

# SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

18-29 AUGUST 2021

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## SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES FIRST FILMS FOR 2021

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The 68<sup>th</sup> Sydney Film Festival today announced a sneak peek of 22 new films to be featured in this year's 18-29 August 2021 event. The announcement is in advance of the full program launch on Wednesday 21 July.

"With this first look at our 2021 program we invite audiences back into cinemas to explore our times through film," said **Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley**.

"The global health crisis has taken a terrible toll on humanity and in many areas of life. We may feel isolated, out of touch, and missing our global connections as we all face restrictions, and have been unable to travel beyond country borders for over a year.

"This August we invite the audience to join us in discovering the important issues, people, places and phenomena motivating the world's top filmmakers. To come together and share in their diverse experiences.

"These first 22 films, revealed today, take us on a journey from Côte d'Ivoire to Kosovo, from Iran to Japan, to the frontlines of climate change and the battle for democracy in Hong Kong. They take us into the future and the wild fantasy beyond. They will also warm your soul and make you laugh. They share deeply human, delicate tales about extraordinary people from very different walks of life.

"From the inspiring Dalit women breaking stories and barriers at India's only all-female news network, to back home for reflections on the legacies of some of Australia's greatest cultural icons, these films are a taste of the incredible program of international and local cinema we have in store."

### Leading the pack...

Leading the titles announced today is, ***Wash My Soul in the River's Flow***, an enthralling musical journey through love and country based around a fertile collaboration from 2004 between First Nation artists Archie Roach and the late Ruby Hunter, Paul Grabowsky and the Australian Art Orchestra. Members of the Stolen Generation, Roach and Hunter met at a Salvation Army drop-in centre. This film is the story of their lives as told through their music and lively yarns, celebrating country, culture, resilience and family.

Fashion revolutionaries **Jenny Kee** and **Linda Jackson** are another iconic Australian creative duo honoured in this year's SFF program with ***Step into Paradise***, directed by AACTA and BAFTA-nominated filmmaker Amanda Blue. The film is a vibrant and passionate true story of the pair's enduring friendship and game-changing collaboration.

Starring in a very different role, Australian screen icon **Essie Davis** AKA Miss Fisher (*Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*; *The Babadook*, SFF 2019) shines as a single mother battling the system and her



troubled past in **The Justice of Bunny King**, together with New Zealand's **Thomasin McKenzie** (*Jojo Rabbit*, 2019).

Canada-New Zealand production **Night Raiders** is a tale of Indigenous resistance set in a dystopian future where children have become the property of the state. Directed by Cree/Métis woman Danis Goulet and executive produced by **Taika Waititi** (*What We Do in the Shadows*, SFF 2014), the film uses sci-fi to shine a light on the experiences of First Nations peoples around the world.

Danish superstar **Mads Mikkelsen** (*Another Round*, SFF 2021) headlines eccentric, transgressive, crime-comedy **Riders of Justice**, his fifth collaboration with Oscar-winning director Anders Thomas Jensen (*After the Wedding*, SFF 2007).

**Ellar Coltrane** (*Boyhood*, SFF 2014) and **Joe Manganiello** (*True Blood*) feature in **Shoplifters of the World**, a tribute to '80s English band the Smiths, inspired by true events.

And the infamous 148-tweet thread from A'Ziah "Zola" King, which broke the internet in 2015, is faithfully chronicled in girl gaze stripper saga **Zola**, nominated for a Sundance Grand Jury Prize in 2020.

Australian Director Eddie Martin (*All This Mayhem*, SFF 2014) revisits the cast of Larry Clark's notorious indie cult classic *Kids* twenty-six years after its original release in **The Kids**, providing a snapshot of the lives of the cast members who didn't hit the big time.

In **Memory Box**, nominated for the 2021 Berlinale Golden Bear, two of the biggest filmmakers in contemporary Lebanese cinema, the award-winning team Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige (*A Perfect Day*, SFF 2006), meditate on the role memory plays in shaping our lives.

