



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL: Monday 2 April, 2012**

# Sydney Film Festival 6-17 June reveals first films

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The 59th Sydney Film Festival today announced early highlights in advance of the full program launch on Wednesday, 9 May.

‘Revealing the first confirmed films for this year’s Festival really lets us share our excitement,’ said **Nashen Moodley** in his first year as Festival Director for Sydney Film Festival. ‘This is just a cross-section and a taste of what we have in store, but you’ll already see the extraordinary diversity in subject, style and geography that makes a great international film festival memorable and thought-provoking. From the film that everyone was talking about in Sundance to a look inside Woody Allen’s head to *Some Guy Who Kills People*, cinema lovers in Sydney, NSW or around Australia will have many reasons to join us here in June.’

This first announcement comprises 25 titles including 22 Australian premieres, 15 features and 10 documentaries, as well as some of the top prize-winning films from Sundance, Rotterdam and Berlin.

Today’s announcement includes the winner of the US Dramatic Grand Jury Prize at Sundance Film Festival ***Beasts of the Southern Wild***, the winner of the FIPRESCI prize at Berlin Film Festival ***Tabu***, the winner of the FIPRESCI prize at International Film Festival Rotterdam ***Neighbouring Sounds*** and the winner of the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize Documentary at Sundance, ***The Law In These Parts***.

Since its inception in 1954, Sydney Film Festival (SFF) has become a key cultural event for Sydney and well-established in the international film festival calendar. For 12 days in June the Festival takes over eight venues including the iconic State Theatre, Event Cinemas George Street, Dendy Opera Quays and the Art Gallery of NSW, showcasing the best in film from across Australia and around the world. This year, for the first time, Sydney Film Festival Hub @ Lower Town Hall will open its doors with free exhibitions, screenings, talks, live music and performances from 5pm-10pm throughout the Festival.

SFF boasts an internationally-recognised Official Competition, now in its fifth year. Previous Official Competition winners include; *A Separation* (2011), *Heartbeats* (2010), *Bronson* (2009) and *Hunger* (2008). The Official Competition winner receives a \$60,000 cash prize in recognition of courageous, audacious and cutting-edge filmmaking. 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 FOXTEL Australian Documentary Prize. The finalists for these awards will be announced at the full program launch on Wednesday, 9 May.

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## Feature Films:

### **Beasts of the Southern Wild** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Benh Zeitlin | Starring: Quvenzhané Wallis, Dwight Henry | USA

Winner of the US Dramatic Grand Jury Prize at Sundance 2012, this striking and unforgettable feature-film debut is set in 'The Bathtub' – a defiant bayou community cut off from the rest of the world. Six-year-old Hushpuppy is devoted to her father, Wink, who tries to prepare her for a dangerous new world, as the icebergs melt and prehistoric creatures descend.

### **Tabu** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Miguel Gomes | Starring: Teresa Madruga, Laura Soveral, Ana Moreira | Portugal, Germany, Brazil, France

In this utterly beguiling and surprising film, a temperamental old woman, her Cape Verdean maid and a neighbour devoted to social causes live on the same floor of a Lisbon apartment building. When the old lady dies, the other two learn of an episode from her past: a tale of love and crime set in an Africa straight from the world of adventure films.

### **Neighbouring Sounds** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Kleber Mendonça Filho | Starring: Irandhir Santos, Gustavo Jahn, Maeve Jinkings | Brazil

In this assured and astonishing feature-film debut, life in a middle-class neighbourhood in present-day Recife, Brazil, takes an unexpected turn after the arrival of an independent private-security firm. Their presence brings a sense of safety but also a good deal of anxiety to a culture which runs on fear in this reflection on class, architecture, violence and noise.

### **The Loneliest Planet** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Julia Loktev | Starring: Gael García Bernal, Hani Furstenberg, Bidzina Gujabidze | USA, Germany

Alex and Nica are young, in love and engaged. Travelling in the Caucasus Mountains of Georgia, they hire a local guide to lead them on a backpacking trek through a stunning wilderness. The idyll is interrupted by a momentary misstep that cannot be undone – one that threatens to undo everything the couple believed about each other and themselves.

### **Rampart** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Oren Moverman | Starring: Woody Harrelson, Ned Beatty, Ben Foster | USA

Written by director Oren Moverman and novelist James Ellroy, the gritty *Rampart* is set in Los Angeles in 1999 and revolves around Officer Dave Brown (Woody Harrelson), a trigger-happy cop whose brutality is out of step with the times. When he is caught on tape beating a suspect, Brown's professional and personal lives begin to spiral out of control.

