

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 08:00am WEDNESDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2021**  
**SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL AUDIENCE AWARDS ANNOUNCED**

The 68<sup>th</sup> Sydney Film Festival wrapped on Sunday 14 November with the Australian Premiere of **Wes Anderson's** comedy-drama *The French Dispatch* at the State Theatre.

Today the Festival announced the **Audience Awards**, the people's votes for top five features and documentaries. Top voted narrative feature is *Beautiful Minds* directed by **Bernard Campan** and **Alexandre Jollien** and top documentary is *Blind Ambition* directed by **Robert Coe** and **Warwick Ross**.

**Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley** said: "The people have spoken – and it is with great pleasure that the Festival announces *Beautiful Minds* and *Blind Ambition* as the winners of the 2021 Audience Awards. It was brilliant to see audiences come out in support of local productions, with the majority of titles in the top five having a local connection."

"*Beautiful Minds* is a captivating French comedy selected as part of the Festival's Screenability strand and was partially inspired by the real life experiences of co-director Alexandre Jollien who was born with cerebral palsy. Full of joie de vivre, the film sees a dour funeral director and philosophical delivery man embark on an unconventional road trip across France."

"Australian directors-producers-writers Warwick Ross and Rob Coe's *Blind Ambition* explores the inspiring story of four determinedly optimistic refugees who compete in the World Wine Blind Tasting Championships – the Olympics of wine – as Zimbabwe's first-ever representatives," he said.

**THE AUDIENCE AWARDS**

**The Audience Award for Best Narrative Feature Top Five:**

1. *Beautiful Minds*, directed by **Bernard Campan** and **Alexandre Jollien** (France, Switzerland)
2. *Wormwood Apocalypse*, directed by **Kiah Roache-Turner** (Australia)
3. *Here Out West*, directed by **Fadia Abboud**, **Lucy Gaffy**, **Ana Kokkinos** and **Leah Purcell** (Australia)
4. *Friends and Strangers*, directed by **James Vaughan** (Australia)
5. *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, directed by **Jasmila Žbanić** (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

**The Audience Award for Best Documentary Top Five:**

1. *Blind Ambition*, directed by **Robert Coe** and **Warwick Ross** (Australia)
2. *I'm Wanita*, directed by **Matthew Walker** (Australia) - also the winner of the 2019 [Documentary Australia Foundation Award](#)
3. *When the Camera Stopped Rolling*, directed by **Jane Castle** (Australia)
4. *The Seeds of Vandana Shiva*, directed by **James Becket** and **Camilla Becket** (Australia, USA)
5. *Araatika: Rise Up!*, directed by **Larissa Behrendt** (Australia)  
tied with *Ithaka* directed by **Ben Lawrence** (Australia)

**Sydney Film Festival CEO Leigh Small** said: "A number of films appearing at the 68<sup>th</sup> Sydney Film Festival were seen and invited in late 2019, and audiences began to buy tickets at the end of that year. So, after segueing to a June 2020 67<sup>th</sup> Virtual Edition and delaying the festival twice, SFF finally

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made it into cinemas two weeks after the lifting of COVID restrictions and two months before the end of 2021.”

“With COVID capacity restrictions and a smaller program, we were thrilled to see cinemas over 55% full and 52 sessions sold out. Not only did audiences come out; 104 sessions featured a filmmaker or live SFF introduction, and 42 international filmmakers made virtual introductions. Also, importantly for many of our Australian filmmakers they not only came to share their premieres with an audience, but also with each other for the first time in a cinema,” she said.

**Minister for the Arts Don Harwin** said: “As we returned to the city in November to celebrate and revel in Sydney’s favourite cinema spaces, the 68<sup>th</sup> Sydney Film Festival has moved us all.”

“The NSW Government, through Screen NSW, was pleased to support the Sydney Film Festival once again, and now we continue that investment as the Travelling Film Festival hits the road with no less than 13 regional NSW stops.”

