



MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 8:45PM SUNDAY 14 JUNE

THE 62ND SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES: OFFICIAL COMPETITION WINNER

Arabian Nights, directed by **Miguel Gomes**, was tonight awarded **Sydney Film Festival's** prestigious **Sydney Film Prize**, from a selection of **12 Official Competition** films, at the Festival's Closing Night Gala.

The \$62,000 cash prize, now in its eighth year, is awarded for a film's 'emotional power and resonance; audaciousness, cutting-edge, courageousness; and capacity to go beyond the usual treatment of the subject matter'.

"It is the Jury's unanimous decision to award this year's Sydney Film Prize to *Arabian Nights Volume 1, 2, 3*; directed by **Miguel Gomes**," said 2015 **Jury President Liz Watts**. "[*Arabian Nights* is] a film of ambition and political vision which confronts, frustrates, and spellbinds - and ultimately reminds us that cinema continues to be a powerful vehicle to examine the human condition."

"A subject that is so timely – oppression and exploitation are at the heart of the film in its examination of a nation and people under extreme austerity measures. Ultimately the film reminds us that hope and endurance are fundamental to the human spirit," she said.

Ambitious, indignant and filled with offbeat humour, Miguel Gomes' extraordinary trilogy draws on the structure of *Arabian Nights*; to create a vivid portrait of Portugal today. Following *Tabu* (SFF 2012), Gomes was anguished by the austerity measures imposed on his homeland and commissioned journalists to gather true stories from all over the country that were then fictionalised. The outcome has resulted in a heady blend of the surreal and the all too real, told over six hours in a series of thrilling segments.

Accepting from Lapland, Finland; filmmaker **Miguel Gomes** was delighted to receive news of the decision. "I am very happy with the prize. Thank you Sydney, thank you Nashen, thank you ladies and gentlemen from the jury!" he said. "I have found out two major reasons for being honoured with such a prize: 1) it's easier to have prizes when you can afford to have 3 different screenings of your film! 2) I am now in Lapland, home of old good trustable... Santa Claus!"

Gomes was born in Lisbon, Portugal. *Arabian Nights* received its world premiere in the Directors' Fortnight section this year at the Cannes Film Festival, where it was the longest entry. His second feature film, *Our Beloved Month of August* (2008) also premiered at Cannes' Directors' Fortnight going on to win a number of awards around the world. His third feature, *Tabu*, won the Alfred Bauer Prize for Artistic Innovation at the Berlinale and Gomes attended the screenings at the Sydney Film Festival's Official Competition in 2012.

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Renowned Australian producer **Liz Watts** presided over Sydney Film Festival's 2015 Official Competition Jury. Japanese program consultant **Hiroshi Aihara**, Australian screenwriter **Andrew Bovell**, Thai filmmaker **Pen-ek Ratanaruang**, and the Austrian Film Commission's **Martin Schweighofer** comprised the full Festival jury.

The Festival's Official Competition was established in 2008 and is endorsed by Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films; the regulating organisation for international film festivals.

Previous Sydney Film Prize winners include: *Two Days, One Night* (2014); *Only God Forgives* (2013); *Alps* (2012); *A Separation* (2011), which went on to win an Academy Award; *Heartbeats* (2010); *Bronson* (2009); and *Hunger* (2008).

The selection of films in Competition for the SFF 2015 Sydney Film Prize were:

ARABIAN NIGHTS

Portugal, France, Germany, Switzerland | 2015 | Total 383 mins (Vol. 1: 125 mins, Vol. 2 132 mins, Vol. 3 126 mins) | In English, Portuguese, French and German with English subtitles | Feature
Director: Miguel Gomes | Screenwriters: Miguel Gomes, Mariana Ricardo, Telmo Churro | Producers: Sandro Aguilar, Luis Urbano | Cast: Crista Alfaiate, Adriano Luz, Américo Silva, Carloto Cotta, Crista Alfaiate, Chico Chapas, Luísa Cruz