### **Once Upon a Time in Anatolia**

Director: Nuri Bilge Ceylan | Starring : Muhammet Uzuner, Yılmaz Erdoğan, Taner Birsel | Turkey

Turkish master Nuri Bilge Ceylan takes on the police procedural, and the result is a patient and beautifully layered narrative in which every line of dialogue contributes to solving the puzzle. Following a murder and confession, a group of men go in search of the corpse, and discover a great deal more. Winner of the Grand Prix at Cannes 2011.

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### **Faust** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Alexander Sokurov | Starring: Johannes Zeiler, Anton Adasinskiy, Isolda Dychauk | Russia

Inspired by Goethe's play, Alexander Sokurov radically reinterprets the myth of Faust in this visually stunning film which won the Golden Lion in Venice. Sokurov's Faust is a thinker, rebel and pioneer, but is also driven by greed and lust. After *Moloch* (Hitler), *Taurus* (Lenin) and *The Sun* (Hirohito), *Faust* is the final film in Sokurov's tetralogy on power.

### **Harold's Going Stiff** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Keith Wright | Starring: Stan Rowe, Sarah Spencer, Phil Gascoyne | UK

You've never seen a zombie movie like this before. Fashioned in the style of a BBC regional documentary, Keith Wright's very funny and surprisingly touching tale investigates 'Onset Rigors Disease', a mystery illness turning men in the north of England into bloodthirsty ghouls. Featuring sharp social satire and charming inter-species romance, *Harold's Going Stiff* is a truly original horror gem.

### **A Simple life** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Ann Hui | Starring: Deanie Ip, Andy Lau, Qin Hailu | Hong Kong, China

With perfect performances from Andy Lau and Deanie Ip, Ann Hui's moving film looks at the decades-long relationship between a man and a devoted family servant. Having cared for Roger from childhood, Ah Tao suffers a stroke and is admitted into a nursing home. Roles are reversed as Roger tenderly cares for her in the final phase of her life.

### **A Royal Affair** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Nikolaj Arcel | Starring: Mads Mikkelsen, Alicia Vikander, Mikkel Boe Føesgaard | Denmark, Sweden, Czech Republic, Germany

Winner of Best Screenplay and Best Actor prizes at Berlin, *A Royal Affair* is the true story of an ordinary man who wins a queen's heart and starts a revolution. At its centre is an intriguing love triangle between Danish King Christian VII (Mikkel Boe Føesgaard); Struensee (Mads Mikkelsen), the man of enlightenment; and young queen Caroline Mathilde (Alicia Vikander).

### **Goodbye**

Director: Mohammad Rasoulof | Starring: Leyla Zareh, Hasaan Pourshirazi, Behname Tashakor | Iran

Mohammad Rasoulof, who was honoured at SFF 2011, returns with the suspenseful and moving story of a young lawyer whose licence to practice has been revoked as punishment for protesting against the government. Pregnant and alone, Noora is determined to leave Iran and must manoeuvre through the bureaucracy – not a simple task for a single woman pursued by the state.

### **Barbara** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Christian Petzold | Starring: Nina Hoss, Ronald Zehrfeld, Jasna Fritzi Bauer | Germany

In East Germany in 1980, a doctor is exiled to a country hospital as punishment for applying for an exit visa. As her lover from the West carefully plots her escape, Barbara waits patiently and avoids friendships, but a co-worker and a traumatised patient chip away at her defenses and she slowly loses control. Winner of Best Director at Berlin.

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## Beauty

Director: Oliver Hermanus | Starring: Deon Lotz, Charlie Keegan, Michelle Scott | South Africa, France

In this fascinating study of desire, South African director Oliver Hermanus focuses on Francois, a middle-aged, Afrikaans-speaking family man who becomes obsessed with the young son of longtime friends. As Francois begins to stalk the young man, his carefully constructed world begins to unravel. Winner of the Queer Palm at Cannes 2011.

## Monsieur Lazhar (Australian Premiere)

Director: Phillipe Falardeau | Starring: Fellag, Sophie Nélisse, Émilien Néron | Canada

This Oscar®-nominated drama is the moving story of a group of schoolchildren coming to terms with the adult world, and the inspirational educator who transforms their lives. When a beloved teacher passes away, an Algerian immigrant is appointed as substitute. While the class begins to heal, nobody in the school is aware of Lazhar's painful past and uncertain future.

## Some Guy Who Kills People (Australian Premiere)

Director: Jack Perez | Starring: Kevin Corrigan, Karen Black, Barry Bostwick | USA

Fresh from a spell in the loony bin, and the prime suspect in a series of bizarre murders, sensitive artist Kenny Boyd might also be Some Guy Who Kills People. Droll humour, juicy gore and terrific performances from Kevin Corrigan and the great Karen Black as Kenny's acid-tongued mum make for a delightfully deranged treat.

