

MEDIA RELEASE

Mardi Gras Film Festival Popping at the Seams!

20 additional screenings & 4 new venues in 2016 line up: 18 Feb – 3 March

14 January 2016: With 20 additional screenings, 4 new venues, 9 international guests, countless Australian premieres and an increased cash prize for the My Queer Career winners, the 23rd Mardi Gras Film Festival presented by Queer Screen is set to be the biggest year yet in the Festival's history. The full program and all tickets are now on sale at queerscreen.org.au or through the Mardi Gras Film Festival app.

Running from 18 February to 3 March, the Festival will feature 75 screenings at Event Cinemas in George Street and new-to-festival venues the Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace Cremorne, the Golden Age Cinema and Bar in Surry Hills and The Harbour. From mid-March to early April the Festival will travel to the Riverside Theatre in Parramatta and for the first time, the Carrington Hotel in the Blue Mountains.

"Every year we aim to be bigger and better than before and this year we have nailed it," explains Festival Director Paul Struthers. "We have more diversified content including a lot more lesbian films, more transgender films, more documentaries, more international guests, more masterclasses and more screenings at more venues including two free community screenings. There is absolutely something for everyone in this year's line-up and we are really excited to launch the full program today".

An absolutely jam-packed program offers LGBTIQ stories across the whole spectrum from fantastical feature films to raw documentaries and promises to make audiences laugh, cry, think, be inspired and engaged. Highlights include:

CHEMSEX - a fascinating and honest insight into the lives of modern gay men in the UK who engage in weekend-long, drug fueled orgies, a.k.a 'chemsex' or 'wired fun'. Participants hold nothing back and the documentary offers untouched, gritty and sometimes confronting point of view from a variety of lives within the London chemsex scene. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion.

Andrew Steggall's **DEPARTURE** is a visual delight bringing us to the peaceful French countryside where Elliot on holiday with his mum is awakened to previously unknown desires. With a surprisingly honest portrayal of family, young love and self-discovery, this film will haunt you in the best possible way. Filmmaker Andrew Steggall will be at the Festival and participating in a Q&A after the screening.

THE GIRL KING tells the story of the real life Queen Kristina of Sweden a brilliant 17th century monarch who fought the conservative forces of her court to modernize Sweden. Shocking the court with her refusal to marry, Kristina fell for her lady-in-waiting and names her as the Queen's bed companion. This is the first film to delve deeper into the Queen's sexuality and won Best Actress award at the Montréal World Film Festival.

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Sure to become an audience favourite, Dame Maggie Smith and Alan Bennett give stellar performances in **THE LADY IN THE VAN**, fresh from the Toronto Film Festival. This is a quirky, true story about a homeless elderly woman called Mary Shepard who moved her battered van into Bennett's driveway and refused to leave.

A superb Australian feature from 2013 My Queer Perspective winner Grant Scicluna, and featuring actors Reef Ireland, Kerry Fox and Tom Green, **DOWNRIVER** is a mysterious story that follows protagonist James as he is released on parole for the murder of a child as a young boy and turns the idea of coming of age on its head. The cast and crew will participate in a Q&A after the screening.

The visually stunning **GIRLS LOST** is an emotionally raw Swedish urban fantasy film where three teenage girls are given the bodies of cisgender men for the night. When they realise how different they are treated as men then gain a new confidence as women while one realizes he may have been a boy all along.

A fascinating Australian documentary, **ECCO HOMO** asks a range of famous and not so famous people including U2 and INXS, the impossible question who was Troy Davies? Artist and performer, provocateur and chameleon, Davies charmed his way through a lifetime of fame, art, secrets, HIV, abuse and gender fluidity.

Starring Dianna Agron from *Glee*, **BARE** explores the vastness of Nevada's landscape and the neon lights of its seedy nightlife as country girl Sarah is drawn into a world of drugs, stripping, spirituality and sex by squatter Piper.

Exciting news for fans of hit online drama **STARTING FROM...NOW!**, the Festival presents the world premiere of the fourth season in one glorious sitting followed by a Q&A with the cast and crew. Following the complicated lives of four inner-city Sydney lesbians, the drama has amassed 20 million views over its first three seasons.

International directors and actors will be arriving from all over the world including from Germany: Marco Kreuzpaintner(director) and Kostja Ulmann(actor) of **COMING IN** and previously **SUMMER STORM**; Spain: Actor Marcal Forés from **EVERLASTING LOVE**; the UK Andrew Steggall (Director) **DEPARTURE**; Canada: Christina Zeidler (Director) **PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL MONOGAMIST**; Switzerland Claudia Lorenz (Director) **WHAT'S BETWEEN US** and from the US Ray Yeung, Director and Chowee Leow - Co-Producer of **FRONT COVER** and Nneka Onuora Director of **THE SAME DIFFERENCE**. All international guests will participate in a Q&A discussion with the audience after their film screenings

My Queer Career, Australia's largest LGBTIQ film prize has now been increased to a prize of \$14,000 in cash and support and automatic nomination to the world-renowned Iris Prize competition. This year the eight finalists are: Kate Halpin (**A PRIVATE MATTER**), Brian Fairbairn and Karl Eccleston (**DON'T CRY THOSE TEARS**), Tim Marshall (**FOLLOWERS**), Nathan Keene (**LITTLE BOY BLUE**), Stevie Cruz-Martin (**MARROW**), Joshua Longhurst (**OASIS**), Ben Southwell (**ON STAGE**), and Dannika Horvat (**THE SUMMER OF ABC BURNS**).

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Thanks to Screen NSW, Queer Screen is hosting four free events for local film makers with Australian and international talents. These include a production masterclass with US based director of **THE SAME DIFFERENCE** Nneka Onuorah; a masterclass in directing actors and your crew from **COMING IN** director Marco Kreuzpaintner and actor Kostja Ullmann; developing a strategy for the film festival circuit with **DOWNRIVER** director Grant Scicluna; and an industry forum on trends in LGBTIQ cinema.

In partnership with the City of Sydney, two free community screenings will be shown. **WHAT'S BETWEEN US** looks at the aftermath of a straight husband coming out as gay as Frank admits to sexual attraction to men after 18 years of marriage and three children. **THE YEAR WE THOUGHT ABOUT LOVE** is a documentary following the personal lives of members of True Colours, a Boston based LGBTIQ youth troupe and delivers a powerful message on social change.

The always popular shorts section has been extended with this year with the exciting addition of the first ever *Asia Pacific Queer Film Festival Alliance Shorts* – a selection of the best shorts from a new alliance of 11 Asian queer film festivals.

There will also be a screening of Mixed Shorts featuring a collection of the year's best lesbian, gay and transgender films; a special late-night collection of international Gay Shorts, and returning after a four year absence a great collection of Lesbian Shorts.

The Festival Bar will run every night from 6pm to late.

The 2016 Mardi Gras Film Festival presented by Queer Screen is supported by St George Bank, The Star Sydney, Event Cinemas George Street, AGL, ACON, Ovolo Hotels, Optus, City of Sydney, Screen NSW, South Australian Tourism and the Star Observer.

Tickets for all films are on sale now including flexi passes to 5 or 10 films. Please visit queerscreen.org.au or the Mardi Gras Film Festival app to book or call (02) 9332 4938 to become a Queer Screen member for discounted tickets and priority entry.

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Note to Editors:

- Directors and actors from most films are available for interview
- Screeners of most films are available for review and imagery is available for publication

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