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MARDI GRAS FILM FESTIVAL RELEASES FULL PROGRAM DOMINATED BY HOMEGROWN TALENT

From ballerinas to roller derby players, rodeo cowboys to surf lifesavers, and everything in between, the **22nd Mardi Gras Film Festival** will deliver the best in LGBTQI cinema. **Queer Screen** is proud to announce a diverse, thought-provoking and highly entertaining program of films to be screened at Sydney's **Event Cinemas George Street** from **Thursday 19 February to Thursday 5 March 2015**.

Film fans all over Sydney have been eagerly awaiting the announcement of the festival's full program since the release of ten teaser films last November. Mardi Gras Film Festival has certainly delivered and then some, with its wide-ranging medley of classic and contemporary queer films hailing from Australia and countries as far-reaching as Philippines, Kenya, and even the very first queer feature film from Sri Lanka.

Mardi Gras Film Festival Director, Paul Struthers, says, "This year's Mardi Gras Film Festival program has such a special selection of films from all over the world. However, I'm especially proud of the really strong Australian talent that features this year. It's incredibly important to us at MGFF to support the local industry and get Aussie films shown to as wide an audience as we possibly can. And it's easy to support our filmmaking industry when it produces the incredible films we've chosen for our program!"

First up amongst these home-grown highlights that Struthers has picked is the tense, gripping and terse new drama, **Drown**, which explores the world of Aussie beach culture through the story of handsome young Sydney surf club champion, Len. Len is on a bender of jealousy and unrequited lust, but he can't stand the new lifesaver, Phil, who he thinks is gay. Just how far will Len take his rage? The film stars Harry Cook (*Accidents Happen*) and Matt Levett (*Devil's Playground*) and is a world premiere for the festival.

Next up is the world premiere of **All About E**. Sexy Sydney DJ, E, always has a world of women at her feet. When she and her gay best friend, Matt, stumble upon a load of cash, they are forced to hit the road on the run from crooks. They soon realise there's nowhere left to go but into outback Australia, and for E, that means heading back into the arms of ex-girlfriend Trish and a lot of tough memories from her past.

The Festival will also celebrate the 45th anniversary of cult Australian film **The Set**, directed by Frank Brittain. The very first local production to have homosexuality as its central theme, *The Set* depicts the story of Paul (Sean McEuan) who is pursuing his dreams in the Sydney art world when he falls in love with his cousin's handsome boyfriend, Tony. This screening will also be followed by a Q&A with the cast and crew.

Shot in and around Newtown, **Skin Deep** will be making its Australian premiere at the Mardi Gras Film Festival. Troubled university student Caitlin and straight-laced Leah are two lost souls who discover that sometimes a stranger is the best person to open up to. This moving film received an Honourable Mention for Best Narrative Feature at the Austin Film Festival where it had its world premiere. Again, this screening will involve a Q&A and after party following the film.

This year's program features an assortment of fascinating documentaries for every taste. There's the hilarious **Do I Sound Gay?** following the journey of David Thorpe, a man who undergoes voice-changing exercises due to his anxiety about sounding gay. Featuring interviews with linguists and celebrities such as Margaret Cho, Tim Gunn, Dan Savage, George Takei and David Sedaris, this doco candidly questions wider cultural issues concerning sexuality and self-esteem. *Do I Sound Gay?* had its world premiere at the 2014 Toronto International Film Festival where it won First Runner-Up, People's Choice Award for Documentary. The film was also chosen to open the 2014 edition of DOC NYC, the largest documentary festival in the U.S.

Mala Mala celebrates the trans* community in Puerto Rico, through the eyes of nine trans-identifying

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individuals. Among the group are business owners, sex workers, and even *RuPaul's Drag Race* contestant, April Carrión. The screening will be the film's Australian Premiere.

Fascinating crime documentary, **Out in the Night**, tells of a night in a gay-friendly neighbourhood of New York City when four African-American lesbians are violently and sexually threatened by a man on the street. The women defend themselves, the man is stabbed, and all the women are charged and convicted in the courts. Cruelly dubbed a 'Gang of Killer Lesbians' by the media, this group of women are finally given voice to share their accounts of what really happened that night.

Peter de Rome: Grandfather of Gay Porn tells the story of pornography art filmmaker, Peter de Rome, who captured the attention of the underground New York art scene from the '60s onwards (including Andy Warhol and David Hockney), with his erotic fantasy pornscapes.

Chronicling the events of the brilliant women who founded the modern women's movement from 1966 to 1971, **She's Beautiful When She's Angry** examines the evolution of feminism. It includes prominent lesbian figures like Karla Jay, Kate Millett and Rita Mae Brown. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion called Still Angry.

Famous faces frequent this year's festival program. Legendary Patrick Stewart stars in **Match**, based on a Tony Award-winning play about an interview with an aging Julliard dance professor. This film also stars Carla Gugino and Matthew Lillard. Another star-studded film is **Life Partners**, cast in which are Leighton Meester (*Gossip Girl*) and real-life husband, Adam Brody (*The OC*), along with Gillian Jacobs (*Community*). Openly gay actor Ben Whishaw (*Bright Star*, *Skyfall*) stars in **Lifting**, about a man who, in his grief, reaches out to his dead boyfriend's mother, who is of Cambodian-Chinese heritage and doesn't speak English.

There's a star-turn of a different kind in one of the films this year, with gay pornstar-turned-actor Frankie Valenti (aka Johnny Hazzard) in **Tiger Orange**. Valenti stars as a man reunited with his estranged brother after the death of their father. Valenti's transition from blue movies to the silver screen has been hailed by critics, earning him the Best Actor award at the 2014 LesGaiCineMad Festival.

