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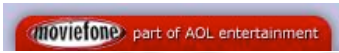
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AFI Dallas Review: Buddha's Lost Children

Posted Apr 8th 2007 2:05PM by [Jette Kernion](#)

Filed under: [Documentary](#), [Foreign Language](#), [Independent](#), [Theatrical Reviews](#), [Cinematical Indie](#), [AFI Dallas](#)



The best-looking film I saw at AFI Dallas this year was the gorgeously photographed documentary [Buddha's Lost Children](#). Fortunately, the subject matter is equally as absorbing as the imagery. The film is about the Golden Horse Monastery and the monk who runs it, Khru Bah. He travels throughout the Golden Triangle region of Thailand, bringing villagers food and supplies donated through the monastery, and often returning with boys whose best hope of a successful life is through joining the monastery as novices. The Golden Triangle villagers are often poor and many suffer from problems related to drug addiction. He is assisted by Khun Eud, a nun who believes strongly in Khru Bah's causes.

Khru Bah's monastery also takes care of horses, many of which are rescued from slaughterhouses. The novices and monks all have horses to care for and ride, and the boys learn how to take care of themselves as well as the animals. Many of Khru Bah's ideas on raising and educating children are reflected in his treatment of horses. The novices also all learn how to box, since Khru Bah was a championship boxer in Thailand until he joined the monastic order in 1990.

To add a personal touch to the documentary, *Buddha's Lost Children* focuses on several of the boys who have joined or are considering joining the monastery. Yee is a village boy sent to the monastery because his mother simply can't feed and care for all of her children, and wants him to be educated and cared for. Suk is a 9-year-old orphan who would not speak or react to anyone when he was first brought to the monastery, but liked to take care of the horses. Now he helps new novices like Yee.

Buddha's Lost Children has a timeless quality about it -- the events in this

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film could have taken place at any time. We rarely see computers, phones or other technology that would date the film. As I said before, the photography is impressive -- the orange colors of the monks' and novices' robes seem almost to glow, and the horses look magnificent onscreen. But the overall look of the film does not gloss over the poverty in the small Thai villages, and the hard life that even the novices must face.

The documentary does not tell us anything especially new or innovative. It's an inspirational story of one man who is trying to do what he can to improve the world around him, and how many other people have subsequently joined his cause and changed their lives and the lives of others. I am not usually a fan of the cliched "triumph of the human spirit" theme in narrative feature films, but to watch Khru Bah in action is fascinating and touching. I was surprised that a film about one man in one small part of the world could sustain my interest so consistently for more than 90 minutes.

Buddha's Lost Children won the documentary grand jury prize at AFI Fest in Los Angeles last year. [Zeitgeist Films](#) owns the U.S. distribution rights, but I can't find any information about an upcoming release. The documentary has played a number of film festivals around the world, and I hope it will play in more theaters or air on TV soon.

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