The sneak peek also contains some heavy-hitting documentaries, including one of the most complete accounts of the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests to date, in the thrilling and courageous film **When a City Rises**, directed by seven filmmakers and following four different protestors as they fight for their last chance at a democratic future.

And multi-award-winning director Jennifer Abbott (*The Corporation*, SFF 2004) brings potent stories from the frontlines of climate change in **The Magnitude of All Things**, as she travels the globe capturing a planet in crisis, featuring Greta Thunberg and many other vital activists.

### International festival winners

International festival circuit prize-winners include: Grand Jury Prize, Best Director and Audience Award winner at Sundance 2021 (World Cinema Dramatic), **Hive**, an outstanding debut drama from Kosovo-born filmmaker Blerta Basholli, about the true story of a Kosovo War widow fighting the patriarchy.

Venice 2020 Special Jury Prize winner **Dear Comrades!**, a monochrome masterpiece examining the true events of the Novochoerkassk massacre of 1962, by the great Russian director Andrei Konchalovsky (*The Postman's White Nights*, SFF 2015).

2020 Berlinale Golden Bear winner **There Is No Evil** from banned Iranian filmmaker Mohammad Rasoulof (*A Man of Integrity*, SFF 2017) is a powerful take on the death penalty and its impact on Iranian society.



Berlinale 2021 Silver Bear winner ***Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy***, presents three stories about coincidences and three complicated women, by celebrated Japanese director Ryusuke Hamaguchi.

And Sundance 2021 Special Jury and Audience Awards winner ***Writing With Fire***: an inspiring documentary about the trailblazing journalists behind India's all-female news network *Khabar Lahariya*, and their tenacious grassroots reporting.

### International comedic hits

In ***Swan Song*** screen legend **Udo Kier** (*Bacurau*, SFF 2019) stars as a former drag queen and snippy hairdresser from small-town Ohio, now living in a retirement home. Kier gives a poignant and uproariously funny performance-of-a-lifetime alongside a stellar supporting cast including **Jennifer Coolidge** (*Legally Blonde*), **Linda Evans** (*Dynasty*) and **Michael Urie** (*Ugly Betty*), as he treks across Ohio to fulfil his estranged former client's dying wish.

***My Best Part*** is the directorial debut from French actor **Nicolas Maury** (*Call My Agent!*), who stars as a highly-strung actor, alongside French icon **Nathalie Baye**, as his doting mother. The hilarious and bittersweet tale was part of Cannes Film Festival's Official Selection, and Toronto International Film Festival, both in 2020.

### Supernatural and scary

Multi-award-winning director Christian Petzold's (*Phoenix*, SFF 2015; *Transit*, SFF 2018) ***Undine***, starring **Paula Beer** (*Never Look Away*, SFF 2019), and **Franz Rogowski** (*Victoria*, SFF 2015), combines romance and the supernatural in a European fable about a water nymph who must kill her lover if he betrays her.

From West Africa's Côte d'Ivoire, Philippe Lacôte's multiple (11) international award-winning drama, ***Night of the Kings*** has been a major festival hit including at Venice and Toronto. The film blends myth, ritual, magic and politics as a young prisoner tells an epic story to make it through the night.

SFF's **Freak Me Out** program will also return in 2021 with a blood-red carpet selection of carefully curated odysseys from the wild side of contemporary cinema. The first title announced is ***The Beta Test***, a pulsating combination of erotic thriller, crime mystery and Hollywood satire, from Jim Cummings (*Thunder Road*, SFF 2016) and PJ McCabe.

### Family friendly

The first of this year's Family Films is ***The Ape Star***, an offbeat animated film about outsiders and unconventional love adapted from Frida Nilsson's award-winning novel and directed by Sweden's Linda Hambäck. The film features stellar voice performances from **Pernilla August** (*Star Wars*) and **Stellan Skarsgård** (*In Order of Disappearance*, SFF 2014; *Thor*).

