

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01am WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH 2019

DAVID STRATTON CURATES RETROSPECTIVE OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS

Sydney Film Festival and the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) are delighted to announce a program of 10 essential films directed by pioneering Australian women filmmakers, curated by David Stratton.

Entitled **Essential Australian Women Directors – 10 Trailblazers Selected by David Stratton**, the program is presented by Sydney Film Festival and the NFSA. The curated films will screen as a retrospective program at the **Art Gallery of New South Wales (5-10 June)** as part of the **66th Sydney Film Festival (5-16 June)**. The retrospective will also screen in Canberra at NFSA's Arc cinema (28 June-7 July).

The retrospective consists of ten films, each marking a great milestone in Australian film history, including: silent melodrama *The Cheaters* by pioneering filmmaker Paulette McDonagh, digitally restored by the NFSA and screening with a score performed live by the virtuosic Jan Preston; winner of the prestigious Camera d'Or, *Love Serenade* by Shirley Barrett; the iconic cult comedy *Malcolm* by AFI Award-winning director Nadia Tass; and *Bedevil*, the first and only feature by Aboriginal artist Tracey Moffatt.

Selections include early works from highly-acclaimed film stars, including *High Tide*, the second collaboration between icons Gillian Armstrong and Judy Davis; *Waiting* by acclaimed filmmaker Jackie McKimmie, which stars TV legend Noni Hazlehurst; and *Sweetie* by New Zealand-born Australian filmmaker Jane Campion – to this day, the only woman to have received the prestigious Palme d'Or.

Influential films from more recent years include *The Babadook*, the thrilling debut of Jennifer Kent; the achingly moving *Blessed* by Ana Kokkinos, starring Miranda Otto and Wayne Blair; and Golden Globe-nominated filmmaker Rachel Ward's debut feature *Beautiful Kate*.

Renowned critic and broadcaster, David Stratton, a former director of the Sydney Film Festival (1966 to 1983) will introduce the Sydney screenings, and take questions along with filmmaker guests.

David Stratton said, "Rather than highlighting one director, we're celebrating the vital work of ten remarkable women. This retrospective pays tribute to not only these pioneering filmmakers, who tirelessly forged their own path forward, but to all the talented women who have crafted important and enduring films in this country."

"In the era of the #MeToo movement, the barriers that once faced women filmmakers are perhaps crumbling at a quicker pace - in the meantime, let's celebrate the titanic achievements of our women filmmakers, and these landmark works that have irrevocably shifted the industry landscape forever."

Sydney Film Festival Director **Nashen Moodley** said, “From an influential silent masterpiece, to the only feature film by artist Tracey Moffatt, these works are immaculately-crafted showcases of truly revolutionary women filmmakers. The films are brought to life with performances from the highest calibre of Australian acting talent, including Miranda Otto and Frances O’Connor, Bryan Brown and Ben Mendelsohn – all who have delighted audiences at the Festival in previous years.”

NFSA General Manager, Collection and Access **Meg Labrum** said, “Women have been an essential driving force in our film industry since its early days. From the pioneering McDonagh Sisters to Jennifer Kent, David Stratton’s selection truly is an abridged history of Australian film through a female gaze. We hope Sydney and Canberra audiences, particularly the new generations of aspiring female filmmakers, will feel empowered by the work of these fierce creative minds that came before them.”

A recipient of the Australian Film Institute’s Raymond Longford Award and named Commander of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, David Stratton AM has also served as President of the FIPRESCI (International Film Critics) jury in Cannes and served on the international juries of both Venice and Berlin film festivals, authored three books and lectured in Film History at the University of Sydney. He co-hosted *The Movie Show* and *At the Movies* with Margaret Pomeranz for 29 years. He recently published his fourth book *101 Marvellous Movies You May Have Missed* (2018).

The 10 films in the program are:

NFSA Restores: The Cheaters (1930)

– Paulette McDonagh

Malcolm (1986) – Nadia Tass

High Tide (1987) – Gillian Armstrong

Sweetie (1989) – Jane Campion

Waiting (1991) – Jackie McKimmie

Bedevil (1993) – Tracey Moffatt

Love Serenade (1996) – Shirley Barrett

Blessed (2009) – Ana Kokkinos

Beautiful Kate (2009) – Rachel Ward

The Babadook (2014) – Jennifer Kent

Sydney Film Festival tickets are on sale now for Essential Australian Women Directors – 10 Trailblazers Selected by David Stratton screenings for \$21.00 (Adult) each or Concession \$18.00 + booking fee. A **special discount package** of all ten films in the retrospective is available for \$140 + booking fee.

Flexipasses and subscriptions to Sydney Film Festival 2019 are on sale now.

Call 1300 733 733 or visit sff.org.au for more information.

The full Sydney Film Festival program is announced in May 2019.

