



MEDIA RELEASE
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Sydney Film Festival, 5 – 16 June, announces the Official Competition 2013

Sydney Film Festival announces the Jury President and the 12 films selected to compete for the Sydney Film Prize this June.

Sydney Film Festival is delighted to announce Australian actor **Hugo Weaving** as **Jury President** for the 2013 Official Competition. The internationally recognised SFF Official Competition, now in its sixth year, awards a \$60,000 cash prize, Australia's richest cash award for film, in recognition of the most courageous, audacious and cutting-edge film from the 12 features selected.

"In both content and form, these twelve films are daring and original and exemplify the criteria for the Official Competition. We look forward to introducing these remarkable films to the Australian audience. We feel very privileged that the great Australian actor Hugo Weaving will serve as the Jury President, and feel confident that he will lead the jury in making a great decision," said Nashen Moodley, SFF Festival Director.

One of Australia's most acclaimed and respected actors, Hugo Weaving's many credits range from international blockbusters *Cloud Atlas*; *The Hobbit*, *The Matrix* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogies to award-winning Australian films such as *Oranges and Sunshine*. He has appeared on stage in over twenty productions for the Sydney Theatre Company including *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Hedda Gabler* and *Uncle Vanya*. Weaving received the Australian Film Institute's Best Actor award for his performance in *Proof* (1991) and also for *Little Fish* (2005). In 1998, he received the Best Actor award from the Montreal Film Festival for his performance in *The Interview*. Weaving will also feature in the SFF opening night film, the Australian murder mystery ***Mystery Road***.

"Having keenly attended the SFF for many years, always with the eyes of a somewhat excited and hungry child, it will be a great pleasure and honour for me to take up the position of Jury President for the 2013 Official Competition and 60th birthday," said Weaving.

Previous Sydney Film Festival Official Competition winners include: *Alps* (2012), *Separation* (2011) – which went on to win an Academy Award®, *Heartbeats* (2010), *Bronson* (2009) and *Hunger* (2008). Winners of the SFF Official Competition take home a \$60,000 cash prize as well as international recognition.

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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, 8 May.

The selection of films in Competition for the Sydney Film Prize are:

The Act of Killing (Australian Premiere) | Denmark, Norway, UK | **Directors: Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn, Anonymous** | Producer: Signe Byrge Sørensen

When maverick documentarians Errol Morris and Werner Herzog saw an early cut of this film, they signed on as executive producers. This says much about the boldness and originality of Joshua Oppenheimer's project. The director spent three years filming survivors of the 1965-66 Sumatran massacres, where he discovered that the killers involved were openly boastful of their crimes. Then he met Anwar Congo, a small-time gangster who was promoted to death-squad leader when the Indonesian government was overthrown in 1965. Anwar abetted the military regime in their mass slaughter of alleged communists, ethnic Chinese and intellectuals, killing hundreds with his own hands. Today, Anwar is neither evasive nor repentant, but braggingly upfront about every aspect of his murderous activities. In his earlier days, Anwar made a living selling black-market movie tickets. He and his friends modelled themselves on their Hollywood idols, with sharp suits and slick hair. Bizarrely, they agree to take part in the film, because they want to be movie stars – and Oppenheimer obliges, using every genre trick in the book. The killers play themselves, write the scripts and... play the victims. The result is a film so chilling, so surreal, that you're compelled to watch frame by astonishing-frame.

Borgman (Australian Premiere) | Netherlands | **Director: Alex van Warmerdam** | Cast: Jan Bijvoet, Hadewich Minis, Jeroen Perceval

Enter with caution into the dark, malevolent, wickedly funny and decidedly strange world of Alex van Warmerdam's creation. Straight from its Competition presentation in Cannes, the first Dutch film to achieve this in 38 years, *Borgman* may very well cause lingering nightmares. The film opens with a priest and some villagers arming and readying themselves for a battle with what appears to be a subterranean community. Shotguns and spears at the ready, the vigilantes set out to destroy their enemies, but Borgman manages to narrowly evade them and warn the others, who all slip away from their underground abodes. A dishevelled Borgman next appears at a suburban home, politely asking permission to take a bath. Though this initial interaction does not go well, Borgman has soon ingratiated himself into the household of an arrogant, comfortable couple, their three children and nanny. At first he is gentle and kind, and seems to have a greater connection with the members of the family than they do with each other, but soon the sinister Borgman starts wielding his inexplicable influence. The body count rises, Borgman is joined by his very creepy associates, and the scene is set for all hell to break loose. Van Warmerdam's singular vision is eccentric, wild and indelible.

