

MEDIA RELEASE: WEDNESDAY 10 MAY 2023

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES EUROPE! VOICES OF WOMEN IN FILM PROGRAM

The 70th Sydney Film Festival (7-18 June), in partnership with European Film Promotion announces *Europe! Voices of Women in Film*, a program of 10 new films from vital European women filmmakers.

“The *Europe! Voices of Women in Film* program's eighth edition shines a light on exceptional women filmmakers, amplifying their voices in an industry burdened by gender disparity,” said **Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley**. “Featuring films from Italy to Denmark, and Ireland to Estonia, the program serves as a platform for the diverse experiences and narratives of European women.”

EFP's Managing Director Sonja Heinen said, “This year's selection of films of our longstanding common initiative provides an intense and varied glimpse of the diverse realities in Europe. Partly inspired by their own biographies the women directors show their views of the world and raise their voices to explore themes of migration, belonging, self-empowerment and friendship.”

“We are confident that the selected films will excite and inspire the Australian audience and encourage important cross-border discussions about moving issues of our time. Our thanks go to Sydney Film Festival for sharing this platform for ten films by the most promising of European women filmmakers,” she said.

EFP Films:

- **BAND** | 2022 | Iceland | Director, Screenwriter: Álfrún Örnólfsdóttir
- **BEHIND THE HAYSTACKS** | 2022 | Greece, Germany, North Macedonia | Director, Screenwriter: Asimina Proedrou
- **ELAHA** | 2023 | Germany | Director: Milena Aboyan
- **FAMILY TIME** | 2023 | Finland, Sweden | Director, Screenwriter: Tia Kouvo
- **THE GIRL FROM TOMORROW** | 2022 | Italy, France | Director, Screenwriter: Marta Savina
- **THE QUIET MIGRATION** | 2023 | Denmark | Director: Malene Choi
- **SMOKE SAUNA SISTERHOOD** | 2023 | Estonia, France, Iceland | Director, Screenwriter: Anna Hints
- **SUNLIGHT** | 2023 | Ireland | Director: Claire Dix
- **THAT AFTERNOON** | 2023 | Netherlands | Director, Screenwriter: Nafiss Nia
- **THUNDER** | 2022 | Switzerland | Director, Screenwriter: Carmen Jaquier

Five filmmakers from *Europe! Voices of Women in Film* will take part in a public talk at The Hub (10 June, 11:30am) called *Voices of Europe*. In conversation with *Screen International's* Sandy George, these cutting-edge female filmmakers will discuss their different approaches to filmmaking and how the landscape for women working in film varies across the continent.

In Sydney to present their films at the festival are: Icelandic actress and director Álfrún Örnólfsdóttir (**Band**), Greek director Asimina Proedrou (**Behind the Haystacks**), Italian director and screenwriter Marta Savina (**The Girl From Tomorrow**), Estonian director Anna Hints (**Smoke Sauna Sisterhood**) and Dutch-Iranian filmmaker Nafiss Nia (**That Afternoon**).

The full Sydney Film Festival 2023 program can be found online at sff.org.au.

Sydney Film Festival runs in cinemas 7-18 June 2023. Tickets and Flexipasses to Sydney Film Festival 2023 are on sale now. Please call 1300 733 733 or visit sff.org.au for more information or to book.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Isabelle Brown, Communications Advisor

E: isabelle@originalspin.com.au M: 0401 576 024

Sanika Karnik, Communications Advisor

E: sanika@originalspin.com.au M: 0466 635 010

Matt Fraser, Director of Communications

E: matt@originalspin.com.au M: 0401 326 007

Amber Forrest-Bisley, Publicity Manager, Sydney Film Festival

E: amber@originalspin.com.au P: 8065 7363 M: 0405 363 817

****Images are available to download [here](#).**

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:

[eNews](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

FILMS AND FILMMAKER BIOS

BAND

An all-female Icelandic art rock band make a last-ditch attempt to make it big in this raucous and eccentric documentary, which blurs the lines between reality and fiction.