Ambitious, indignant and filled with offbeat humour, Miguel Gomes' extraordinary new film draws on the structure of 'Arabian Nights' to create a vivid portrait of Portugal today. Following *Tabu* (SFF 2012), Gomes was anguished by the austerity measures imposed on his homeland and commissioned journalists to gather true stories from all over the country that were then fictionalised. The outcome is a heady blend of the surreal and the all too real, told in a series of thrilling segments. As Gomes says in his captivating voiceover narration: "I thought I could make a fine film, filled with wonderful and seductive stories. At the same time, I thought the film could follow... Portugal's current miserable situation. Any muttonhead understands that, more or less skilfully, one of these two films can be made. But it's impossible to make both at once." Gomes has gone down that "impossible" path, and has made a singular film. It is a snapshot of his country in economic strife and a collection of riveting stories that will resonate far beyond Portugal's borders.'

BLACK SOULS

Italy | 2014 | 108 mins | In Italian with English Subtitles | Feature
Director: Francesco Munzi | Screenwriters: Francesco Munzi, Fabrizio Ruggirello, Maurizio Braucci | Producers: Gianluca Arcopinto, Luigi Musini, Olivia Musini | Cast: Marco Leonardi, Peppino Mazzotta, Fabrizio Ferracane

Likened to *The Godfather* and Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra*, *Black Souls* follows three brothers from a southern Italian crime family faced with a crisis and no easy resolution. Calabria's mafia, the 'Ndrangheta, is a vast criminal network of international scope. Luciano (Fabrizio Ferracane), the eldest brother, has turned his back on the drug operation that provided the family's stature and wealth, choosing a simple life with his wife and 20 year-old son Leo (Giuseppe Fumo), raising goats in their ancestral town in the Calabrian hills. Restless Leo idolises his charismatic uncles Luigi (Marco Leonardi), still involved in the narcotics trade, and Rocco (Peppino Mazzotta), the family mastermind. One night Leo's impulsive reaction to a trivial argument pulls all three brothers into a simmering feud that threatens to explode. Gradually ratcheting up the tension until its stunning climax, director Francesco Munzi tells a powerful tale of morality and the challenges of breaking cycles of crime and violence. Evocatively capturing both the moral and physical decay of Calabria, *Black Souls* is an intelligent and bracing crime film.

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THE DAUGHTER

Australia | 2015 | 96 mins | In English | Feature

Director, Screenwriter: Simon Stone | Producers: Jan Chapman, Nicole O'Donohue | Cast: Geoffrey Rush, Ewen Leslie, Paul Schneider

Simon Stone's auspicious feature film debut, inspired by his award-winning adaptation of *The Wild Duck*, brings together a magnificent cast in a heartrending drama about two intertwined families. Christian (Paul Schneider) returns to his family home, after a long absence, for his father Henry's lavish wedding to a much younger woman. Henry (Geoffrey Rush) is the owner of the local timber mill, which he is closing down, causing much hardship in the area. While home, Christian reconnects with his childhood friend Oliver (Ewen Leslie), an employee at the timber mill who is now out of a job. He begins to bond with Oliver's wife Charlotte (Miranda Otto), daughter Hedvig (Odessa Young) and father Walter (Sam Neill) and starts piecing together a puzzle that will have devastating consequences. Stone, who also wrote the screenplay, gives us that rare film, filled with fully formed characters. It is about a daughter, but also about fathers and sons, and an intergenerational meshing linked to class and sex. This is the sort of serious, emotional drama of which we see far too little, and featuring brilliant actors at the height of their powers.

ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL

USA | 2014 | 105 mins | In English | Feature

Director: Alfonso Gomez-Rejon | Screenwriter: Jesse Andrews | Producers: Jeremy Dawson, Steven Rales, Dan Fogelman | Cast: Thomas Mann, Olivia Cooke, RJ Kyler

Winner of the Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* is an original film about friendship, creativity, mortality and the love of cinema. Greg (Thomas Mann) is a high school senior who is trying to blend in as anonymously as possible. Even his closest friend Earl (R.J. Cyler) is described as a 'co-worker'. Together, Greg and Earl create parodies of classic films. Their repertoire includes: *Pooping Tom*, *A Sockwork Orange*, *Senior Citizen Cane* and *2:48pm Cowboy*. When Greg's mom (Connie Britton) insists he spend time with Rachel (Olivia Cooke) – a girl who has just been diagnosed with cancer – he slowly discovers how worthwhile the true bonds of friendship can be. Greg decides to make a film for Rachel, one that will test the limits of his creativity and lay bare his feelings for her. With a great score by Brian Eno, *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* is full of humour and pathos – and is a glorious love letter to cinema.

A PIGEON SAT ON A BRANCH REFLECTING ON EXISTENCE

Sweden, Norway, France, Germany | 2014 | 100 mins | In English and Swedish with English subtitles | Feature

Director, Screenwriter: Roy Andersson | Producer: Pernilla Sandström | Cast: Holger Andersson, Nils Westblom, Charlotta Larsson

Swedish cinematic visionary Roy Andersson brings his trademark absurdist humour and singular vision to this winner of the Venice Film Festival Golden Lion. Zipping back and forth through time, and peopled with a bizarre cast of characters, the film is a meticulous tragicomic series of vignettes. Fifteen years in the making, it follows on from the much loved *Songs From The Second Floor* and *You, The Living* (SFF 2008), together making up *The Living Trilogy*. It unites a macho Swedish monarch, a randy Flamenco teacher, a series of rather funny deaths and a rousing musical number. Alongside these humorous snippets of life, we encounter tragic examples of man's lack of empathy for others, and for animals. Guiding us through this unique take on existence are Sam and Jonathan, two travelling salesmen peddling strange novelty items. The overall effect is immersive and astonishing. Says Andersson: "I envision *A Pigeon...* as comical from beginning to end, emotional and uplifting. But from time to time, the audience will also witness outbreaks of terror. The range between humour and horror will be profound."

SHERPA

Australia, Nepal | 2015 | 96 mins | In English, Nepali and Sherpa with English subtitles |

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Documentary

Director, Screenwriter: Jennifer Peedom | Producers: Bridget Ikin, John Smithson

Images of climbers perched on the precipitous white slopes of Everest have spoken to us of bravery and camaraderie since New Zealander Edmund Hillary's and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay's summit triumph in 1953. The smiling duo, posing in goggles and parkas, became an icon for team spirit. In 2013, the world's media reported on a shocking mountain-high brawl as European climbers fled a mob of angry Sherpas. Director Jennifer Peedom and her team set out to uncover the cause of this altercation, intending to film the 2014 climbing season from the Sherpas' point of view. Instead, they captured Everest's greatest tragedy, when a huge block of ice crashed down onto the climbing route, killing 16 Sherpas. For the Himalayan workers repeatedly traversing the mountain carrying supplies, the risk of this hazardous endeavor is multiplied. This stunning documentary, shot by high-altitude cinematographer Renan Ozturk, explores the unequal relationship between cashed-up foreign expeditions and their guides. It is also a story of family and tradition, as exemplified by Phurba Tashi Sherpa, an experienced climber at the heart of this commanding film.

STRANGERLAND

Australia, Ireland | 2014 | 112 mins | In English | Feature

Director: Kim Farrant | Screenwriters: Fiona Seres, Michael Kinirons | Producers: Naomi Wenck, Macdara Kelleher | Cast: Nicole Kidman, Joseph Fiennes, Hugo Weaving

Kim Farrant's striking feature debut marks Nicole Kidman's welcome return to Australian independent cinema with a fearless performance of deep vulnerability and emotion. Soon after the Parkers move to the remote desert town of Nathgari, the teenage children of Catherine (Kidman) and Matthew (Joseph Fiennes) mysteriously disappear. With Nathgari eerily smothered in red dust and darkness, the townsfolk join the search led by a local cop, David Rae (Hugo Weaving). As temperatures rise and the chances of survival plummet with each passing day, Catherine and Matthew find themselves pushed to the brink. Farrant brilliantly ratchets up the tension, and gradually dark secrets are revealed. The outback here functions as a beautiful but dangerous force, as important as the characters. A fresh addition to a long tradition of films set in remote Australia, *Strangerland* is distinct in its compelling depiction of female sexuality. Says Farrant: "*Strangerland* examines how people react in times of crisis and how our deep fear of the unknown and our abhorrence of feeling pain can push us over the edge emotionally, psychologically and physically ... especially sexually."