Child's Pose (Australian Premiere) | Romania | **Director: Călin Peter Netzer** | Cast: Luminita Gheorghiu, Bogdan Dumitrache, Nataşa Raab

Winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlinale, *Child's Pose* is a riveting drama that centres on a mother's twisted affection for her son, and the repercussions of her actions when his well-being is placed in jeopardy. 60-year-old Cornelia (the phenomenal Luminita Gheorghiu) leads a life of privilege, social power and abundant wealth in contemporary Bucharest, but life is not perfect. More than anything in the world, she longs for her 34-year-old son Barbu (Bogdan Dumitrache) to reciprocate her affections. But the pair barely speak, something the domineering Cornelia blames on Barbu's live-in girlfriend. When Barbu is involved in a tragic car accident and runs down a child on a highway, Cornelia is thrust back into his life.

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Seeing her chance to regain control, she commences a frighteningly well-orchestrated campaign to save her son from prison. But Barbu, boiling with anger yet hopelessly emasculated and infantilised, refuses to play along. Propelled by Gheorghui's towering, tour-de-force performance and a razor-sharp attention to class and generational resentments, Netzer's engrossing film lays bare the moral bankruptcy of upper-class Romanian society and its institutions in expert fashion. Disquieting but also compassionate, this examination of guilt and the crippling effects of loss makes for a fascinating, unforgettable cinema experience.

For Those in Peril (Australian Premiere) | UK | **Director: Paul Wright** | Cast: George MacKay, Kate Dickie, Michael Smiley

Selected for the Cannes Critics' Week competition, *For Those in Peril* is the auspicious feature debut of Paul Wright, who made the prize-winning shorts *Hikikomori*, *Believe* and the BAFTA-winning *Until the River Runs Red*. This visually innovative film is set in a remote Scottish community, where Aaron (George MacKay) is the lone survivor of a fishing accident that claimed the lives of five men including his older brother. Spurred on by seagoing folklore and local superstition, the village blames him for this tragedy, making him an outcast amongst his own people. Considered either the source of bad luck, or a coward, Aaron is increasingly alienated by the community. To make matters worse, he refuses to believe that his brother is dead, and promises to one day recover him from the sea. Into the contemporary action, Wright inserts home video footage that poignantly conveys the sense of loss and deep grief that the community shares. With pitch-perfect performances from a great cast, Wright sensitively paints a portrait of a town wracked with grief, and anger. Relief, when it comes, is in the form of a moment of magical transcendence.

Grigris (Australian Premiere) | France | **Director: Mahamat-Saleh Haroun** | Cast: Souleymane Dème, Anaïs Monory, Cyril Guei

The great African filmmaker Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, who served on SFF's Official Competition Jury in 2012, has made some of the most profound and important films to emerge from the continent in the past two decades, including *A Screaming Man*, which won the Jury Prize at Cannes in 2010. His new film is not only beautiful to look at, it is a superb humanist drama with thriller elements. Set in Chad, *Grigris* is an energetic and poignant film about a young man who dreams of rising above economic and physical impediments. Despite a paralysed leg, 25 year old Grigris (an excellent Souleymane Dème) dreams of becoming a dancer. Displaying nimbleness on the dancefloor despite his serious disability, Grigris is the toast of the nightclubs. His dreams are dashed when his uncle falls critically ill, and in order to save him Grigris is forced to work with illegal petrol traffickers. This dangerous gambit has grave consequences, and all that Grigris has worked so hard to achieve is brought into danger. Appearing at SFF straight from its Competition berth at Cannes, *Grigris* is a visually sumptuous, uplifting film and a thoughtful portrait of a war-ravaged country on the brink of change.

Monsoon Shootout (Australian Premiere) | India-UK | **Director: Amit Kumar** | Cast: Neeraj Kabi, Vijay Verma, Nawazuddin Siddiqi

Monsoon Shootout marks the emergence of a striking new talent on the Indian film scene. Amit Kumar's debut feature is a taut thriller exploring police violence, corruption and the moral quandary facing an idealistic rookie cop. Depicting an India in which extrajudicial murders by the police are commonplace, Kumar takes one of these 'encounters' as the starting point for a compact and riveting ride through Mumbai's underworld. As heavy monsoon rains lash the badlands of the city, Adi (Vijay Verma), an enthusiastic cop out on his first assignment, faces a life-altering moment when he must decide whether to shoot or not. *Monsoon Shootout* then presents three scenarios with very different repercussions for each possible decision Adi could make, taking Adi on a journey that pits him against a system that demands a compromise of his morals. Co-produced by Anurag Kashyap and Guneet Monga (SFF 2012 Competition film

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Gangs of Wasseypur) and Asif Kapadia (*The Warrior, Senna*), and co-starring *Gangs* star Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Tannishtha Chatterjee (*Brick Lane*), the film is atmospheric, pacy and deeply satisfying. With shootouts, gangland hits, and extortion rackets all vividly captured against the stunning backdrop of the dramatic wet season, *Monsoon Shootout* uses genre conventions to tell a gripping story.

