

**SYDNEY
FILM
FESTIVAL**

70

**7-18
JUNE
2023**

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL OFFERS FIRST GLIMPSE OF 70TH ANNIVERSARY PROGRAM

Celebrating a momentous 70 years in 2023, Sydney Film Festival today released a special preview of 12 films to be featured in this year's 7-18 June event. The announcement is in advance of the full program launch on Wednesday 10 May.

"Sydney Film Festival is thrilled to continue a 70-year strong tradition of presenting exceptional cinema from across Australia and around the world to Sydney audiences. Today the Festival announces 12 cinematic treasures for a peek of what's in store, when over 200 feature films, documentaries and shorts are announced with the full program in May," said **Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley**.

"Since 1954, Sydney Film Festival has brought more than 10,000 films to Australian audiences. Year after year, the Festival continues to be a pioneer in the world of cinema, screening bold and inspiring works that provoke thought and push boundaries."

"The 2023 program will expand on this legacy, promising to ignite stimulating dialogues and present powerful ideas that will broaden audience perspectives," said Moodley.

Included in the Festival's sneak peek are two new Australian documentaries and a feature film from New Zealand. ***Rachel's Farm*** follows actor-director Rachel Ward (*Palm Beach*, SFF 2019) as she revitalises her northern NSW beef farm using sustainable farming practices.

In ***The Last Daughter*** Wiradjuri woman Brenda Matthews documents her search to uncover the truth about her government-ordered abduction as a child, and find her white foster family.

Both Brenda Matthews and Rachel Ward will attend the Festival to present their documentaries.

New Zealand comedy ***Red, White & Brass***, directed by Damon Fepulea'i and executive produced by Taika Waititi, is based on the true story of Tongan rugby superfans who trick their way to the Rugby World Cup by volunteering to be the marching band, despite having never played.

International award-winning films in this first drop include ***No Bears*** by director Jafar Panahi (*Tehran Taxi*, SFF 2015; *Three Faces*, SFF 2018), who is banned from making films in his home country of Iran. The film won the Venice Film Festival Special Jury Prize. Another notable addition to the line-up is Christian Petzold's (*Undine*, SFF 2021; *Barbara*, SFF 2012) Berlin Film Festival Silver Bear winning feature ***Afire***, about four young people trapped in a holiday house as a wild fire draws near.

Celebrated names of the silver screen include **Penélope Cruz** (*Parallel Mothers*, SFF 2021) starring in ***L'immensità*** as a mother with marital troubles, alongside her child embracing his gender identity in 1970s Rome. The film is a deeply autobiographical work from director Emanuele Crialesi. While legendary documentarian **Frederick Wiseman** (*City Hall*, SFF 2021) delivers a rare narrative work about the turbulent relationship between literary giants Leo and Sophia Tolstoy in ***A Couple***.



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Highly anticipated documentary *Subject* explores the impact of documentaries on their onscreen participants – and including those involved in high profile documentaries *The Staircase*, *The Wolfpack*, *Capturing the Friedmans*, *Hoop Dreams* and *The Square*. The film also raises important questions about the responsibility documentarians have towards their participants.

The Festival line-up includes powerful stories that chronicle resistance against government systems. *Bobi Wine: The People's President* is a documentary that follows the journey of the Ugandan musician turned politician campaigning to end the country's dictatorship. And in *While We Watched*, director Vinay Shukla (*An Insignificant Man*, SFF 2017) documents the struggle of award-winning Indian journalist Ravish Kumar against misinformation and political power as he fights to uphold independent reporting. Shukla will be attending the Festival to present his documentary to Sydney audiences. Lav Diaz (*Season of the Devil*, SFF 2018) explores another power system in the drama *When the Waves Are Gone*, about two policemen on a collision course in the Philippines.

Finally, *Blind Willow, Sleeping Woman*, a debut film by director Pierre Földes, is an animated adaptation of Haruki Murakami's short story collection of the same name.

Flexipasses and subscriptions to Sydney Film Festival 2023 are on sale now. Call 1300 733 733 or visit sff.org.au for more information. The full Sydney Film Festival program is announced on Wednesday 10 May 2023, when tickets to specific film sessions will be on-sale.

Follow Sydney Film Festival: [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Youtube](#)

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



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EDITOR'S NOTES:

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

Sydney Film Festival will celebrate its 70th birthday from Wednesday 7 June to Sunday 18 June 2023, offering 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.

The 70th Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia, and the City of Sydney.

Stay up to date with Sydney Film Festival:
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DOCUMENTARIES

BOBI WINE: THE PEOPLE'S PRESIDENT

The gripping story of a Ugandan pop star turned politician and his determination to end his country's brutal dictatorship. Premiered at Venice Film Festival.