**The full Sydney Film Festival program is announced on Wednesday 21 July 2021.**

**Flexipasses and subscriptions to Sydney Film Festival 2021 are on sale now.**  
**Call 1300 733 733 or visit [sff.org.au](http://sff.org.au) for more information.**

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### MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

**Amber Forrest-Bisley, Publicity Manager**

E: [amber@originalspin.com.au](mailto:amber@originalspin.com.au) P: 02 8065 7363 M: 0405 363 817

**Alex Clampett, Communications Advisor**



E: [alex@originalspin.com.au](mailto:alex@originalspin.com.au) M: 0411 046 734

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

## EDITOR'S NOTES

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### ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

From Wednesday 18 August to Sunday 29 August 2021, the 68<sup>th</sup> Sydney Film Festival offers Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, red-carpet openings, in-depth discussions, film guests and more.

Sydney Film 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](http://sff.org.au).

The 68th Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia and the City of Sydney.

### DOCUMENTARIES

#### **STEP INTO PARADISE**

**The abiding friendship and game-changing collaboration between iconic Australian fashion creatives Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson is vividly rendered in award-winning director Amanda Blue's documentary.**

Kee and Jackson have shared a passionate love affair with all things Australian for almost 50 years. With wit, irreverence, and a fertile imagination, they have embraced our unique landscape and elevated tourist kitsch to the height of style. It's a fashion story like no other. It's also the story of friendship that has endured despite tragedy and heartbreak. To enter the dynamic duo's world is to step into a visual collage of emotion, art, and kaleidoscopic colour – a world beautifully depicted on screen using archival footage and evocative collage. *Step into Paradise* is a fittingly vibrant and passionate film about two Australian fashion revolutionaries.

#### **THE KIDS**

**Twenty-six years since Larry Clark's notorious indie cult classic *Kids*, Australian director Eddie Martin revisits the original cast in this fascinating doco. Selected for Tribeca 2021.**

*Kids* was one of the most talked about and controversial films of the 1990s. "It is *Lord of the Flies* with skateboards, nitrous oxide and hip-hop," according to the *New York Times*. Feted photographer Clark shot his debut feature with a cast of then-unknown New York teenagers, including filmmaker Harmony Korine, and actors Rosario Dawson and Chloë Sevigny. But what happened to the rest of the kids? Martin (*All This Mayhem*, SFF 2014) tracks the lives of the cast members, during and after the shoot, who didn't hit the big time. In this unflinching look at an iconic film of the '90s, Martin explores difficult questions that continue to surround the film.

#### **THE MAGNITUDE OF ALL THINGS**

**Potent stories from the frontlines of climate change merge with a filmmaker's familial memories in this cinematic documentary. Featuring activists, scientists and traditional custodians from Australia and beyond.**

Jennifer Abbott, multi-award-winning director of *The Corporation* (SFF 2004), began to grapple with the gravity of climate change as her sister faced a terminal illness. Abbott draws parallels between



this personal and planetary grief. As she travels the globe, she captures stunning images and witnesses a planet in crisis: from Kiribati to the Amazon rainforest; from Australia's bushfires to the fate of the Great Barrier Reef. She documents climate action worldwide – including Extinction Rebellion protests, Greta Thunberg-inspired school strikes and First Nations communities battling to save their traditional lands. As Abbott contemplates her sister's fate and our collective environmental paralysis, she poses the tough question: do we need hope to act, or do we need to lose hope in order to act?

