

Starlight Hotel

New Zealand : 1987 : dir. Sam Pillsbury :

Recorded Releasing / Challenge / NZ Film Commission : 93 min

prod: Finola Dwyer & Larry Parr : scr: Grant Hinden-Miller : dir.ph.: Warrick Attewell

[Greer Robson](#)

Peter Phelps; Marshall Napier; The Wizard; Alice Fraser; Ian Brackenbury Channell;

Patrick Smyth

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ € Z ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5573	2½	6	1	873	- - - - -	No	Unseen



Easily mistaken for a boy down under?

Source: *Films & Filming* Jan 88

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
2001 review:

"Nice little film about the exploits of troubled teen Robson and psychologically scarred WWI vet Phelps. A friendly film about a most unlikely friendship. Warrick Attewell's cinematography is a standout. *** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review

"Two runaways - one a rebellious child, the other a suspected murderer - team up on the road. Slight but engaging story, with good period detail. From the novel "The Dream Monger". * "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"This tale of a 12-year old girl's cross-country trek to find her father seems like a New Zealand version of **"THE JOURNEY OF NATTY GANN"**, lacking the winsome dog and mercifully much else in the winsome line. During the Depression Kate (Robson) is parked with relatives so that her father can seek work in the big city. Unhappy, she runs away, hooking up with a young war veteran (Phelps), himself on the run. They ride the rails, pilfer from farms, queue up at soup kitchens, and sleep under the stars. He doesn't notice a substantial young bosom under her boy's disguise until he throws her into a creek – "Christ! A bloody sheila!" – a myopia which perhaps explains the lack of compass bearing in his life. It's a thin, underwritten film, with muffled emotional climaxes, and with neither of the main players equipped to bring much to their parts. A walk on the mild side."

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

" **"STARLIGHT HOTEL"** is a road movie (from Grant Hinden Miller's 1986 novel "The Dream Monger") centring on the friendship between a man on the run from the law and a 13-year old girl looking for her father. Setting is the central South Island in 1930, with farmers forced to leave their land as the Depression bites. Kate (Greer Robson) runs away to try to find her father, who's looking for work in Wellington on the North Island.

She soon encounters Patrick (Peter Phelps), a man whose life was shattered by his experiences in the world war and later when his wife left him. He's wanted by the police for beating a repo man who was taking advantage during the Depression, and is trying to get to a port and then passage to Australia.

All the classic elements of this kind of film are here: jumping on trains, hiding out in barns,

making friends and enemies along the way. The film benefits enormously from the charismatic performances in the leads. Phelps, an Australian actor, gives a rugged, charming performance. Robson, the little girl in **"SMASH PALACE"**, has the required toughness and sensitivity for this role. Title refers to the "hotel" where the runaways sleep: under the stars."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Familiar tale, although with a new setting: 1929 New Zealand. A 12-year old runaway bound for Australia heads across the New Zealand countryside. Rated "PG" for profanity and violence. ** "

Excerpt from **Films & Filming** – January 88 – report on the Chicago Film Festival:

"...Quite a lot of the other films I have written about from other festivals, and I can only record that it was as good for me to see again such as Umberto Solas's **"A SUCCESSFUL MAN"** from Cuba, Pedro Almadovar's bizarre but compelling **"THE LAW OF DESIRE"** from Spain, Sam Pillsbury's **"STARLIGHT HOTEL"**, a sort of **"PAPER MOON"** from New Zealand, and Daniel Schmid's **"JANATSCH"** from Switzerland as it was for Chicagoans to see them for the first (and probably the last) time... "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. A fusion of several well-beaten storylines here then: the Depression-era road film – **"PAPER MOON"**, **"THE JOURNEY OF NATTY GANN"** (one of Disney's better efforts) – the child befriending an escaped convict film – **"WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND"**, **"MARTIN'S DAY"**, **"A PERFECT WORLD"** – and films about the close bonding of a grown man and a girl around puberty – **"LA DROLESSE"**, **"DIGGING TO CHINA"**, **"LAWN DOGS"**. A shame that writers so often feel constrained to describe such adult/child friendships as "unlikely" or "improbable", when it is the 1990s, not the 1930s, which marked such circumstantial liaisons problematic. (I've grouped them together under the

category “special” friendships.) Natty Gann, as I recall, also hit the road in boy’s garb, echoing various silent melodramas of the teens and twenties in which women donned the guise of boys to move unmolested through the alien world of men.

See subject index under **AUSTRALASIA, DEPRESSION ERA (1930s settings), DESPERADOES / ESCAPED CONVICTS, ROAD FILMS, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS, SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS** and **WOMEN AS BOYS / BOYS AS GIRLS**.