“Congratulations to all who have made it possible for us to come together and enjoy another fantastic Festival,” he said.

**Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore** said: “What a welcome, breath-of-fresh-air the Sydney Film Festival has been this year, with a really terrific selection of international and Australian productions drawing crowds back into our theatres and the city as we re-open post-lockdown.”

“There has truly been a film for everyone this year, from the opening night offering **Here Out West** - a wonderful celebration of Australia’s rich multicultural heartland from young local filmmakers - to the highly anticipated closing film **The French Dispatch** by extraordinary auteur Wes Anderson.”

“A hearty congratulations to all this year’s winners, and to the festival for breathing life back into the city,” she said.

As part of SFF On Demand, Audience Award top five films are available to stream nationally until Nov 21 including Documentary Australia Foundation Award for Australian Documentary winner **I’m Wanita, Friends and Strangers, When the Camera Stopped Rolling** and **Araatika: Rise Up!**.

Other Award winners On Demand include Sydney Film Prize winner **There Is No Evil, I’m Wanita, Peeps, tough** and **Freedom Swimmer**.

The full Sydney Film Festival 2021 program can be found online at [sff.org.au](https://sff.org.au).

SFF On Demand’s online program runs 12-21 November. Tickets to Sydney Film Festival 2021 are on sale now. Please call 1300 733 733 or visit [sff.org.au](https://sff.org.au) for more information.

## SFF ON DEMAND

Cinephiles across Australia are still able to enjoy an impressive selection of titles from the 68th Sydney Film Festival online as part of **SFF On Demand** until **21 November**.



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Single rentals start from \$15, with a variety of packages available from \$14-\$130.

**What:** SFF On Demand

**When:** Friday 12 November - Sunday 21 November, 2021

**Where:** Online

**Full program details and ticketing information can be found [HERE](#)**

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## MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

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

## EDITOR'S NOTES

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### OTHER 2021 SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL AWARD WINNERS INCLUDE:

The \$60,000 **Sydney Film Prize** for 'audacious, cutting-edge and courageous' film was awarded to ***There Is No Evil***, by Iranian filmmaker **Mohammad Rasoulof** at the Festival's Closing Night Gala awards ceremony and event at the State Theatre. The work was selected from 12 Official Competition films by a prestigious jury headed by **David Michôd**, who also awarded a Special Mention to ***Limbo*** directed by Ben Sharrock.

Filmmaker **Matthew Walker** was awarded the [Documentary Australia Foundation Award for Australian Documentary's](#) \$10,000 cash prize for ***I'm Wanita***, a no-holds-barred introduction to Tamworth's renegade 'Queen of Honky Tonk' which follows her journey to Nashville to record an album. With a Highly Recommended going to ***Television Event*** from Jeff Daniels.

The [Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films](#) saw the \$7,000 cash prize for the Dendy Live Action Short Award presented to ***Peeps*** directed by **Sophie Somerville**. The \$7,000 Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director, going to **Taylor Ferguson** for ***tough***. The \$5,000 Yoram Gross Animation Award went to **Olivia Martin-McGuire's *Freedom Swimmer***.

The \$10,000 Sydney-UNESCO City of Film Award, bestowed by Create NSW to a trail-blazing NSW-based screen practitioner, went to AACTA Award winning producer and director **Karina Holden**.

Filmmaker **Darlene Johnson** was awarded the 2021 [Deutsche Bank Fellowship for First Nations Film Creatives](#). The fellowship provides a \$20,000 grant to an Australian First Nations film creative to further develop their skills through international placement or other professional development.

The first ever recipient of the \$10,000 Sustainable Future Award is Australian documentary ***Burning*** directed by **Eva Orner**. This award is made possible by a syndicate of passionate climate activists led by Award sponsor, Amanda Maple-Brown.



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## ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

From Wednesday 3 November to Sunday 14 November 2021, the 68th Sydney Film Festival offers Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, in-depth discussions with film guests, and now a virtual offering with **SFF On Demand** streaming nationally from 12-21 November.

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.



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