### **WASH MY SOUL IN THE RIVER'S FLOW**

**A cinematic reinvention of Archie Roach and the late Ruby Hunter's 2004 award-winning concert – a fertile music collaboration with Paul Grabowsky and the Australian Art Orchestra.**

In 2004, Ruby and Archie worked with Grabowsky and the Australian Art Orchestra to create the seminal concert *Kura Tungar: Songs from the River*. Ruby was born on the banks of the Murray, home to the Ngarrindjeri people for thousands of years. As a child, she was forcibly taken from her family under the government's assimilation policy. Years later she met Archie, another member of the Stolen Generation, at a Salvation Army drop-in centre. The story of their lives, as told through their music and lively yarns, celebrates country and culture, resilience, and family. Philippa Bateman's lovingly crafted film threads together footage of rehearsals and opening night with stunning images of the Murray. A fittingly cinematic and spiritual tribute to two much-loved Australian performers, executive produced by Indigenous singer-songwriter Emma Donovan.

### **WHEN A CITY RISES**

**An urgent and illuminating documentary that tells the story of the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests through the eyes of four main characters. F:act Award, CPH:DOX 2021.**

The film follows peaceful protestor (William), teenager (M.J.), law student (Eve) and 'frontliner' (Tan). All four are involved in HK's leaderless movement fighting to maintain democracy in their island city. As the protests escalate and millions take to the streets, each finds a way to contribute. Eve handles the phones and provides legal advice. M.J. joins the throng but he's fearful of arrest and what that will mean for his future. William struggles with the physical conflict and tries to keep to the sidelines. Tan faces tear gas and water cannons but struggles with family commitments. Across shopping malls and university campuses, the violence escalates as an entire generation juggles defiance, desperation and despair. This prize-winning and courageous film features exceptional access and dynamic footage.

### **WRITING WITH FIRE**

**An inspiring documentary about the trailblazing journalists behind India's all-female news network and their tenacious grassroots reporting. Special Jury and Audience awards, Sundance 2021.**

The reporters at *Khabar Lahariya* experience discrimination daily, as women and as Dalits, considered "untouchables" according to the Hindu caste system. Led by fearless chief correspondent Meera, the newly digitised news service, based in India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh, sets out to expose long-standing injustices. Often with little experience of journalism or smartphone technology, the reporters listen patiently to the manifold victims of violence, incompetence and oppression. They don't shy away from the bigger picture either, tackling stories ranging from elections to corruption to sectarianism. With integrity and grit, they relentlessly challenge traditional roles and champion the need for journalism in a democracy.

### **FEATURES**



### **DEAR COMRADES!**

**The great Russian director Andrei Konchalovsky (*The Postman's White Nights*, SFF 2015) has made a monochrome masterpiece examining a historical massacre. Special Jury Prize, Venice 2020.**

*Dear Comrades!* is based on the true events of the Novocherkassk massacre of 1962, information of which was hidden for decades. Lyudmila is a loyal Communist Party official who toes the party line and is dead set against dissent. When the army is sent to suppress a labour strike, the soldiers open fire, killing and wounding many workers. In the ensuing chaos people go missing, and Lyudmila's fiery teenage daughter Svetka is amongst them. Lyudmila embarks on a dangerous and desperate search, but the cover-up takes hold and non-compliance is swiftly punished. Now in his eighties, Konchalovsky won his first prize in Venice for a short film in 1962. Nearly six decades later his new film is vibrant, angry, occasionally humorous and as vital as ever.

### **HIVE**

**Winner of three major awards at Sundance 2021, this outstanding drama is based on the true story of a Kosovo war widow fighting against patriarchy.**

The debut feature by Kosovo-born filmmaker Blerta Basholli is inspired by real-life beekeeper Fahrije Hoti. Seven years after Fahrije's husband went missing in the Kosovo War, she is struggling to provide for her two children. Her plan to establish a women's co-operative and sell *ajvar* (pepper relish) is met with scorn by men in her village. In this patriarchal place, a woman's morals can be questioned for even the slightest show of independence. But Fahrije is no ordinary woman. Basholli's lean, punchy script and Yllka Gashi's superbly controlled central performance bring the legacy of war and the strength of women into sharp and rewarding focus.

