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Shorts

This issue, we look at two shorts revolving around teenagers made by emerging Melbourne-based filmmaker Rhys Graham.

Firstly, his drama *Love This Time*, about a young girl dealing with grief and exploring romantic love for the first time, received a Special Mention at this year's prestigious Berlin Film Festival.

Twelve-year-old Tatiana Quaresma plays main character Nauria with a gravity that anchors the film. Her aura of sadness is due to the recent death of her mother and her father's subsequent withdrawal from life. Nauria finds solace in the company of her little brother and a boy in her class. It becomes an adultless world, as the boy is apparently alone at his house and Nauria's father is silent and bedridden from grief. She is left alone to wonder about her feelings and "make things right", as she puts it. It's not clear what she means by this and it's not the only ambiguous moment in the film. Sometimes the words – and even the silent moments – seem more sophisticated than the young actors. Nevertheless, the emotional world of adolescents is respectfully portrayed and the mood is strong.

Graham loves the 'visual poetry' of film. And with the dialogue so sparse and enigmatic, it's like hearing a poem over scenes. He's collaborated with cinematographer Greig Fraser to capture some delicate moments and composer Patrick Robertson of the band Motor Age provides a moody soundtrack.

In *Firestorm*, Graham's earlier film from 2004, we sense the seeds of his ideas for *Love This Time*. The 11-minute documentary shot in Canberra features a number of local teenagers giving their personal accounts of the night of the firestorm in 2003. They also talk about their romantic relationships and the comfort they give.

The film is virtually a journey into the underground of youth culture, with scenes of a boy strumming his guitar while his girlfriend sits nearby, a group playing pool and then some candid ruminations. Their narration is simple and diffident, without any big emotional scenes or startling revelations. We're conditioned to seeing great drama in films but Graham simply allows these kids to speak about their feelings. To hear them express love so certainly, while coming across so shyly, is a revelation.

Interspersed with these touching moments are shots of the devastated housing areas and surrounding forest. It was obviously a beautiful area before the firestorm and these teenagers are clearly traumatised by the event. In their telling of the experience, their feelings are gently discovered rather than acted out in rebellion or acts of high drama.

These two films owe little to teen flicks such as Larry Clark's *Kids* or Catherine Hardwicke's *Thirteen*, where the teens are out of control. Graham simply offers us truthful moments, presented subtly. Lisa Miller