



MEDIA RELEASE

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SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES THE 2014 OFFICIAL COMPETITION FILM SELECTION

The 61st Sydney Film Festival today announced the 12 films selected to compete for the Sydney Film Prize this 4-15 June.

The internationally recognised SFF Official Competition, now in its seventh year, awards a \$60,000 cash prize in recognition of the most courageous, audacious and cutting-edge film from the 12 features selected. The winning film is announced on Sunday 15 June.

"The Official Competition selection celebrates film that pushes the boundaries of the art form," said **SFF Festival Director Nashen Moodley**. "This year's selection offers some true surprises, and I look forward to the audience reactions to these amazing films."

The SFF 2014 Official Competition selection includes:

The Festival's Opening Night feature ***20,000 Days on Earth***, an innovative film about international cultural icon **Nick Cave** that recently won the Directing Award: World Cinema Documentary and the Editing Award: World Cinema Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival

Black Coal, Thin Ice, winner of the Golden Bear for best film at the 2014 Berlinale, a stylish film noir set in industrial northern China. It follows a former policeman's investigation into a series of killings, leading him to a mysterious femme-fatale suspect.

Boyhood, directed by **Richard Linklater**, winner of the Silver Bear for best director at the 2014 Berlinale. It is an emotional family drama shot using the same actors, **Ethan Hawke, Patricia Arquette, Ellar Coltrane** and **Lorelei Linklater**, over a 12-year period.

The debut feature from Australian director **Kasimir Burgess**, ***Fell***, a **World Premiere** shot in the Victorian Alps. It chronicles a story of redemption, as a father seeks to avenge his daughter's death, and stars **Matthew Nable** and **Daniel Henshall**.

Fish & Cat, by Iranian director **Shahram Mokri**. It was shot in a single take and is based on a real news report about a roadside diner where human flesh was served.

The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq, directed and written by **Guillame Nicloux**, and starring controversial French author **Michel Houellebecq** as himself in a fictional scenario based on media speculations around his real-life disappearance in 2011.

Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter, inspired by true events, and starring Oscar nominee **Rinko Kikuchi** (*Babel*; *Norwegian Wood*, SFF 2011) as a lonely Japanese woman who journeys to Minnesota in search of the mythical fortune featured in the film *Fargo*.

Locke, director **Steven Knight**'s daring cinematic experiment shot in real time and starring **Tom Hardy** as a businessman who attempts to deal with a series of crises via speakerphone while driving. It was described by *Variety* as an "ingeniously executed study in cinematic minimalism."

Australian director David Michôd's ***The Rover***, a dystopian crime drama starring **Guy Pierce** and **Robert Pattinson**, following his critically acclaimed 2010 breakout feature *Animal Kingdom*.

Ruin, from Australian directing duo **Amiel Courtin-Wilson** (*Hail*, SFF 2011) and **Michael Cody**. Winner of the Orizzonti Special Jury Prize at the 2014 Venice Film Festival, it was shot in Cambodia on a shoestring budget.

Snowpiercer, from South Korean director **Bong Joon-ho**, winner of the Blue Dragon award for Best Director. It is an apocalyptic science-fiction thriller that follows the last survivors of humanity as they perpetually circumnavigate the globe on a class-divided train; it features stars **Chris Evans**, **Song Kang-ho**, **Ed Harris**, **John Hurt** and **Tilda Swinton**.

Two Days, One Night from two-time Cannes Palme d'Or winners the **Dardenne Brothers** (*Rosetta*, *The Child*, *The Kid with a Bike*) and starring Oscar-winning actress **Marion Cotillard** (*La Vie en rose*, *The Dark Knight Rises*).

Previous Sydney Film Festival Official Competition winners include: *Only God Forgives* (2013), *Alps* (2012), *Separation* (2011) – which went on to win an Academy Award®, *Heartbeats* (2010), *Bronson* (2009) and *Hunger* (2008). Winners of the SFF Official Competition take home a \$60,000 cash prize as well as international recognition.

SFF 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) and the Documentary Australia Foundation Australian Documentary Prize. The finalists for these awards will be announced at the full program launch on Wednesday, 7 May.

SFF 2014 Official Competition titles:

20,000 Days on Earth

Directors: Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard | Screenwriters: Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard, Nick Cave | Producers: James Wilson, Dan Bowen | Distributor: Madman Entertainment

Drama and reality collide in this extraordinary portrait of musician and cultural icon Nick Cave. Artists Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard take a fascinating approach in this visually astonishing and highly stylised imagination of Cave's 20,000th day on earth, all set to a sparkling narration by Cave himself. Through his visits to his archive, and a long and revealing session with his therapist, a picture of the artist, his origins, and his creative process is beautifully drawn. The filmmakers also follow Cave into the studio as he writes and records his hit album *Push the Sky Away*. Along the way, we witness fascinating and humorous conversations between Cave and his friends and collaborators like Kylie Minogue, Ray Winstone, Blixa Bargeld and Warren Ellis. Capturing Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds live at the Sydney Opera House helps reveal the massive impact Cave has and the deep devotion he inspires. Imaginative, intimate, daring and defying easy categorisation, *20,000 Days On Earth* is not just a scintillating portrait of a visionary artist, but a tremendous work of art in itself.