Also spot Patricia Clarkson in **Last Weekend**, *Girls* actress Gaby Hoffman in **Lyle**, and our own Sigrid Thornton in **BFFs**. **BFFs** tells the story of Kat and Sam, who are gifted a weekend away to a couple's retreat, despite being straight and not a couple. This film is arguably the funniest of the festival, and Thornton herself will be coming along to the screening and participating in a Q&A session afterwards.

Last year was the first time that Mardi Gras Film Festival screened a kid's film as part of the program, and this year the tradition will be continued with Disney princess film of a different kind, a **Frozen Sing-a-long**. This gorgeous animation is riddled with pro-gay subtext and teaches the empowering lesson to 'let it go!' and feel proud in your own skin. The screening is presented by Rainbow Kids and Babies.

Ten years has passed since Ang Lee's three-time Academy Award-winning **Brokeback Mountain** graced our screens. Mardi Gras Film Festival offers a chance to relive this beautiful film on the big screen. Its perfect pairing is the award-winning documentary, **Queens & Cowboys: A Straight Year on the Gay Rodeo**, taking us to the unexplored realm of gay rodeos.

Another fantastic combination is **Derby Crazy Love** and **In the Turn**. These two documentaries investigate the adrenaline-fuelled world of roller derby and how femininity and queer culture translate into this badass sport.

As in other years, there will be a variety of critically acclaimed queer short films as part of the festival's program as well. **My Queer Career** is Australia's richest prize for queer short films, awarding the winner of this year's fantastic line-up over \$10,000 worth of prizes. There are also the always popular sessions of **Mixed Shorts** and **Gay Shorts**, a highlight of which is **Wham, Bam Mr. Pam**, covering the career of Catholic school girl-turned gay porn director, Mr. Pam.

While you're not watching films, the perfect place to hang out and discuss your picks of the festival over a drink and a dance is Event Cinema's **pop up festival bar**. Open every day from 6pm until late during MGFF, the festival bar will host such hot dance and electro acts as Stereogamous (featuring Paul Mac and Jonny Seymour on the decks), DJs Kitty Glitter, Adam Love, Amanda Louise, Cunningpants, the Heaps Gay DJs and Dandy DJs, Jack Shit, Sveta and James Smithers. Performers include Apocalypstik, Super Showgirl Cosplay, Matt Format and Del Lumanta. Expect a variety of free talks, parties and events in partnership with community groups.

There will be a special VIP party to launch the official program on Wednesday 21 January 2015 at The Star, Sydney. Mardi Gras Film Festival Director, Paul Struthers says "We are delighted to have secured The Star as



the Entertainment Partner for Queer Screen and the Mardi Gras Film Festival. As Sydney's leading entertainment destination with the reputation for hosting Sydney's most exciting parties and events, The Star is the perfect destination to host the Mardi Gras Film Festival official launch."

Richard Howarth, General Manager of Marketing, Sales and Entertainment for The Star said, "The Star is proud to be the Entertainment Partner of Queer Screen and host for signature events on the Mardi Gras Film Festival program for 2015. The Star is a welcoming destination and is keen to support the creative and arts community. The partnership recognises the Star's Pride and Diversity programs that we are continuing to expand and develop and is delighted to be involved in this exciting showcase of adventurous cinematic entertainment."

Martine Jager General Manager, Marketing & Customer Experience at St.George Banking Group says "St.George cannot wait to bring Queer Screen back to Sydney for 2015. We're incredibly excited to see this year's world class films and show our support for the LGBTIQ community."

Event Cinemas George Street General Manager Anthony Kierann says "Event Cinemas George Street is thrilled to again be the Exclusive Venue Partner for MGFF 2015, creating a platform for the Mardi Gras Film Festival's growth in the heart of Sydney's CBD."

"Partnering with Queer Screen on this exciting and dynamic Film Festival calendar event in establishing a Festival Hub for the LGBTI community to experience and celebrate the vast array of diverse and extraordinary stories being screened at this year's festival. Event Cinemas is proud to be supporting local filmmakers in 2015 as an award partner with My Queer Career, for Best Original Screenplay. The festival films programmed by Queer Screen are a very exciting and fascinating collection of films that will resonate with a rich tapestry of experiences for festival guests," said Kieran.

Lord Mayor Clover Moore says The City is proud to be supporting Queer Screen as it presents the 22nd Mardi Gras Film Festival. "The festival brings together a diverse range of international films, from countries such as the Philippines and the Netherlands, to look at the issues faced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people around the world.

"It also features a number of Australian-made movies that prove our local filmmakers are some of the world's best. I'm sure audiences will enjoy celebrating the GLBTI experience on the big screen." She says.

Presented by Queer Screen and proudly supported by Screen NSW, the Mardi Gras Film Festival is Australia's leading selection of LGBTIQ films, offering audiences a carefully curated program of queer-tinged features, documentaries, short films and retrospectives over two full weeks.

Tickets for the Mardi Gras Film Festival can be purchased at www.queerscreen.org.au

ABOUT MARDI GRAS FILM FESTIVAL

The Mardi Gras Film Festival has grown considerably since 1993. It is now one of Australia's largest film festivals of any kind, and one of the top queer film festivals in the world. It is highly regarded by filmmakers all over the world, and it is the most important avenue for promoting gay and lesbian titles to distributors and exhibitors in this territory.

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