### **MEMORY BOX**

**A mysterious package connects three generations of women from 1980s Beirut to modern-day Montreal in this stylish meditation on history and memory. In Competition, Berlinale 2021.**

*Memory Box* is the first narrative feature in nine years by award-winning team Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige (*A Perfect Day*, SFF 2006) and the first Lebanese contender in the Berlinale Competition in four decades. A large carton from France suddenly lands on the Montreal doorstep of Maia and her teenage daughter Alex. Inside are diaries, photos and cassettes detailing every aspect of Maia's teenage life during the Lebanese Civil War. While the past is too painful for Maia to revisit, Alex secretly goes through the contents, which come to life in beautifully crafted flashbacks. Loosely based on Hadjithomas's teenage letters and diaries, the film illuminates the role memory plays in shaping our lives.

### **MY BEST PART**

**Nicolas Maury (*Call My Agent!*) directs and stars alongside French icon Nathalie Baye in the bittersweet tale of a highly-strung actor and his doting mother.**

Parisian actor Jérémie Meyer's life is falling apart. He's just been overlooked for a prized film role, and his fed-up boyfriend has called time on their relationship. Wracked by uncontrollable jealousy – "I feed on my own poison" – Jérémie escapes to his mother's house in the lush woodlands of Saint-Auvent in Limousin. Can he find new romance with mum's hunky new assistant? Or will his insecurities prove too much for even his adoring mother to bear? This frank and wickedly funny human drama features marvellous performances by Maury as the fragile son and Baye as the supportive mother whose slowly revealed past brings rich emotional complexity.



### **NIGHT OF THE KINGS**

**Philippe Lacôte's multiple award-winning drama blends myth, ritual, magic and politics in the tale of a young prisoner in Côte d'Ivoire who must tell an epic story to save his life.**

There has never been a prison movie like this before. A major hit at festivals including Venice and Toronto, and the winner of 11 international awards, *Night of the Kings* begins with Lacôte's intimate knowledge of Côte d'Ivoire's notorious La MACA prison. When a frightened young pickpocket arrives at La MACA he's chosen to fulfil the role of "Roman" (storyteller), a key player in the transition of power from one dominant inmate to the next. On the night of the red moon Roman must entertain his audience until dawn or face deadly consequences. Song, dance, improvised drama and flashbacks to Côte d'Ivoire's turbulent past are woven into Lacôte's stunningly original and utterly compelling cinematic virtuoso piece.

### **NIGHT RAIDERS**

**A thrilling sci-fi tale of Indigenous resistance directed by Cree/Métis woman Danis Goulet and executive produced by Taika Waititi (*What We Do in the Shadows*, SFF 2014). Selected Berlinale 2021.**

In the not-too-distant future, all children have become property of the state. They are forced to fight in wars for ever-draining resources. To avoid this fate, Niska (Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, *The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open*, SFF 2019) and daughter Waseese (Brooklyn Letexier-Hart) live off the grid. But when mother and daughter are forced to seek medical help, tough decisions must be made. The fight for future generations, Indigenous sovereignty and solidarity beats at the heart of Danis Goulet's dystopian feature debut. In this joint Canada-New Zealand production, Goulet skillfully reminds us that First Nations peoples around the world were all too familiar with the trappings of dystopia long before the genre became popular.

### **RIDERS OF JUSTICE**

**Danish superstar Mads Mikkelsen (*Another Round*, SFF Summer Season 2021) stars in this furiously entertaining, wonderfully eccentric and big-hearted crime-comedy.**

Markus (Mikkelsen) is a career soldier whose wife dies in a train "accident". Otto, Lennart and Emmenthaler are socially awkward tech nerds who convince Markus that foul play was involved, and sign up to help him wipe out the perpetrators. Then there's Markus' teenage daughter Mathilde. She thinks the oddball trio are crisis counsellors helping her to connect with her emotionally stitched-up dad when she needs him most. Hilarious one moment, affecting the next and spectacularly action-packed in between, this fabulous rollercoaster ride marks the fifth and arguably best collaboration between Mikkelsen and Oscar-winning writer-director Anders Thomas Jensen.