Oh Boy (Australian Premiere) | Germany | **Director: Jan Ole Gerster** | Cast: Tom Schilling, Friederike Kempter, Marc Hosemann

German hit *Oh Boy* is part slacker comedy and part chronicle of Berlin's transition to hipster cool, filled with reminders of that city's rich and checkered history. College dropout Niko (Tom Schilling) has been dumped by his girlfriend, and is in trouble with the law. To make matters worse, his father has just discovered that he dropped out of university years ago and cuts him off financially. When his disappointed father asks him what he has been doing for the last two years, Niko answers "I've been thinking." Meanwhile a beauty from his past confronts him with the emotional wounds he inflicted on her. All Niko wants is a cup of "normal coffee," but even this eludes him. "Do you know the feeling when people around you seem to behave in a strange way?" Niko wonders. "And the longer you think about it, the more it dawns on you that it's not other people who are strange, but yourself?" As Niko struggles with the growing sense of being an outsider, a series of chance encounters have a profound influence on his future. Shot in an alluringly grainy black and white, *Oh Boy* is breezy, witty film with a serious edge. The film recently won most of the major prizes at the German Film Awards, including Best Film and Best Director.

Only God Forgives (Australian Premiere) | France-Denmark | **Director: Nicolas Winding Refn** | Cast: Lene Børglum, Sidonie Dumas, Vincent Maraval

Following the international hit *Drive*, director Nicolas Winding Refn (who won the 2009 Sydney Film Prize with *Bronson*) reunites with Ryan Gosling for this brutal story of rage, betrayal and redemption. Set almost entirely in a neon-lit Bangkok at night, each frame in this dazzling, muscular film, which was shot by Larry Smith (*Bronson, Eyes Wide Shut*), is a carefully composed work of art. Gosling, in a restrained and complex performance, plays Julian, an American who runs a Thai boxing club in Bangkok and who is clearly involved in the criminal underworld. When Julian's brother Billy is murdered, their mother Jenna (Kristin Scott Thomas) – the dangerous head of a powerful criminal organisation – arrives in Bangkok to collect her son's corpse. She also dispatches Julian to find his brother's killers, which pits him against the 'Angel of Vengeance', a terrifying cop called Chang (Vithaya Pansringarm) who is determined to restore order, and unafraid to use his sword to do so. As the film patiently reveals more and more about their histories, these violent, damaged characters clash explosively, in the boxing ring and beyond. If there were any doubts before, with this Cannes Competition contender Winding Refn proves himself a master of the cinematic language of extreme violence.

The Rocket (Australian Premiere) | Australia | **Director: Kim Mordaunt** | Cast: Sitthipon Disamoe, Loungman Kaosainam, Thep Phongam

Winner of both the Best First Feature award at the Berlinale and Best Narrative Feature at Tribeca, *The Rocket* is a heartwarming coming-of-age tale set entirely in Laos. Kim Mordaunt, who made the excellent documentary *Bomb Harvest* (SFF 2007), which was also set in Laos, is clearly invested in the people and culture of the region, and tells this story with great empathy and authenticity. Ahlo is the surviving twin of a difficult birth and is believed by some to be a source of bad luck. When the 10-year-old Ahlo and his family are displaced by the construction of a dam, further tragedy strikes as they relocate. Upon reaching the relocation village, Ahlo befriends young Kia and her eccentric uncle Purple, but is still ostracised by the superstitious community, and even treated with suspicion by his own family. Ahlo decides that his only hope of redemption is the Rocket Festival: a riotous, and dangerous, annual competition where huge bamboo rockets are set off to provoke the rain gods. Despite being too young to enter the competition,

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Ahlo is determined to succeed. Set amidst a beautiful landscape, and with lovely performances by the young actors, *The Rocket* is a sensitive and uplifting film.

Stories We Tell (Australian Premiere) | Canada | **Director: Sarah Polley**

The third feature in Sarah Polley's luminous career as a filmmaker – following her Academy Award®-nominated *Away from Her* (SFF 2007) and *Take This Waltz* (2011) – is both intensely intimate and genre-twisting. *Stories We Tell* is a moving portrait of Polley's family – her many siblings, actor-writer father, and actress mother – and a legacy of secrets and lies. As with many families, there are a multitude of stories that have been told through the years. Polley, the youngest child, mines this oral tradition in this groundbreaking film, seamlessly blending past and present, the real and the imagined. Many and varied perspectives emerge from this storytelling, cleverly evoking questions about the elusive nature of memory and truth. Polley's characteristically unflinching yet compassionate gaze delivers an exceptional level of depth and emotion. As Polley says, "If I have learned anything from making this film, it is that we can't all be right and we can't all be wrong. So we must be unintentionally distorting things to varying degrees in order to feed our own version of what we need the past and history to be, and in our way, we must all be telling the truth as well."

