



Screen, Screen Reviews

Remember This: Lake Mungo

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Written by [Jacob Heayes](#) | Nov 23, 2017

The Australians are rather good at horror films, aren't they? Whilst most would cite Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* as the prime example of a chiller from Down Under, there's more than enough room to recommend the criminally underrated *Lake Mungo* from Joel Anderson. Released in the festival circuit during 2008-2010, the film received an extremely limited release and has only gained traction over the past decade from word-of-mouth among the horror community. Anderson himself is an enigma – *Lake Mungo* is his only film to date and even his IMDB profile remains faceless. When taken as his entire filmography however, *Lake Mungo* is thrillingly original and undeniably disturbing.

It'd be easy to view Anderson's film as a found-footage horror in the vein of *The Blair Witch Project* or *[REC]*, especially considering the narrative focuses around a fake documentary investigating ghosts. However, this is a film very much focused on the people in front of the camera, not behind – in fact, Anderson conducted the majority of the on-screen interviews with the actors himself and there's barely any scripted dialogue. In that sense, *Lake Mungo* is a straight-up mockumentary that feels ripped out of the era of shows like *Most Haunted* (except, y'know, actually scary!). The film concerns the drowning of teenage Alice Palmer and her brother's attempts to document her ghostly apparitions appearing throughout their home. Sure, we've all seen ghost movies before, but *Lake Mungo*'s genius rests on how stripped-back it feels.

The scares in Lake Mungo pay off as they're all in front of you the whole time

Throughout the film, there are barely any obnoxious sound effects and only a single jump-scare. Instead of such tropes, Anderson chooses to just *show* you the horrors, lingering on pixelated images of what may or may not be Alice lurking in the frame. The extreme low-budget approach only works wonders, allowing the viewer to never really be sure of what they're looking at. The scares in *Lake Mungo* pay off as they're all in front of you the whole time – they might just be hiding slightly off-frame or in the background, making their reveal that bit more haunting.

As with any effective documentary, the plot twists and turns rapidly with new plot developments being thrown at you at an exciting pace. Of course, I'm imploring all of you to check out *Lake Mungo* so I won't divulge anything, but it's fair to say the film explores themes beyond spooky images. If anything, it reminded me of the breakneck pace of certain true-crime shows, with new evidence and allegations forcing you to reshape your perspective on the narrative constantly. With a brisk runtime of 89 minutes, the film never feels too repetitive or dull and for once, the payoff is worth all the buildup (the final act of *Lake Mungo* lingers in my mind to this day).

If you caught *Lake Mungo* upon its initial release, it thankfully holds up exceptionally a decade later, outdoing the efforts of several studio releases and well worth revisiting. Otherwise, this is truly a horror film worth trying (yes, Halloween has past but when has that ever been an excuse?) if not only for its experimentation and brilliant story. Who knows what's hiding at the edge of the frame in your pictures?

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