



MEDIA RELEASE

The Evolution of Queer Film in 2020

Queer Screen's 27th Mardi Gras Film Festival: 13 – 27 February 2020

8 January 2020: Queer Screen's 27th Mardi Gras Film Festival (Festival) captures the continuing evolution of queer film and characters. Running from 13 – 27 February in Sydney, the Festival returns to the Inner West with over 20 screenings at Dendy Newtown, in addition to Hayden Orpheum and principal venue partner Event Cinemas George Street, before touring to Canberra, Parramatta, Lismore, Newcastle and the Blue Mountains in March. Tickets are now on sale at queerscreen.org.au.

This year's Festival boasts 6 world premieres, 93 Australian premieres and 12 Sydney premieres across 57 feature-length films, 2 episodics and 75 short films told through 15 different genres.

"Our 2020 theme 'Evolve, Emerge, Fly' reflects both the continually improving quality of the local and international films on offer as well as the diversity of emerging Australian talent", explains Queer Screen Festival Director Lisa Rose. "It also represents the broader evolution of queer film, as we move beyond 'coming out' stories to tell all sorts of stories, through all sorts of characters, in all genres."

"In addition, several films examine how LGBTIQ+ people seek to belong from a global perspective. When we look at the movement of people around the world, whether forced or voluntary, we see that ultimately, we all just want to belong somewhere and the truth is, we belong everywhere," she added.

Some of the Festival's most powerful films directly address the persecution and displacement of LGBTIQ+ people including the meditative FIREFLIES from Iran; LABEL ME which follows a Syrian refugee in Germany and UNSETTLED: SEEKING REFUGE IN AMERICA, an insightful documentary about asylum seekers in the USA.

For the first time in its 27 year history, the Festival opens with an Australian feature film, ELLIE & ABBIE (AND ELLIE'S DEAD AUNT). A heartfelt rom com, the film was shot in Sydney and shines a light on our own civil rights movement through a teenage lesbian love story. It is portrayed by a fantastic cast including Marta Dusseldorp (Stateless, Janet King), Rachel House (Thor: Ragnarok, Hunt for the Wilderpeople) and Julia Billington (Starting from...Now), alongside emerging talents Zoe Terakes (Wentworth) and Sophie Hawkshaw as the lovestruck teens.

AN ALMOST ORDINARY SUMMER closes the Festival. Set on the Amalfi Coast, this is a cheeky and moving comedy that brings two Italian families together when their patriarchs shock everyone with the news they are engaged.

Centrepiece of the Festival is one of the most acclaimed LGBTIQ+ films of 2019, AND THEN WE DANCED. A film about rivalry, desire and defiance, the powerful drama is set in a traditional Georgian dance school. It sparked scenes of violent protest in Georgia when it screened there. Nominated for the Queer Palm award at Cannes Film Festival, it has won multiple audience awards including NewFest (New York LGBTQ Film Festival) and the Golden Duke award at the Odessa International Film Festival.

Another first for the Festival is Queer Scream, a program strand on queer horror films that includes arguably the most fun film in the program, transgender and lesbian vampire flick, BIT. Transgender actress Nicole Maines (Supergirl) won the LA Outfest Outstanding performance in a US feature award for her lead role.

OUT HERE is a joint initiative from Network 10 and Screen Australia which will include three short documentaries spotlighting the diversity of LGBTIQ+ lives and communities in regional Australia. Following the world premiere at the Festival, these local films will screen on 10 Play during Mardi Gras.

Other exciting Australian episodic productions screening during the Festival include the world premieres of lesbian detective comedy WITHOUT A TRACEY and sexy pansexual drama CLOUDY RIVER, which received completion funding from Queer Screen.

An additional World Premiere is T11 INCOMPLETE, telling the story of a paraplegic lesbian and her carer, a recovering alcoholic. The film will be presented by visiting writer/director Suzanne Guacci.

Developed from a play that started a revolution and changed laws in Bolivia, TU ME MANQUES is an innovative film that turns a deeply personal story into a universal call for love and acceptance. THE GLASS ROOM, based on a novel shortlisted for the Man Booker prize, is an epic historic film about a lavish 30 year love story between two women in the former Czechoslovakia.

A timely inclusion as religious freedom is increasingly used as an excuse to target our LGBTIQ+ community, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO is a moving documentary focusing on four gay and transgender Americans and their devout Christian families that shines a light on the love and acceptance possible within faith, while profiling the continued struggle for acceptance.

CHANGING THE GAME which won the audience award for Best Documentary at both Frameline and LA Outfest, takes us into the lives of three transgender high school athletes in the US. Experiencing both success and fierce resistance in the world of sports, this film is their urgent, articulate plea. This screening will be followed by a panel discussion Game Change: Affirmation and Inclusion in Australian Sport presented with Pride in Sport.

Not to be missed is TOP THREE, the bittersweet animated feature about what happens when our dreams don't quite fit into our reality. Taking the LA OutFest audience award for best narrative feature, and featuring wonderfully inventive animation, the film follows Anton and David to picturesque Sweden, vibrant India, beautiful Japan, and inside Anton's mind at its most euphoric and neurotic.

Screening for free is ARE YOU PROUD?, the intersectional documentary that tracks the rise of UK Pride from its beginnings through to the diverse range of Pride celebrations that exist today.

This year Queer Screen welcomes a new Co-Chair Matt Janssen, who has taken over from Joe Duggan, and who will retain the role of Membership Director in addition to Co-Chair responsibilities.