Tickets to **Essential Australian Women Directors – 10 Trailblazers Selected by David Stratton** at Arc cinema, NFSA (Acton, ACT) are \$15 Adult, \$13 Concession, and season passes (\$100 / \$90) also available. Tickets are available in person and online: nfsa.gov.au/events

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*****Sydney Film Festival Press Pack and Images Available [HERE](#)**



THE CHEATERS (1930)

McDonagh's pioneering romantic silent melodrama, set in Sydney, stars the director's sister, Marie Lorraine, as the daughter of a criminal mastermind.

The McDonagh sisters made four feature films between 1926 and 1933, as well as some documentaries – most of these films are, sadly, lost today. Paulette, the driving force, was the director and screenwriter; Isobel, using the stage name Marie Lorraine, was the leading actress; Phyllis was the producer and production designer. *The Cheaters*, their third film, went into production as a silent film, although at the time cinemas were busily converting to sound. It's a romantic melodrama in which the daughter (Lorraine) of a criminal mastermind (Arthur Greenway) falls in love with the son (Josef Bambach) of her father's most bitter enemy. Location footage of Sydney at the time includes a shot of the incomplete Harbour Bridge.

MALCOLM (1986)

The first feature by director Nadia Tass is a delicious comedy starring Colin Friels as an introverted inventor and John Hargreaves as a resourceful criminal.

Nadia Tass's debut, with screenplay and photography by her husband David Parker, is a genuinely fresh comedy about the unlikely friendship between a reclusive orphan, Malcolm (Colin Friels, brilliant), and Frank (John Hargreaves), a resourceful criminal. Malcolm avoids human and even animal contact. He spends his time making elaborate models, mechanical devices – including a home-made tram, or the car that splits into two – that appear to have no practical use, until Frank dreams up a way to use them for criminal purposes. The robbing of a bank via remote control is a highlight. Lindy Davies is a splendid heroine and the supporting cast includes such stalwarts as Chris Haywood, Charles Tingwell and John Stanton. The film's entertainment value ensured its commercial success, belying its modest budget.

HIGH TIDE (1987)

Gillian Armstrong and Judy Davis collaborated again on this emotionally rich multi-generational drama. Claudia Karvan plays Davis' daughter and Jan Adele is the grandmother.

Eight years after the trailblazing *My Brilliant Career*, Gillian Armstrong and Judy Davis collaborated again on this emotionally rich multi-generational drama, for which Davis won the New York Film Critics' award for Best Actress. The setting is Eden on the NSW South Coast where Lilli (Davis), a back-up singer for Elvis imitator Frankie J Holden, becomes stranded. This provides an opportunity for her to be reunited with Ally (Claudia Karvan), her long-lost daughter, who lives with her grandmother (Jan Adele). The screenplay by Laura Jones avoids any hint of cheap sentimentality – instead this is a raw and deeply felt movie in which the fractured relationships are painfully real. Colin Friels makes a strong impression in a key supporting role, but it's the links between the three women that make the film unforgettable.

SWEETIE (1989)

One of the most original films ever made in this country, Jane Campion's story about a pair of very eccentric sisters caused a sensation at Cannes.

Born in New Zealand, Jane Campion studied film in Sydney, made a telemovie for the ABC, and then directed this startlingly bold feature, which caused a sensation at Cannes. It's the story of two sisters, Kay (Karen Colston), a shy factory worker who is scared of trees but trusts fortune tellers, and Dawn aka Sweetie (Genevieve Lemon), who invades the suburban home where Kay is living with Louis (Tom Lycos), accompanied by her spaced-out 'producer', Bob (Michael Lake). Filled with eccentric characters and situations – the dancing jackaroos are a hoot! – and all of it superbly photographed by Sally Bongers, this remarkable slice of Australiana, with its choral music and quirky mood shifting, is a genuine original from one of the world's great contemporary filmmakers.

WAITING (1991)

Noni Hazlehurst plays a surrogate mother about to give birth, who welcomes her closest friends to her isolated rural shack. McKimmie's second feature is a gem.

Jackie McKimmie's second feature stars the luminous Noni Hazlehurst as Clare, a pregnant woman awaiting the birth of her first baby. She has no intention of keeping the child, but is acting as a surrogate for her friends Sandy (Helen Jones) and Michael (Frank Whitten). Clare lives in an isolated shack somewhere in rural NSW and has invited her closest friends to help her celebrate the birth, including Diane (Deborra-Lee Furness), who arrives with her latest lover. It's a frank and beautifully-made film about friendship, sexual politics and infidelity, with beautifully photographed scenes of chaos as the little house fills with people. Hazlehurst gives one of her finest performances.

BEDEVIL (1993)

Aboriginal artist and photographer Tracey Moffatt's only feature to date consists of three ghost stories told in a thrillingly original, highly stylised, fashion.