Black Coal, Thin Ice

Director, Screenwriter: Diao Yinan | Producers: Qu Vivian, Wan Juan, Shen Yang, Zhang Dajun | Cast: Liao Fan, Gwei Lun Mei, Wang Xuebing | World Sales: Fortissimo Films

Winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlinale, this film noir is a stylish and exhilarating look at a police investigation in contemporary China. Following a mysterious killing in a small town in the industrial north, a police investigation uncovers multiple suspects but the case ends in tatters when police officers are killed and wounded in the course of the investigation. Forced to retire, injured officer Zhang Zili (Liao Fan) takes on a demeaning job as a security guard and drowns his sorrows. Years later, a series of uncannily similar murders come to light, and Zhang sets about solving the mystery which is centred around a beautiful woman. Director Diao Yinan has cited John Huston, David Lynch and the Coen Brothers as influences on the film, and this paired with a gritty Chinese milieu makes for a potent combination. With astonishing set-pieces at the start and the end of the film, and a complex performance from Liao, which earned him the Best Actor prize in Berlin, *Black Coal, Thin Ice* is both powerful and memorable.

Boyhood

Director, Screenwriter: Richard Linklater | Producers: Cathleen Sutherland, Richard Linklater | Cast: Ethan Hawke, Patricia Arquette, Ellar Coltrane, Lorelei Linklater | Distributor: Universal Pictures International Australasia

Richard Linklater, one of cinema's most humane filmmakers, made this masterful film over short periods from 2002 to 2013. This ground-breaking cinematic experience earned him the Silver Bear for best director at Berlin, and covers 12 years in the life of an American family. We meet Mason (Ellar Coltrane) as a typical seven-year-old, then watch his transition to adulthood. While young Mason is the focus, *Boyhood* also portrays the lives of those closest to him: his sister (Lorelei Linklater) and parents (Ethan Hawke and Patricia Arquette). We experience their joys and missteps, the relationships formed and lost, encompassing much of what all families go through. Using the same actors over so many years gives the film a rare authenticity, and while Hawke and Arquette are both perfect, they are matched with lovely performances by the young actors. *Boyhood* has many achievements, but chief amongst those is the level of care you feel for its characters. It's a singular film that will be watched and admired for years to come.

Fell

Director: Kasimir Burgess | Screenwriter: Natasha Pincus | Producers: John Maynard, Mary Minas | Cast: Matt Nable, Dan Henshall | Production Company: Felix Media

This stunning debut by Australian director Kasimir Burgess is an entrancing and enigmatic drama – a dreamlike, visually resplendent tale of nature, revenge and redemption. While camping, Thomas' only daughter, Lara, is killed by a logging truck in a hit-and-run accident. The driver, Luke, goes to prison. Stricken with grief, Thomas sheds his urban life and his identity, moving to the remote town where Lara was killed. There he takes a new name, Chris, and finds work as a logger. When Luke is released and returns to work, Chris connives to be his partner in dangerously high tree-logging work. Every time Luke climbs, Chris holds his life in his hands. Burgess expertly ratchets up tension as the two damaged men grow closer through an affinity for nature. The forest is as important a character, exerting a strange power over them. Actors Matthew Nable and Daniel Henshall are superb, delicately conveying emotion and subtly embodying the unsettling atmosphere. *Fell* marks the emergence of a distinctive new voice in Australian film.

Fish & Cat

Director, Screenwriter: Shahram Mokri | Producer: Sepehr Seyfi | Cast: Babak Karimi, Saeed Ebrahimi, Abed Abest | World Sales: Iranian Independents

It's unlikely you'll see another film like Shahram Mokri's *Fish & Cat*. Coupling a phenomenal single-shot approach with a bizarre story and a sick sense of humour, this Iranian film is as unnerving as it is technically impressive. The plot's bare bones – based on a news account about a roadside diner that served human flesh – suggest a slasher film. So does the setting: a lakeside camp where university hipsters from Tehran are stalked by a pair of creepy cooks with a penchant for knives. But *Fish & Cat* contains little violence, and endlessly plays with expectations. We get to know the characters and their backstories while suspense is stretched over the course of the film's spectacular single shot. That shot is beautifully executed by Mahmud Kalari, who also shot

the Sydney Film Prize-winning *A Separation* (SFF 2011). Despite what seems a linear real-time approach, flashbacks, dreams and nightmarish surrealism are incorporated in a style reminiscent of David Lynch. *Fish & Cat* is both rewarding and disturbing.

Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter

Director: David Zellner | Screenwriters: David Zellner, Nathan Zellner | Producers: Nathan Zellner, Cameron Lamb, Chris Ohlson, Andrew Banks, Jim Burke | Cast: Rinko Kikuchi, Nobuyuki Katsube, Kanako Higashi | Distributor: Palace Films

Inspired by true events, this psychological adventure from the Zellner Brothers and executive produced by Alexander Payne, is a whimsical story of a lonely Japanese woman determined to find a mythical fortune. With only her beloved pet rabbit Bunzo to confide in, twentysomething Kumiko (Oscar nominee Rinko Kikuchi, *Babel*, *Norwegian Wood*, SFF 2011) lives a solitary life in Tokyo. A dead-end job, a demeaning boss and a nagging mother add to her isolation. Her escape plan lies in an unlikely place – an old VHS tape of the film *Fargo*. Convinced that the satchel of money in the film is really still buried in the Midwestern wilderness, and armed with a hand-sewn map, Kumiko is determined to make the trip to Minnesota to claim her prize and fulfill her destiny. It's a convincing and moving fable, both charming and heartbreaking, with an astonishing central performance by Kikuchi and a lovely supporting cast that includes the Zellners. This is a film about obsession with cinema, about psychological vulnerability, and about how fantasy can sometimes be more appealing than reality.

Locke

Director, Screenwriter: Steven Knight | Producers: Paul Webster, Guy Heeley | Cast: Tom Hardy, Ruth Wilson, Olivia Colman | Distributor: Madman Entertainment

A daring and very successful, cinematic experiment, *Locke* removes virtually all of the frills of modern cinema. Shot in real time, with a minimalist setup, a very fine script and a tremendous performance by Tom Hardy, *Locke* is utterly mesmerising. Hardy is Ivan Locke, a man who would appear to lead a good life. He's at the top of his game professionally, and is happily married with children. But on the eve of a huge day for his career, things are about to fall apart. Driving his car in a rush to his destination, Locke must deal with a series of crises all descending upon him at the same time, with just a speakerphone to aid him. Steven Knight (the writer of *Eastern Promises* and *Dirty Pretty Things*, and writer-director of *Redemption*) directs with a confidence matching his scintillating screenplay. Visually too, *Locke* is extraordinary even if it is limited to a man in a car and its surrounds. Truly surprising and emotionally resonant, *Locke* shows that when the simplest elements are executed perfectly it can lead to a complex, engaging and unforgettable film.

Ruin

Director, Screenwriter, Producer: Amiel Courtin-Wilson, Michael Cody | Cast: Sang Malen, Ros Mony | Distributor: Madman Entertainment

In the stunning follow up to *Hail* (SFF 2011), Australian co-directors Amiel Courtin-Wilson and Michael Cody deliver a visually breathtaking, impressionistic tale of love and violence. Phirun and Sovanna are two Cambodians who live troubled lives. Sovanna works as a prostitute and suffers under a sadistic pimp, while Phirun is a factory worker who tires of the abuse. Each can take it no longer and, magnetically drawn together, they are forced to flee the city. They take to the jungle where along with growing love, they face burgeoning chaos. The journey brings its own traumas, and Phirun and Sovanna must deal with a present as perilous and violent as their pasts. Largely improvised, and structurally daring, *Ruin* creates a dreamlike atmosphere, and is set to an unforgettable score that perfectly augments the hypnotic images. The winner of the Orizzonti Special Jury Prize at Venice, *Ruin* confirms Cody and Courtin-Wilson as filmmakers who achieve visceral and stunning cinema in a risky and original way.

Snowpiercer

Director: Bong Joon-ho | Screenwriters: Bong Joon-ho, Kelly Masterson | Producers: Park Chan-wook, Lee Tae-hun, Park Tae-jun, Robert Bernacchi, David Minkowski, Matthew Stillman | Cast: Chris Evans, Song Kang-ho, Ed Harris, John Hurt, Tilda Swinton | Distributor: Roadshow Films

In the near future, an experiment to halt global warming has gone horribly wrong, freezing the world over and killing virtually all life. Korean director Bong Joon-ho's new sci-fi thriller is based on the French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige*, brought to life by a stellar cast including Chris Evans, Song Kang-ho, John Hurt, Tilda Swinton, Jamie Bell and Octavia Spencer. Bong is known for fusing genre elements with social critique in films like *Memories of Murder* (SFF 2004), *The Host* and *Mother*. His first English-language film is his most ambitious and overtly political. Earth's sole survivors live on the Snowpiercer, a train that perpetually circumnavigates the planet. The rich live in splendour at the front of the train, while the poor live in squalor at the back. Years into the journey, those at the back plot a rebellion. But the journey to the front is long and filled with danger. With spectacular visuals and effects, the film has an epic Hollywood quality, but adds complex characters and a quirky humour that makes it Bong's own.

