Pastures of the Blue Crane

In 1964 the young adults novel, *Pastures of the Blue Crane*, was published. Winning two important awards it made an indelible impact on its readers. It also reaped fame and great affection for its author, Hesba Fay Brinsmead, who grew up just 10 Kms west of Bilpin in the Blue Mountains. The ABC commissioned AFI winner Ellie Witcombe (*The Getting of Wisdom, My Brilliant Career*) to write a five part television adaptation which made no less a haunting impression on its viewers when screened in 1969. With strong performances from leads Jeanie Drynan, Harold Hopkins and Harry Lawrence, its setting in the Tweed Valley (it was shot in locations in Murwillumbah, Terranora, Coolangatta and Brisbane) and themes of familial friction and historic shame pushed at the edge of storytelling in its time. This is evidenced by the strong character portrayals, the filming of sub-tropical luxuriance (despite the limits of B&W, a budget constraint by the ABC who considered colour just as luxuriant) and haunting music composed by Charles Marawood. The drama's locum is Drynan's inhabiting of Amaryllis, the girl still at high school suddenly thrust into an adult self-sufficiency when told of her father's unexpected death and the inheriting of a weatherboard home far away in Northern NSW. The move there gradually unshackles Rhyll's guardedness, as well as the reticence of other key characters to overcome a certain private isolation. The themes helped break new ground in television, illuminating a little of the forgotten history of imported Islander labour to the plantations of northern NSW and Queensland.

Only recently made available by ABC library archives the complete screening of this landmark Australian drama is happening here 'down south' once only after its packed 2018 debut in Murwillumbah. It will be introduced by its esteemed director, Tom Jeffrey (*The Removalists, The Odd Angry Shot*), who will participate in an interview and Q&A session with David Stratton at the event's conclusion.