The only feature made to date by Aboriginal photographer and artist Tracey Moffatt, this distinctive and original work consists of three ghost stories staged on studio sets. The ghosts include an American soldier, a blind child killed on the railway tracks, and a pair of young lovers. Moffatt, who appears in one of the stories, is experimenting here with a fresh and unusual narrative style. None of the stories are told in a traditional way. The use of painted backdrops combined with spectacular actuality footage, plus the stirring use of music, adds up to a strange and very beautiful movie. One great sequence involves the preparation of a meal of yabbies with Chardonnay and Hollandaise sauce followed by snake terrine.

LOVE SERENADE (1996)

Winner of Camera d'Or at Cannes, Shirley Barrett's whimsical and very offbeat comedy stars Miranda Otto and Rebecca Frith as small-town sisters.

Shirley Barrett's utterly endearing first feature deservedly won the Camera d'Or (best first feature) in Cannes. Miranda Otto and Rebecca Frith play sisters who share a house in the small town of Sunray. Their lives are turned upside down by the arrival in town of a 'celebrity' – a lazy, self-indulgent hippy (George Shevtsov) – "virgins are my specialty!" – who takes over the local one-man radio station. The other principal character is the owner of the local Chinese restaurant (John Alansu), who practises nudism. Barrett's keenly whimsical approach to this eccentric material is enhanced by Mandy Walker's splendid photography, but it's the unexpectedly surreal elements that stay in the memory.

BLESSED (2009)

This achingly moving, harshly powerful film takes us into the world of four mothers whose children are in serious trouble. Frances O'Connor leads a fine cast.

Ana Kokkinos' film is divided into two parts. In the first, *The Children*, we follow a group of kids who get into trouble in various different ways. In the second, *The Mothers*, we cover the same time frame but from the perspective of the mothers. The latter are superbly portrayed by Miranda Otto, Deborra-Lee Furness, Frances O'Connor and Victoria Haralabidou, while the cast also includes Wayne Blair, Monica Maughan and William McInnes. Kokkinos sometimes depicts the same incident as seen from two different perspectives, and her sympathy for all of these characters, flawed as some of them are, is palpable. Confronting at times, but honest and powerful, this is surely one of the greatest Australian films of recent years.

BEAUTIFUL KATE (2009)

In Rachel Ward's feature debut, Ben Mendelsohn plays a man who returns to the isolated property where he grew up, to see his dying father (Bryan Brown).

For her feature film debut as director, Rachel Ward adapted an American book written by Newton Thornburg in 1984. It's a story of a family torn apart by feelings of guilt about the events that occurred one summer several years ago. Ben Mendelsohn is Ned, who returns from the city to the isolated property, together with his girlfriend (Maeve Dermody), to see his father (Bryan Brown in one of his finest roles), who is dying. There Ned meets his sister, Sally (Rachel Griffiths), who has stayed at home to look after things. The reunion triggers painful memories of Ned's twin sister, 'beautiful' Kate (Sophie Lowe). The hothouse atmosphere of the remote homestead is superbly captured in this evocative, sometimes erotic, movie.

THE BABADOOK (2014)

In Jennifer Kent's thrilling debut, a single mother (Essie Davis) and her six-year-old son (Noah Wiseman) are haunted by the mysterious 'Mr. Babadook'.

Jennifer Kent's Sundance Festival sensation is a superior suspense movie set almost entirely in a shadowy suburban house in Adelaide, where Amelia (Essie Davis), a single mother, lives with her hyperactive six-year-old son, Samuel (Noah Wiseman). Still grieving over the loss of her husband in a car crash the night Sam was born, Amelia's troubles begin when the boy asks her to read a bedtime story about Mr. Babadook, a creepy character who apparently has the powers to emerge from the book and haunt the pair. Davis and Wiseman give exceptional performances under Kent's assured direction, and though the film was made on a modest budget, it succeeds in delivering the promised thrills far more successfully than similar Hollywood product.

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

From Wednesday 5 June to Sunday 16 June 2019, the 66th Sydney Film Festival offers Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, red-carpet openings, in-depth discussions, international guests and more.

Sydney Film Festival also presents an Official Competition of 12 films that vie for the Sydney Film Prize, a highly respected honour that awards a \$60,000 cash prize based on the decision of a jury of international and Australian filmmakers and industry professionals. Previous Sydney Film Prize winners: *The Heiresses* (2018), *On Body and Soul* (2017); *Aquarius* (2016); *Arabian Nights* (2015); *Two Days, One Night* (2014); *Only God Forgives* (2013); *Alps* (2012); *A Separation* (2011); *Heartbeats* (2010); *Bronson* (2009); and *Hunger* (2008).

The Festival is a major event on the New South Wales cultural calendar and is one of the world's longest-running film festivals. For more information visit: sff.org.au.

The 66th Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW and Destination NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia and the City of Sydney. The Festival's Strategic Partner is the NSW Government via its tourism and major events agency, Destination NSW.

Flexipasses and subscriptions to the 66th Sydney Film Festival (5-16 June 2019) are on sale now. Please call 1300 733 733 or visit sff.org.au/tickets/flexipasses for more information.