## Documentaries:

### The Law in These Parts (Australian Premiere)

Director: Ra'anán Alexandrowicz | Documentary | Israel

This brilliant documentary, a Grand Jury Prize winner at Sundance, explores the framework for Israel's long-term military 'rule of law' in the Occupied Territories. The system's architects – including military judges, attorneys and a former Supreme Court president – submit to a series of uncomfortable interviews in which they are asked to consider the consequences of the laws they have crafted.

### Woody Allen: A Documentary (Australian Premiere)

Director: Robert B Weide | Documentary | USA

This riveting look at the creative life of the multi-hyphenate filmmaker from his early years to his stand-up days and recent Oscar® win is packed with clips (*Bananas, Annie Hall, Vicky Christina Barcelona*) and interviews with a plethora of stars (including Diane Keaton, Scarlett Johansson and Owen Wilson), his mother and, of course, the man himself.

### Crazy Horse (Australian Premiere)

Director: Frederick Wiseman | Documentary | USA, France

Frederick Wiseman (*La danse, Ballet*) turns his impeccable gaze on Le Crazy Horse de Paris, the self-tagged 'best nude dancing show in the world'. The master documentarian follows two obsessive perfectionists, choreographer Decouflé and artistic director Mahdavi, as they create a fabulous new erotic revue, featuring exquisite performers and eye-catching effects.

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### **Under African Skies**

Director: Joe Berlinger | Documentary | USA

Paul Simon reunites with the musicians who collaborated on his 1986 megahit *Graceland* – which stirred controversy upon its release when Simon was accused of breaking the cultural boycott of Apartheid South Africa. Prizewinning filmmaker Joe Berlinger (*Paradise Lost*, *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster*) follows Simon as he confronts his critics and celebrates a landmark artistic achievement.

### **Maori Boy Genius** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Pietra Brettkelly | Documentary | New Zealand

“What if some shrewd filmmaker had recognised Barack Obama’s boyhood promise and documented the birth of his political consciousness as a teen?” So runs the tagline for New Zealand filmmaker Pietra Brettkelly’s compelling documentary – an up-close study of Ngaa Rauuira Pumanawawhiti, a charismatic 16-year-old who has been pegged as a future leader since boyhood by his Maori community.

### **Side By Side**

Director: Chris Kenneally | Documentary | USA

In this entertaining and illuminating documentary, narrator and co-producer Keanu Reeves interviews film-industry heavyweights – directors (James Cameron, George Lucas, Christopher Nolan and Lars von Trier), cinematographers (including Australians Donald McAlpine and Dion Beebe), editors and technicians – to investigate how the shift from celluloid to pixels has changed the way films are crafted and exhibited.

### **El Gusto** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Safinez Bousbia | Documentary | France, Algeria, Ireland, UAE

*Chaabi* – the effervescent popular music of the Casbah of Algiers – once brought both Muslim and Jewish musicians together in a unique orchestra. The 1954 War of Independence fractured this harmony, forcing many musicians to flee, while others joined the struggle. Through their stories (and eventual reunion), director Safinez Bousbia sketches a portrait of Algerian history – accompanied by *chaabi*’s intoxicating rhythms.

### **First Position** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Bess Kargman | Documentary | USA

Six talented young performers pursue their dancing dreams at the Youth America Grand Prix, the most prestigious children’s ballet acompetition in the world. The relentless practice routines, backstage nerves, fiercely supportive ballet moms and the overwhelming joy of dance – it’s all on screen in this multiple-award-winning documentary.

### **Golden Slumbers** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Davy Chou | Documentary | France, Cambodia

The golden age of Cambodian cinema ended in 1975 when the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh, trashing cinemas and film reels, and forcing filmmakers to flee or die. In his eye-opening documentary, director Davy Chou traces the lost celluloid years with visits to one-time movie houses and production lots, and haunting interviews with the few surviving cast and crew.

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## **Searching for Sugar Man** (Australian Premiere)

Director: Malik Bendjelloul | Documentary | Sweden, UK

Winner of a World Cinema Audience Award and Special Jury Prize at Sundance, this film traces the improbable-but-true story of 70s singer-songwriter Rodriguez, a Detroit soul dude who failed to make the charts in his US homeland, but found an enthusiastic audience in Apartheid-era South Africa – although neither he nor his managers knew until two dedicated fans tracked him down.

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## **Sydney Film Festival runs from 6-17 June 2012**

The 59th Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Arts NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia, and the City of Sydney. The festival's Strategic partner is the NSW Government through Destination NSW.

For more information, visit [www.sff.org.au](http://www.sff.org.au)

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