### **SHOPLIFTERS OF THE WORLD**

**This heartfelt tribute to the music and lyrics of the Smiths tells the story of a fan who, devastated by the band's split, hijacks a local radio station. Inspired by true events.**

In Denver, 1987, a group of teenagers are shattered by the news their favourite band, the Smiths, are breaking up. Cleo (Helena Howard, *Madeline's Madeline*, *The Wilds*) wants nothing more than to leave her humdrum life behind and live in Paris. Awkward record store employee Dean (Ellar Coltrane, *Boyhood*, SFF 2014) is in love with Cleo but unable to express his feelings. While his friends go into mourning, Dean takes radical action. He hijacks the local radio station and forces the DJ (Joe Manganiello, *True Blood*, *Magic Mike*) to play only Smiths songs – all night. Director Stephen Kijak (*Scott Walker: 30 Century Man*, SFF 2007) uses a plethora of original Smiths songs to beautifully capture a time where being a fan was a way of life.



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### **SWAN SONG**

**A fabulously snippy hairdresser (screen legend Udo Kier; *Bacurau*, SFF 2019) escapes his nursing home and treks across small-town Ohio to fulfil the dying wish of a former client.**

Once upon a time every society lady in Sandusky, Ohio, flocked to the salon of hair magician and drag queen Pat Pitsenbarger (Kier). But that was thirty years ago, before “the Liberace of Sandusky” lost everything – including the love of his life. The despondent Pat seems destined to end his days in a retirement home. That’s until he’s informed that a rich former client has posthumously nominated him to style her funeral hairdo. What follows is a poignant and often uproariously funny odyssey. Pat seeks out the old-school supplies he needs – while visiting people and places from a time long before the rainbow flag flew openly in Sandusky. Kier, in the performance of his life, is simply superb and the soundtrack rocks.

### **THE APE STAR**

**An offbeat animated delight about outsiders and unconventional love from Swedish director Linda Hambäck. Adapted from Frida Nilsson’s award-winning novel.**

This charming animated feature, which premiered at the Berlinale, is the story of orphan girl Jonna whose one wish is to have a family. When a large gorilla adopts Jonna it seems a dubious mismatch. The pair quickly bond, much to the surprise of the local authorities who try to separate them. Jonna and Gorilla must fight to prove they are a family so they can stay together. But will they succeed? Swedish stars Pernilla August (*Star Wars*) and Stellan Skarsgård (*In Order of Disappearance* SFF 2014; *Thor*) give stellar voice performances as the main characters, adding to the rich and detailed world created by Hambäck. *The Ape Star* is a story about love and family that’s suitable for all ages.

### **THE BETA TEST**

**A secret sexual encounter triggers an existential nightmare for a Hollywood agent in this riveting social horror from Jim Cummings (*Thunder Road*) and PJ McCabe.**

*The Beta Test* is a pulsating combination of crime mystery, Hollywood satire, erotic thriller and fevered psycho-horror. It centres on Jordan Hines (Cummings, superb), a smarmy, image-obsessed talent agency shark. On the eve of his wedding, he receives a purple envelope inviting him to a thrilling “no-strings-attached” sexual encounter. He’s unable to resist, and so begins a snowballing series of events that catapult Hines into the toxic netherworld of LA and into the black hole of his own sociopathic existence. As his anxiety and paranoia escalate to dizzying, semi-surreal heights, the impression is that Hines would gladly sell his soul to find out who sent that purple envelope – if only he had a soul left to sell.