The three women of the Post Performance Blues Band (PPBB) have never made it big. Their shows are avant-garde and unclassifiable, playing to dive bars with half-empty crowds. Their lyrics are about everything from waffles and coffee to their mothers. And they're about to turn 40. *Band*, directed by PPBB member Álfrún Örnólfsdóttir, thrums with madcap creative passion, as the band gives themselves one last year to make it or break it. Evoking *Spinal Tap's* rollicking absurdity, the film borders on mockumentary, grounded by profound reflections on parenthood, failure and dauntless friendship.

Álfrún Örnólfsdóttir is an Icelandic actress and director, known for *Pity the Lovers* (2019) and *Cold Fever* (1995). Her feature debut *Band* premiered at Hot Docs Festival in 2022.

BEHIND THE HAYSTACKS

The 2015 refugee crisis on the Greece-North Macedonia border is seen through the eyes of three morally culpable family members with overlapping and contradicting versions.

Amongst the reeds of Doiran Lake, a group of children make a tragic discovery with wide-reaching consequences. Debt-ridden fisherman Stergios has been using the lake, which divides North Macedonia and Greece, to smuggle refugees for profit – a decision that draws him and his family into an intense moral quagmire. Told through an elliptical, *Rashomon*-esque narrative, director Asimina Proedrou gradually reveals the consequences of self-motivated desires and prejudices. Intense and visually lyrical, *Behind the Haystacks* is an exploration of religious hypocrisy, xenophobia and constrictive borders.

Asimina Proedrou is from Greece. Her short *Red Hulk* (2013) won a Golden Dionysus at Drama International Short Film Festival and the Best Short Film Award at Athens International Film Festival.

ELAHA

A young Kurdish-German woman believes she must restore her virginity before her wedding, in this empathetic exploration of cultural pressure and bodily autonomy. Berlinale 2023.

Elaha, a 22-year-old student, is on the cusp of becoming a bride. As her community buzzes with excitement, Elaha struggles with the hidden knowledge that she's no longer a virgin. Knowing this would cause shame to her family and fiancé, she desperately searches for options to 'restore' her virginity. There's the costly surgery of hymen reconstruction, or blood capsule kits that assist with deception. But will any of it work? Director Milena Aboyan ratchets up the tension, while depicting her young protagonist's struggle for sexual self-determination with heart-rending grace.

Milena Aboyan, a Yazidi Kurd born in Armenia, has worked on the German ARD TV channel and studied screenwriting at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg. *Elaha* is her feature debut.

FAMILY TIME

In Tia Kouvo's darkly comic debut, three generations of a Finnish family gather at a snowy cottage for Christmas, where tensions simmer. Berlinale 2023.

Beneath the sheen of holiday cheer, family gatherings can be stews of private resentments, regret and unspoken histories. Finnish director Tia Kouvo turns her camera's unsparing gaze on an extended family, who converge at a rustic cottage at the edge of a gorgeous, snow-capped wood for the Christmas season. Droning everyday chatter and mundane family rituals give way to a hothouse of deeper tensions, in this surgical exploration of suffocating private spaces. Sidestepping the usual salacious reveals, *Family Time* instead mines deadpan comedy and melancholy from things that cannot be easily said.

Tia Kouvo is a Finnish director-screenwriter who studied social psychology before attending the HDK-Valand Academy of Art and Design in Gothenburg. *Family Time* is her feature debut.

SMOKE SAUNA SISTERHOOD

Nestled in the smoky warmth of an Estonian log-cabin sauna, women commune to share naked truths and heal, in this intimate, transcendent documentary. Award winner, Sundance 2023.

The practice of gathering in woodland smoke saunas is age-old tradition in Southern Estonia. In Anna Hints's engrossing documentary, the setting takes on a transcendent character, acting as a spiritual refuge for feminine intimacy. Women can comfortably exist in their nakedness, sharing their innermost thoughts on everything from family to self-esteem, traumatic births, and sexual assault. The intensity of their communion is balanced within the restorative atmosphere, where steam hisses over rocks and Edvard Egilsson's score heightens this choral portrait of contemporary womanhood. Sundance 2023 Directing Award: World Cinema Documentary.

Anna Hints is an Estonian director. Hints's short documentary *For Tomorrow Paradise Arrives* (2021) initiated public awareness and grassroots movements against food waste in Estonia.

SUNLIGHT

Ireland's Claire Dix explores the complexity of saying goodbye in this heart-warming tragicomedy about a recovering addict who discovers his beloved mentor is terminally ill.