The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq

Director, Screenwriter: Guillaume Nicloux | Producers: Sylvie Pialat, Marco Cherqui | Cast: Michel Houellebecq, Luc Schwarz, Mathieu Nicourt

In September 2011 the controversial French author Michel Houellebecq, who created an international literary stir with his novels *Whatever*, *Atomised* and *Platform*, disappeared. After failing to show up for his latest book tour, there was intense speculation as to his whereabouts – with some theories even involving Al-Qaeda abducting him. *The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq* offers a fantastical imagining of what happened during his disappearance, made all the more fascinating and bizarre because the notorious author plays himself in the film. Spirited away by a bunch of tough guys and taken to a compound outside Paris, this is no ordinary kidnapping. Michel enjoys his captivity, indulging in copious amounts of booze and cigarettes. There is time too for philosophical discussions with his kidnapers around subjects ranging from literature to politics to Viagra to Mixed Martial Arts. All the while the question remains: just who is going to pay the ransom? Houellebecq delivers a great performance, channelling obnoxiousness and vulnerability in equal measure. The result is a smart, unsettling and hilarious fiction/reality hybrid.

The Rover

Director, Screenwriter: David Michôd | Producers: Liz Watts, David Linde, David Michôd | Cast: Guy Pearce, Robert Pattinson, Scoot McNairy | Distributor: Roadshow Films

In 2010 David Michôd's *Animal Kingdom* won the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and established Michôd as one of the most promising new filmmakers in world cinema. His much-anticipated second feature, a Cannes Official Selection, is an uncompromising, dark thriller with elements of a western, fulfilling all the promise of his debut. Set in a dangerous near-future, 10 years after the collapse of the economic system, *The Rover* depicts an Australia without law or order. The country's natural resources have attracted a range of opportunists, and life is cheap. When Eric (Guy Pearce) has his car stolen, he embarks on a ruthless mission to track down the thieves. He soon forms an unlikely partnership with Rey (Robert Pattinson), the naïve younger brother of gang member Henry (Scoot McNairy) who has left Rey behind in the bloody aftermath of a robbery. Gripping and terrifying, *The Rover's* power lies in its strong relation to reality. Says Michôd: "I want *The Rover* to feel like an entirely conceivable world of the very near future, a world despoiled by very real forces and systems at work all around us today."

Two Days, One Night

Directors, Screenwriters: Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne | Producers: Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne, Denis Freyd | Cast: Marion Cotillard, Olivier Gourmet, Catherine Salée, Fabrizio Rongione | Distributor: Madman Entertainment

The Dardenne brothers are amongst that select company who have won the Palme d'Or twice: for *Rosetta* (1999) and *The Child* (2005). They return to Competition at Cannes with their latest. Oscar-winner Marion Cotillard (*La Vie en Rose*, *The Dark Knight Rises*) is wonderful as Sandra, a woman in a precarious position. Her employer at a factory has given her colleagues a stark choice – to either receive a bonus or have Sandra return

to work after a leave of absence. An initial ballot is not promising. The employer agrees to another vote, leaving Sandra one weekend to convince her colleagues to let her keep her job. Sandra visits them one by one to make her case. With this intriguing premise, the Dardennes fashion a very special film. Without resorting to sentiment, the film is filled with emotion. Every interaction is so rich with possibility you can imagine each of these working-class characters inspiring a film of their own. *Two Days, One Night* is gentle in tone but provocative in spirit.

The 61st Sydney Film Festival runs 4-15 June and brings a packed program of screenings and special events to even more venues across Sydney. For tickets and full up-to-date program information visit sff.org.au

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

Sydney Film Festival screens feature films, documentaries, short films and animated films across the city at the State Theatre, Event Cinemas George Street, Dendy Opera Quays, the Art Gallery of NSW, Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace Cremorne, the Apple Store, SFFTV at Martin Place, Skyline Drive-In Blacktown, and the Festival Hub at Town Hall.

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

Sydney Film Festival also presents 12 films that vie for the Official Competition, a highly respected international 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 include: *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 61st Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia, and the City of Sydney. The Festival's Strategic partner is the NSW Government through Destination NSW.

What: Sydney Film Festival

When: 4-15 June, 2014

Tickets & Info: 1300 733 733 sff.org.au

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