### **THE JUSTICE OF BUNNY KING**

**Essie Davis (*The Babadook*, SFF 2019) and Thomasin McKenzie (*Jojo Rabbit*) shine in a powerful social drama about a single mother battling the system and her troubled past.**

The lights of Bunny King’s life are young daughter Shannon and teenage son Reuben. The darkness in Bunny’s life is a tragic incident that forced her children into foster care. It left her virtually penniless and sleeping on her sister’s couch. While desperately attempting to secure accommodation that will reunite her with her kids, Bunny rescues teenage niece Tonyah from a gravely dangerous situation. Together, fiery-tempered Bunny and frightened Tonyah embark on a wild quest. Their mission? To have their voices heard – and for justice to be served. The spirit of social realist cinema is alive and well in this compassionate and propulsive feature debut by Kiwi director Gaysorn Thavat.





## **THERE IS NO EVIL**

**Banned from making films in Iran, Mohammad Rasoulof won the Berlinale Golden Bear for this powerful take on the death penalty and its impact on Iranian society.**

Over the past decade Rasoulof (*A Man of Integrity*, SFF 2017) has faced various legal difficulties and prison sentences. *There Is No Evil* is inspired by the moment he saw one of his former interrogators at the bank. At first angered, Rasoulof decided to follow his adversary around – which led him to contemplate the role of individuals in an autocratic state. Through four thematically linked stories about people facing complex dilemmas, Rasoulof captures a society profoundly affected by capital punishment. Characteristically intelligent and provocative, Rasoulof imbues each story with a sense of mystery and moral complexity, resulting in an uncompromising film of great power.

## **UNDINE**

**Romance and the supernatural combine in Christian Petzold's (*Phoenix*, SFF 2015; *Transit*, SFF 2018) playful and enigmatic film starring Paula Beer and Franz Rogowski.**

The myth of the water sprite yearning to live on land – and only enabled to do so through true love – underpins Petzold's sensual and passionate film. We meet Undine (Beer, *Never Look Away*, SFF 2018; *Transit*), a Berlin historian and guide, as she endures a breakup with her lover Johannes. Undine's reaction is far from usual. She informs Johannes that if he betrays her, she will have to kill him, and then return to the water from where she came. Undine's explosive meeting with a professional diver named Christoph (Rogowski, *Victoria*, SFF 2015; *Transit*) sets the rules governing her life into disarray, as they embark on a romance that could change everything.

## **WHEEL OF FORTUNE AND FANTASY**

**Japanese director Ryusuke Hamaguchi's intimate psychodrama (Silver Bear, Berlinale 2021) features a triptych of stories about three coincidences and three complicated women.**

Director Hamaguchi (*Happy Hour*, 2015) is a master of twisting expectations. Each story is a collision between two people, leading to shocking and unexpectedly moving outcomes. A model gossips with her friend about a relationship that is closer to home than either of them could have anticipated. A mature age student sets a honey trap for a professor, only to be confronted by his candour. The final story, shot during Japan's COVID lockdown, is set in the near future. Two women, separated for decades, reunite in an emptied Tokyo – before making a startling discovery. These magical tales of chance and desire are tempered by Hamaguchi's naturalistic style – each not-quite romance fully conveys the messy, miraculous nature of life.

## **ZOLA**

**Based on an infamous 2015 tweetstorm, this exhilarating girl gaze stripper saga stars Tylour Paige (*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*), Riley Keough (*American Honey*) and Nicholas Braun (*Succession*). Sundance 2020.**

In a string of 148 tweets, A'Ziah "Zola" King detailed her falling out with sex worker Jessica during a two-day bender which started in Detroit and ended in Florida's seedy underbelly. Janicza Bravo stays faithful to the source material, and the result is a high-energy ride where a neat 90-minutes feel like a sweet 140 characters or less. Punctuating the calamitous affair is a Nigerian pimp, a bumbling boyfriend and gangsters packing heat but with no game. The ethereal score by Mica Levi (*Under the Skin*; *Monos*, SFF 2019), the seductive fluorescent dreamscape of Aussie cinematographer Ari Wegner (*Lady Macbeth*, SFF 2017) and wardrobe to rival Cardi B's turns the drama up to eleven.