How can you part with the person who makes life worth living? Former addict Leon sunnily bounces through life, brushing off the dealers who once had him in their thrall. He owes it all to his best friend, Viking enthusiast Iver. But Leon is destabilised when he discovers Iver has received a terminal diagnosis and is planning to pursue euthanasia. Determined to prolong his mentor's last days, Leon ropes Iver into one last romp across Dublin. Bolstered by the crackling chemistry between Barry Ward and Liam Carney, *Sunlight* is a poignant and hilarious ode to the power of friendship and change.

Claire Dix is a Dublin-based director and screenwriter. Her award-winning feature documentary *Broken Song* premiered at the Jameson Dublin International Film Festival in 2013.

THAT AFTERNOON

Two strangers may be each other's last hope in this intimate character study of two Iranian refugees who intersect through the cracks of a closed door over one afternoon.

Iranian refugee Roya is at an asylum seekers' facility, but her status has been rejected and she is to be sent back to Iran. She flees to her last hope – a nearby photographer known for offering a safe haven. But when Roya arrives, all is not so straight forward. She is denied entry by a man claiming to be the photographer's brother. Separated by a door, the two strike up a conversation, revealing their perspectives on trauma, displacement, and the future. Though at first mistrustful of each other, they may be each other's last hope. Moving and complex, *That Afternoon* is a tale about boundaries and finding human connection in our darkest hour.

Nafiss Nia is Dutch-Iranian filmmaker. Since 2012, she's been the artistic director of the Granate Foundation, an organisation that promotes inclusivity in Dutch film and poetry.

THE GIRL FROM TOMORROW

A legal battle grips a Sicilian town in the '60s, when a strong-willed woman and her family contest a traditional custom that decrees women should marry their rapists.

Based on true events in Sicily, 1965. Spirited daydreamer Lia finds her life derailed when her flirtation with a handsome local, Lorenzo, takes a horrific turn. Lia and her family take her case to the courts, battling intimidation from Lorenzo's powerful family, along with the immense social and legal pressures demanding Lia to marry her assailant. Marta Savina's assured debut has a contemporary feel as she tackles this revolutionary true story with immense skill and sensitivity. *The Girl from Tomorrow* is an urgent tale of self-determination and family love.

Marta Savina is a director and screenwriter who graduated from UCLA with an MFA in directing. Her Emmy-winning short film *Viola, Franca* premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2017.

THE QUIET MIGRATION

A Korean adoptee, raised in the pastures of rural Denmark, struggles with identity and dislocation in Malene Choi's surreal meditation on transracial adoption. Berlinale 2023.

An unspoken yearning for homeland simmers in this lush social drama. Carl, a South Korean adoptee, lives a dutiful existence in the picturesque Danish countryside, tending to the family farm he'll inherit one day. A quiet wound festers at his centre: Carl lives in a land where nobody looks like him, where family members openly decry migration. Director Malene Choi, also a South Korean adoptee, heightens Carl's emotional world through surreal flourishes, as he glimpses phantom impressions of his birth mother, and an ominous crack threatens to split the seemingly idyllic farmhouse in two.

Malene Choi was born in South Korea and raised in Denmark. Her debut feature, the hybrid docudrama *The Return*, received a Special Mention at Göteborg Film Festival in 2018.

THUNDER

Rebellion, spirituality, and sexual awakening entwine in Carmen Jaquier's visceral debut about a teen nun returning to the Swiss Alps after her sister's mysterious death.

In the summer of 1900, pious 17-year-old Elisabeth learns of the death of her sister, Innocente. Ripped away from the nunnery where she planned to spend her life, she returns home to the Valais valley, where her sister's name has become taboo. Then, an encounter with three village boys and Innocente's hidden diary awakens something fresh and wild in the touch-starved Elisabeth. Reminiscent of Jane Campion's *The Piano*, Carmen Jaquier's debut draws on the staggering beauty of the mountains and rivers, in an elemental portrayal of youth caught between restriction and discovery, desire and God.

Carmen Jaquier, born in Geneva, studied at the École cantonale d'art de Lausanne. She directed the shorts *The Girls' Grave* (2011), *The Waves* (2012) and *At the Mermaid Parade* (2013).