was taken away by the government and institutionalised. He never saw his mother again.

Without a hint of bitterness, in his gentle and irresistible voice, he unfolds a sad history. "We wanted the earliest images we could get of the days when I lived out in the bush

with my family, before I was taken by the police into an institution," Randall explains about creating *Kanyini* with Hogan. "I'm one of the kids in the black-and-white shots."

Randall and Hogan met Hollywood-style. Hogan, 28, moved from investment banking, to the New York Film Academy, to NIDA, to film work in London, and script development.

"I was like many Australians who had never met an indigenous person and certainly never had any indigenous friends," she admits.

"I walked into the Mitchell Library looking for a story. It was quite bizarre. I closed my eyes and said, right, which direction? And I actually walked into the Aboriginal section."

"The first book I came to was about the end of Dreamtime and massacres in the country where my mum had a farm."

"I found myself wanting to create a *Dances With Wolves* kind of story for Australia. I read a lot of Australian history and stumbled across Bob's autobiography, *Songman*.

"From Bob's book, I realised there was a pool of knowledge in Australia."

"I tracked Bob down and wrote to him. He invited me up there and it started. 'He knew a lot about the history and had an open heart - that made the experience a lot easier.'"

Randall reveals no anger at the treatment of his people. He only asks for understanding, a fair deal and for change - now.

"It has been too slow. So many of our people expected change when they were alive and young. They've all passed away now," Randall reveals. "I was young with them. Now I'm an old man - it's got to be sooner than later."

He is not impressed by some of the media and the way Aborigines are presented involving petrol sniffing, rape, violence and alcohol.

He says those things may happen, but definitely not all the time and "not in all the communities". These things "occur wherever people live together in an unhappy state".

"If I went to my community today to make a film there wouldn't be one sniffer in the community. We got rid of them ourselves."

"We are like you and your family. We love ourselves and family and care for each other."

Randall says Aborigines are poverty-stricken and not prepared for what the system expects from them. No one told them how to prepare for it, he says.

"We are dependent on people making decisions hundreds of kilometres away."

"We're saying give us the resources to which we are entitled, let us make our own decisions because this is the way we lived before you came here."

Hence the documentary's title, *Kanyini* - which is the belief system, spirituality, land and family.

These are the main pillars of the traditional

indigenous family, says Randall, and loss of these is destroying Aborigines.

"We believe we can do the same thing here at Uluru. Just give us, give me, our rightful inheritance. If we consider Aboriginal law today, every company that takes something off the land owes me. They have to pay something back. That's Aboriginal law."

"We had meat, bush tucker, water and Mother Earth which supplied all that."

Randall says his people don't understand they have lost Australia. "I try and tell them there was this guy who came from over the sea and stuck a flag in the bay in Sydney and we lost our land. That's a difficult concept to understand and accept. That doesn't happen in the animal and insect world."

Talk, negotiate, listen to each other, have an understanding of what's being talked about and what you want are Randall's essentials.

"That didn't happen in this country."

His people still believe they own land.

"It can be done but it has to be a fair sharing. The culture of the two negotiators has to be understood at equal levels. The time span between the totally different cultures must be considered."

Hogan echoes Randall: "I had a dream that indigenous and non-indigenous people come close together and realise the key; the earth needs to be taken care of."

"It is our mother and we are brothers and sisters, so if we start from a unifying place we can start to heal Australia."

Kanyini will open across South Australia on Thursday.