The Broken Circle Breakdown (Australian Premiere) | Belgium-Netherlands | **Directors: Felix van Groeningen** | **Cast:** Veerle Baetens, Johan Heldenbergh, Nell Cattrysse

A remarkable film in every respect, and one that takes you on a constantly surprising and emotional journey of love, passion, tragedy and joy, *The Broken Circle Breakdown* won the Audience Prize at the Berlinale, where it was rapturously received. Infused with gorgeous bluegrass music, and with performances of rare power and magnetism, the film takes you on a rollercoaster ride that leaves you exhilarated and reeling. More than mere background music, bluegrass is integral to the story, linking the main themes of life, love, death, America and parenthood. Elise and Didier have been together for seven passionate years. When their little girl Maybelle is diagnosed with a serious illness, all the turning points in their intense and moving relationship seem to flash by. They remember their love at first sight, courtship and passion, coming closer through their bluegrass band, braving marriage, pregnancy and the joy of parenthood. But as the stress and sorrow of Maybelle's treatment takes its toll, Didier and Elise begin to respond in different ways – their love in threat just when they need it most. Felix van Groeningen has created a masterful, exuberant film; one which miraculously seems to encompass all of human emotion.

Wadjda (Australian Premiere) | Saudi Arabia, Germany | **Director: Haifaa Al Mansour** | **Cast:** Reem Abdullah, Waad Mohammed, Abdullrahman Al Gohani

Wadjda is the first feature film shot entirely in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where cinemas are not permitted. Directed by that country's first woman filmmaker, University of Sydney graduate Haifaa Al Mansour, the story follows a 10-year-old girl who wants nothing more than to own a bicycle. Though growing up in a conservative world, Wadjda (a remarkable Waad Mohammed) is fun-loving and rebellious. One day she sees and covets a beautiful green bicycle. But her mother won't buy it, fearing repercussions from a society that sees bicycles as dangerous to a girl's virtue. So Wadjda decides to raise the money herself, and becomes determined to win the cash prize for a Koran recitation competition at her school. She devotes herself to the memorisation of Koranic verses, and her teachers begin to see her as a model of piety. A groundbreaking and important film, *Wadjda* is filled with hope, and is as entertaining as it is gently subversive. Says Al Mansour: "I come from a small town in Saudi Arabia where there are many girls like Wadjda who have big dreams, strong characters and so much potential. These girls can, and will, reshape and redefine our nation."

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SFF 2013 festival guests from the Official Competition include: Director **Joshua Oppenheimer** and producer **Signe Byrge Sørensen** (*The Act of Killing*); director **Călin Peter Netzer** (*Child's Pose*); director **Paul Wright** (*For those In Peril*); director **Amit Kumar** (*Monsoon Shootout*), **Jan Ole Gerster** (*Oh Boy*); director **Sarah Polley** (*Stories We Tell*); director **Kim Mordaunt** and producer **Sylvia Wilczynski** (*The Rocket*) and **Haifaa Al Mansour** (*Wadjda*).

Sydney Film Festival celebrates its 60th anniversary this 5-16 June bringing a packed program of screenings and special events to even more venues across Sydney. The full program will be announced on **Wednesday 8 May 2013**. For tickets and full up-to-date program information please visit www.sff.org.au.

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

Sydney Film Festival screens feature films, documentaries, short films and animations across the city at the State Theatre, Event Cinemas George Street, Dendy Opera Quays, the Art Gallery of NSW and the Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace Cremorne. The 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 www.sff.org.au

Sydney Film Festival also presents twelve films that vie for the Official Competition; a highly respected international honour that awards a \$60,000 cash prize based on the decision of a jury of international and Australian filmmakers and industry professionals. Previous Sydney Film Festival Official Competition winners include: *Alps* (2012), *A Separation* (2011) – which went on to win an Academy Award®, *Heartbeats* (2010), *Bronson* (2009) and *Hunger* (2008).

The 60th Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia, and the City of Sydney. The Festival's Strategic partner is the NSW Government through Destination NSW.

What: Sydney Film Festival

When: 5-16 June, 2013

Tickets & Info: 1300 733 733 www.sff.org.au

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