Oozing charisma, style and energy, Bobi Wine, a hero of Kampala's slums, starts out using his music to protest Uganda's brutal regime. After successfully winning a seat in parliament, campaigning against corruption, injustice and poverty, Bobi decides to run for president against the 40+ years incumbent Yoweri Museveni. The campaign of intimidation and violence that follows is shocking – the authoritarian Museveni won't give up power without a fight. Filmmakers Christopher Sharp and Moses Bwayo trailed Bobi and his wife Barbie over eight years, from the ghetto to the campaign trail, all against the soundtrack of Bobi's pumping sounds and empowering lyrics.

RACHEL'S FARM

In this uplifting documentary, actor-director Rachel Ward sets out to regenerate her northern NSW beef farm, with the help of experts and neighbours.

For many years, her Nambucca Valley property was a family retreat, conventionally farmed by Rachel's neighbour Mick. The 2019 Black Summer fires spared the farm, but the near-miss – and a first grandchild – sets Rachel thinking hard about the future. Mick encourages Rachel to challenge established farming practices, and take on a new approach which starts from the soil up. It's hands-on hard yakka, but she's determined, and her joy at finding solutions – not to mention dung beetles – is palpable. *Rachel's Farm* is about the environmental threats we face, but it's also the story of one woman's resolve to tackle them head on, intent on making a difference.

SUBJECT

The impact of high-profile documentaries on their onscreen participants, in films including *The Staircase* and *The Wolfpack*, is put under the spotlight in this thought-provoking investigation.

What happens after the cameras have left and your story is in the public domain? Margie Ratliff (the victim's daughter from *The Staircase*), Jesse Friedman (*Capturing the Friedmans*), Mukunda Angulo (*The Wolfpack*, SFF 2015), aspiring basketball player Arthur Agee (*Hoop Dreams*, SFF 1994) and freedom fighter Ahmed Hassan (*The Square*) discuss the painful, liberating, sometimes life-changing experience of being the subject of a documentary. In the process, *Subject* raises highly pertinent questions about the duty of care and ethical responsibility documentarians have towards their participants. Essential viewing for filmmakers and non-fiction fans alike.



THE LAST DAUGHTER

A poignant documentary co-directed by and featuring Wiradjuri woman Brenda Matthews on a journey to find her white family – and uncover the truth about her abduction.

As a child, Brenda was handed over to a white family to be raised, before eventually being returned to the Aboriginal family she no longer knew. She remembers her white parents with fondness, especially their daughter who was around her age. Now an adult, Brenda searches for her foster family and the truth behind her government ordered abduction. In the process she uncovers long-buried secrets and government lies, whilst reconciling her past and the two sides of her family. Co-directors Brenda Matthews and Nathaniel Schmidt won the Audience Documentary Award at the Adelaide Film Festival for this timely documentary.

WHILE WE WATCHED

Indian TV journalist Ravish Kumar fights to keep independent reporting alive in the age of misinformation. A prize winner at Toronto and Busan – essential viewing for news watchers everywhere.

Kumar, a veteran with India's NDTV, is committed to accountability and the facts. He asks the most difficult questions of those in power and, in an age of fake news, clashes with India's political powermongers and populist movement. Facing threats and advertising boycotts, with loyal staff resigning, his network is in deep financial trouble. Despite the grim news, Kumar remains optimistic, inspiring a new generation of reporters. Director Vinay Shukla (*An Insignificant Man*, SFF 2017) follows Kumar's increasingly desperate situation, offering perseverance and hope, and mirroring the issues facing independent journalism worldwide.

FEATURES**A COUPLE**

A rare narrative work from legendary documentarian Frederick Wiseman explores the fractious relationship between the literary couple Leo and Sophia Tolstoy.

The Tolstoys were married for 36 years, had 13 children and each kept a diary, alongside constant correspondence with each other through letters – all while living in the same house. Wiseman, the great chronicler of institutions, here looks unflinchingly at the institution of marriage. Through a searing monologue, drawn from the diaries and letters of the Tolstoys, Sophia (played brilliantly by Nathalie Boutefeu) describes a tumultuous marriage to the mercurial *War and Peace* author – one of great sadness and intense passion. Shot on the beautiful, flower-filled Belle Île, an island off the coast of Brittany, the mesmerising *A Couple* shows that the 93-year-old maestro still has something exceptional up his sleeve.

AFIRE

Silver Bear winner in Berlin, Christian Petzold (*Undine*, SFF 2021; *Barbara*, SFF 2012) returns with a tragicomic romp about four young people trapped at a holiday house as a fire draws near.