"We want to thank Joe for all his hard work, enthusiasm and good humour over the last four years", said Queer Screen Co-Chair Cheryl Kavanagh. "We are so grateful for his work and delighted to welcome Matt to the position who brings with him a wealth of knowledge and experience from both the corporate and community sectors. We are very excited for the future of the organisation and this year's Festival as we head into a new decade."

Other Festival highlights include:

Belonging – finding our place in the world

DISTANCE: A woman returns to the family she abandoned for the woman she loved and embarks on a journey to reconnect with her daughters. Splendid drama with simmering, suppressed emotions.

MONSOON: A British Vietnamese man played by Henry Golding (Crazy Rich Asians), returns to Saigon for the first time in over 30 years, after fleeing as a child during the Vietnam-American War.

LINGUA FRANCA: A nominee for the Venice Film Festival Queer Lion and Federera award, this film follows Olivia, a transgender Filipina immigrant who is scrambling to avoid deportation from New York. Festival guest, director Isabel Sandoval, was the first transwoman of colour to direct and headline a film competing at Venice when the film premiered there in 2019.

FIREFLIES: The second feature from Iranian filmmaker Badi Khoshnoudi, Fireflies is a quietly powerful and relevant film commenting on what it truly means to belong as we meet Ramin a young gay Iranian migrant in Mexico trying to return home.

Out of this world – horror, thrillers and sci-fi

ANIARA: A grim yet gripping award-winning science fiction film that takes on consumerism, faith, and love, through the tale of a bisexual woman trapped on giant space-ship that has veered off-course.

SCREAM QUEEN! MY NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET: The second Elm Street film was dubbed the gayest horror film ever made in Hollywood and effectively ended the lead actor's career. This documentary tells the triumphant tale of the revenge of the first 'scream queen'.

SPIRAL: When a gay couple and their teenage daughter move to a small town, nothing is as it seems. Jeffrey Bowyer-Chapman (UnREAL, American Horror Story) gives a star-making performance in this chilling and timely exploration of what people are willing to do in the name of fear and prejudice.

THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET: A psychological thriller that follows Lola as her carefully controlled life starts to slip away.

International festival faves

THE ELDER ONE: Screened at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), this Indian film follows a transgender child who travels to Mumbai in pursuit of an elder brother who left home due to his sexual orientation.

WHITE LIE: Also a TIFF favourite, this story follows a popular student faking cancer who struggles to maintain her secret.

LOS FUERTES: This sexy romantic drama, fresh from the biggest film festival in Chile, is about finding the inner strength to be yourself instead of bowing to expectations.

Three Rs – romance, romps and retrospectives

BILLIE & EMMA: A comedy and coming of age from young Asian lesbian filmmaker Samantha Lee.

OLIVIA: Camp, weird and very unique melodrama set in girls boarding schools. A 4K restoration of the 1951 French classic.

TAXI ZUM KLO: An audacious queer classic from Germany, which upon release created a stir because of its uninhibited depiction of gay sex.

TELL IT TO THE BEES: Anna Paquin and Holiday Grainger in a romantic melodrama set in the 1950s.

PAPI CHULO: A heart-warming follow-up to Handsome Devil, following a gay TV weatherman and a straight migrant day labourer who form a friendship across language and cultural barriers.

Documentaries

A NIGHT AT SWITCH N' PLAY: Winner of the NewFest Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature, this film profiles the award-winning Brooklyn performance collective that celebrates the queer experience.

5B: Bringing a new perspective to the story of the start of the American HIV epidemic, the untold story of Ward 5B in San Francisco in the early 1980s includes archival footage, interviews and masterful storytelling.

CIRCUS OF BOOKS: Profiling the sweet, elderly Jewish couple who owned West Hollywood's premiere gay adult bookstore and exploring their personalities, their past, and the reasons they entered the risky world of gay porn.

JONATHAN AGASSI SAVED MY LIFE: Charting Israeli adult film star Jonathan Agassi's rise to fame and the pressures his career brings. The unique bond with his supportive mum anchors this personal story of addiction and survival.

CRYSTAL CITY: This gritty and provocative documentaty explores the 400% surge in the use of crystal meth in the gay community in New York. The film traces the lives of 12 courageous men over the course of a year, as they struggle to put their addictions behind them, while revealing the allure and terror of the drug.

QUEERING THE SCRIPT: Charts the evolution of queer women on screen, tracing the moments that have galvanised the industry and the power of fandom.

The ever-popular shorts packages include two sessions of Lesbian Shorts and two sessions of Gay Shorts as well as Transgender Shorts, QueerDoc Shorts, HalloKween Shorts, My Queer Career finalists and Asia Pacific Queer Film Festival Alliance Shorts.

Queer Screen's 27th Mardi Gras Film Festival is presented by AGL, Event Cinemas, Accenture, UTS, SBS, and Create NSW.

Tickets for all films are on sale now including flexi passes to 5 or 10 films. Download the Queer Screen Mardi Gras Film Festival app, visit queerscreen.org.au or call (02) 9280 1533 to book. Become a Queer Screen member for discounted tickets and priority entry.

-ENDS-

Note to Editors:

- Directors and actors from most films, along with Festival Director Lisa Rose and Queer Screen Co-Chair Cheryl Kavanagh are available for interview; film images are available; screeners of films may be available on request
- **Media Enquiries:** Louise Nealon/Vanessa McQuarrie; publicity@queerscreen.org.au; 0403 569 177