TALES

Iran | 2014 | 88 mins | In Persian with English Subtitles | Feature

Director, Producer: Rakhshan Bani-Etemad | Screenwriters: Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Farid Mostafavi | Cast: Golab Adineh, Saber Abar, Farhad Aslani

Iran's leading female filmmaker, writer/director Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, won best screenplay at the Venice Film Festival (with co-writer Farid Mostafavi) for this richly layered look at life in Tehran. *Tales* was first produced as a series of shorts to bypass government control. A number of scenes were shot surreptitiously because actors Fatemeh Motabed Aria and Baran Kosari were banned from performing. A recent relaxation of restrictions meant that Bani-Etemad could craft the footage into a feature, with splendid results. The twisting narrative is made of loosely connected snapshots of people at the margins of society. A taxi driver who tries to help a drug-addicted sex worker, a group of unemployed labourers confronting government bureaucracy, a social worker running from the husband who disfigured her, and a documentary filmmaker are among those whose lives intersect. In each episode, Bani-Etemad's patient eye for human detail and the brilliant dialogue combine in fascinating, funny, heartbreaking stories of loss and love. The stellar ensemble includes Peiman Moadi (*A Separation*, SFF 2011).

TANGERINE USA | 88 mins | In English | Feature

Director: Sean Baker | Screenwriters: Sean Baker, Chris Bergoch | Producers: Sean Baker, Karrie Cox,

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Marcus Cox, Darren Dean, Shih-Ching Tsou | Cast: Kiki Kitana Rodriguez, Mya Taylor, Karren Karagulian

Wickedly funny and refreshingly offbeat, *Tangerine* is a hilarious journey through the lively streets of L.A. with two transgender sex workers on Christmas Eve. Intimate and brilliantly shot, the film is all the more remarkable as it was filmed entirely on an iPhone. Sin-Dee (Kitana Kiki Rodriguez), having just been released from a stint in prison, discovers that her pimp boyfriend Chester (James Ransone) has been unfaithful. Adding insult to injury, Chester's been cheating with a 'fish' – a derogatory term for a biological woman. Incensed, Sin-Dee and her best friend Alexandra (Mya Taylor) embark on a wild mission to get to the bottom of the rumour. Director Sean Baker (*Prince of Broadway, Starlet*) is adept at telling intimate stories involving characters at the margins of mainstream society. Here he decided to shoot with the iPhone 5s (fitted with prototype anamorphic adaptors), as it would be less intimidating for the first-time actors. The result is natural and exuberant performances in one of the most surprising, funny and heartfelt films you'll see this year.

TEHRAN TAXI

Iran | 2014 | 82 mins | In Farsi with English subtitles | Feature
Director, Screenwriter, Producer: Jafar Panahi | Cast: Jafar Panahi

Winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlinale, this is the third film made in secret by Jafar Panahi since a ban on filmmaking was imposed on him in Iran. Where *This Is Not A Film* was an expression of frustration following the ban, Panahi's next film *Closed Curtain* was filled with anger. *Tehran Taxi* is more hopeful, and very funny. A taxi drives around picking up passengers who express their views on matters relating to Iran today. The driver is Panahi himself, and there is a camera attached to the dashboard. Very few know who he is. Panahi and the various characters he encounters reflect on art, politics, and the law. Perhaps the most fascinating encounter is with Panahi's young niece, who is making a film herself and trying to follow her teacher's instructions to avoid "sordid realism." The playful *Tehran Taxi* finds Panahi at his most creative and entertaining, giving one hope that the creator of such great films as *The Circle*, *Offside* and *Crimson Gold* will soon make films, and travel the world, freely.