Friends Leon (Thomas Schubert) and Felix (Langston Uibel) head to an idyllic seaside holiday home for the summer. They look forward to relaxation, but also must work on their creative projects. Leon will finish the manuscript of his anticipated second novel, while Felix has to complete a photography portfolio. On arrival they find an unexpected guest Nadja (Paula Beer, *Undine*), whose loud sex with local lifesaver Devid (Enno Trebs) elicits irritation... among other feelings. Soon Leon is smitten with Nadja, and Felix taken with Devid – and the summer holiday is filled with lust, jealousy, competition and creativity. All the while the forest fires, once distant, encroach and grow, leading to a shocking climax.

BLIND WILLOW, SLEEPING WOMAN

Haruki Murakami's short stories come to life in this fantastical animation about a giant talkative frog, a lost cat, an existential banker and more peculiar characters in Tokyo.

It is 2011 and the city has been struck by a tragic earthquake and tsunami. Anxious banker, Katagiri, is enlisted by a gregarious humanoid frog to slay a giant angry worm that is hell-bent on wreaking more havoc. Meanwhile, apathetic Komura is on a mission to hand-deliver a mysterious package, while also undergoing a divorce and losing his job. In a series of enigmatic vignettes, we follow surreal tales where dreams and reality

playfully blur into one. Director Pierre Földes's musing, pastel-rich debut stands strong against other recent award-winning Murakami adaptations like *Burning* (SFF 2018) and *Drive My Car* (SFF 2021).

L'IMMENSITÀ

Penélope Cruz is dazzling in this family drama – with exquisite song and dance sequences – as a mother facing marital troubles and her child embracing his gender identity in 1970s Rome.

The incomparable Cruz (*Parallel Mothers*, SFF 2021) plays Spanish expat Clara, who has married into a sprawling, affluent Italian family. Her husband, Felice, is unaffectionate and unfaithful but won't consider divorce. When their 12-year-old (incredible newcomer Luana Giuliani) begins to identify as a boy and takes on the name Andrea, the parents react in very different ways. As Andrea develops his first crush, and Clara struggles under the strain of her relationship turmoil, the two form an increasingly strong bond. A deeply autobiographical work for director Emanuele Crialese, inspired by his own childhood journey, *L'immensità* embraces the musical and the fantastical in its tender tale of maternal love.

NO BEARS

Though banned from making films in Iran, Jafar Panahi won the Venice Special Jury Prize for his bold take on two parallel love stories thwarted by superstition and power.

Panahi (*Tehran Taxi*, SFF 2015; *Three Faces*, SFF 2018), only recently released from an Iranian prison on bail, both directs and stars in *No Bears*. What results are two powerful sagas unfolding onscreen. Panahi plays a fictionalised version of himself directing a film remotely from a small border village in Iran. Banned from leaving the country, his assistant director instead oversees the shoot in nearby Türkiye. In the film he's making, a couple desperately tries to secure fake passports to escape to France. Whilst filming Panahi is swept up in a scandal surrounding another young couple's forbidden romance. In this searing blend of truth and fiction, Panahi questions the role of an artist in societies only too willing to scapegoat them.

RED, WHITE & BRASS

This hilarious true story sees Tongan rugby superfans trick their way to the Rugby World Cup by forming a marching band – despite having never played. Executive produced by Taika Waititi.

After failing miserably in his efforts to secure tickets to the much-anticipated Tonga-France match, Maka (John-Paul Foliaki) rushes head-first into his last resort. He offers to provide a Tongan brass band for the pre-match entertainment. The thing is, the band doesn't exist and Maka and an assortment of friends and family, most with no musical experience, have four weeks to build a credible band and routine. This with no instruments but plastic bottles and tin cans, and Tongan community elders staunchly against this potentially embarrassing stunt. But Maka is nothing if not persistent, and along this remarkable journey he gains a great deal more than tickets to a game.

WHEN THE WAVES ARE GONE

Amid the Philippines' war on drugs, two policemen are on a deadly collision course in this searing drama by master director Lav Diaz (*Season of the Devil*, SFF 2018).

Known for his incisive looks into the issues being faced in the Philippines, Lav Diaz has delivered one of his most thrilling dramas with this study of two policemen. Lieutenant Hermes is renowned as the nation's best detective. Ex-sergeant Macabantay was Hermes's mentor and superior until Hermes had him jailed for corruption ten years ago. Now released from prison and fuelled by a religious fervour that manifests in performing bizarre baptisms on strangers, Macabantay is determined to hunt and kill his former protégé. Diaz's essay on life and death during the Duterte presidency is superbly filmed in 16mm monochrome but there is nothing black and white about this complex and compelling drama.