VICTORIA

Germany | 2015 | 140 mins | In English, German and Spanish with English Subtitles | Feature
Director: Sebastian Schipper | Screenwriters: Sebastian Schipper, Olivia Neergaard-Holm, Elke Schulz
| Producers: Jan Dressler, Sebastian Schipper, David Keitsch, Anatol Nitschke, Catherine Baikousis |
Cast: Laia Costa, Frederick Lau, Franz Rogowski

Sebastian Schipper's *Victoria* is a spectacular one-shot film detailing a Berlin bank robbery. Where single-shot films are usually bound to a narrow location, *Victoria* is expansive, boldly exploring the city over one crazy night. Victoria (Laia Costa), a young woman from Madrid, meets Sonne (Frederick Lau) and his friends. They promise to show her the real Berlin, but these guys have got themselves in hot water; they owe a dangerous favour to someone who needs repaying that very night. As Victoria's flirtation with Sonne develops into something more, she is convinced to go along for the ride. What started as a good night out quickly spirals out of control. Schipper didn't want to create yet another heist film, but something that takes the viewer viscerally into the experience of a robbery. He accomplishes that, and a great deal more. In this single take, he also shows us Berlin's party scene, a budding romance, and a touching portrait of real friendship. Says Schipper: "*Victoria* is no Candy Crush. It's poetry, danger, freedom and sin."

VINCENT

France | 2014 | 77 mins | In French with English subtitles | Feature
Director, Screenwriter: Thomas Salvador | Producer: Julie Salvador | Cast: Thomas Salvador, Vimala Pons, Youssef Hajdi

Constantly surprising, and completely delightful, *Vincent* is a gentle, minimalist superhero film. Played by debut director Thomas Salvador, Vincent is an extraordinary young man whose strength,

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reflexes and agility take on superhuman proportions when he comes into contact with water. With his recently discovered ability, Vincent gravitates towards lakes and rivers to experiment with his gift. When he meets Lucie (Vimala Pons) and falls in love, Vincent shares his secret with someone for the first time and finally feels accepted. But when he displays his powers publically, he is forced to flee (in one of the greatest chase scenes you'll see in the cinema this year). Working with a modest budget, Salvador's direction is spot-on, focusing on the human aspects of our hero. When the action does come, it is suitably exhilarating. The scenes of Vincent, truly free and himself when in the water are indelible. With a playful humour, beautiful images, realistic emotion, and an encouraging message about individuality, this is a superhero film with a difference.

The Festival also presents a number of awards to recognise excellence in local filmmaking, including; the **Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films** (which are Academy Award eligible), **Documentary Australia Foundation Award for Australian Documentary** and **Event Cinemas Australian Short Screenplay Award**. The winners are announced at the Festival's Closing Night.

Winners of all Sydney Film Festival are presented with the Festival's signature mesmeric swirl award, designed and handmade in Sydney by our partners Dinosaur Designs.

Each Jury Member and winner of the Sydney Film Prize for 2015 will receive an exquisite timepiece from our watch partner Philip Stein.

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

From **Wednesday 3 June to Sunday 14 June 2015**, the 62nd Sydney Film Festival offers Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, red-carpet openings, panel discussions, international guests and more. Each year the Festival's programming team curates 12 days of cinema sourced from world-famous film festivals, including Cannes, Sundance, Toronto and the Berlinale; as well as Australia's finest local productions.

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 are: *Two Days, One Night* (2014); *Only God Forgives* (2013); *Alps* (2012); *A Separation* (2011), which went on to win an Academy Award; *Heartbeats* (2010); and *Bronson* (2009).

The Festival takes place across greater Sydney: at the State Theatre, Event Cinemas George Street, Dendy Opera Quays, Dendy Newtown, Art Gallery of NSW, Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace Cremorne, Casula Powerhouse, the Festival Hub at Sydney Town Hall and SFF Outdoor Screen.

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: www.sff.org.au.

The 62nd Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW and Destination NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia and the City of Sydney.

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