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## SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL GIO AUDIENCE AWARDS ANNOUNCED

Today, after receiving nearly 18,000 votes, the Sydney Film Festival announced the winners of the GIO Audience Award for Best Australian Narrative Feature, Best Australian Documentary, Best International Narrative Feature, Best International Documentary as well as the runner up in each category.

The local winners were two Australian World Premiere films at the Festival with Best Narrative Feature awarded to *Birdeater* directed by **Jack Clark** and **Jim Weir**, and Best Documentary awarded to *The Defenders* directed by **Matthew Bate**.

The international winner of Best Narrative Feature was Cannes Palme d'Or winner *Anatomy of a Fall*, French director Justine Triet's tense drama featuring Sandra Hüller as an author accused of her husband's murder. Taking home the Best International Documentary award was *Beyond Utopia*, the Sundance 2023 Audience Award winning film, directed by Madeleine Gavin, about a family's dramatic journey from North Korea to freedom.

**Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley** said, "Our passionate audience has cast their votes and the Festival is delighted to announce *Birdeater*, *The Defenders*, *Anatomy of a Fall* and *Beyond Utopia* as winners of the 2023 GIO Audience Awards."

"*Birdeater* was a fantastic indie production by the team at Breathless Films who had three films premiere at the Festival. A homegrown psychological thriller that painted a darkly comic portrait of young Aussie men, *Birdeater* was a real hit with audiences."

"*The Defenders* is a headline grabbing story of former Socceroos Captain Craig Foster as he fights to rescue the life of fellow player Hakeem al-Araibi. This documentary took us behind the media headlines, diving deep into the fight to bring Hakeem home to Australia. Those that missed the World Premiere at the Festival will be able to view *The Defenders* on Amazon Prime Video in Australia from June 23."

"*Anatomy of a Fall* is a searingly intelligent film that lingers on the mind long after the closing credits roll so it's no surprise Festival audiences awarded it Best International Narrative Feature. And director Madeleine Gavin's *Beyond Utopia* is a gripping documentary that follows North Korean defectors as they make a hazardous journey into China; a totally unforgettable film worthy of the prize."

"The Festival has added additional screenings of *Anatomy of a Fall* and *Beyond Utopia* as a part of our Back by Popular Demand series so audiences who missed out on the Festival screenings will have an opportunity to experience these incredible films," said Moodley.

## THE GIO AUDIENCE AWARDS

### **Australian Feature:**

- Winner: *Birdeater*
- Runner Up: *The Big Dog*

### **Australian Documentary:**

- Winner: *The Defenders*
- Runner Up: *The Last Daughter*

### **International Feature:**

- Winner: *Anatomy of a Fall*
- Runner Up: *Perfect Days*

### **International Documentary:**

- Winner: *Beyond Utopia*
- Runner Up: *Little Richard: I Am Everything*

**Minister for the Arts John Graham** said, “As a film fan, thank you to the Sydney Film Festival for seventy years of magic.

“Congratulations to all the award winners and thank you to every talented filmmaker, artist, crew member, agent, producer, distributor and all involved, who shared their creativity and craft in the art of storytelling with the people of NSW at the 70th Sydney Film Festival.

“We look forward to bringing the best of this year’s anniversary program to seven NSW locations, including Newcastle, Orange, Port Macquarie and Sawtell, as part of the Travelling Film Festival through to October 2023,” he said.

**Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore AO** said, “Sydney is the cultural heart of our country and it’s great to see theatres packed with people enjoying the stunning selection of local and international films throughout the Sydney Film Festival.

“For 70 years this festival has been delivering stellar shorts, features and documentaries that have inspired viewers and allowed movie buffs to get close to some of the industry’s leading men and women with some engaging talks.

“I congratulate all the winners this year and look forward to our continued partnership with the Sydney Film Festival and all that it brings to our fine city.”

**Sydney Film Festival CEO Frances Wallace** said, “This year’s Festival was a huge success with a great number of film fans returning to the cinemas in 2023 attending over 400 film screenings, special events and talks. This year we presented 248 incredible films from across the globe and audiences were eager to take part in the festivities with over 100 sold out sessions across the Festival.”

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES****Isabelle Brown, Communications Advisor**E: [isabelle@originalspin.com.au](mailto:isabelle@originalspin.com.au) M: 0401 576 024**Sanika Karnik, Communications Advisor**E: [sanika@originalspin.com.au](mailto:sanika@originalspin.com.au) M: 0466 635 010**Matt Fraser, Director of Communications**E: [matt@originalspin.com.au](mailto:matt@originalspin.com.au) M: 0401 326 007**Amber Forrest-Bisley, Publicity Manager, Sydney Film Festival**E: [amber@originalspin.com.au](mailto:amber@originalspin.com.au) P: 8065 7363 M: 0405 363 817**\*\*Images are available to download [here](#).****EDITOR'S NOTES:****FILM NOTES:*****BIRDEATER*****The world premiere of a homegrown psychological thriller in which a bride-to-be reluctantly attends her fiancé's buck's party, triggering a feral response from the groomsmen.**

Recently engaged Irene (Shabana Azeez, also in *Run Rabbit Run*, SFF 2023) has been roped into joining her awkward but loving fiancé Louie's (Mackenzie Fearnley) buck's party weekend out in the sticks. Louie's deadbeat groomsmen, however, have more in mind than just a quiet glass of pinot by the fire, and as night falls the celebration nosedives into a feverish, drug-fuelled train wreck. Inspired by the likes of *Wake in Fright*, directing duo Jack Clark (*Threshold*, SFF 2021) and Jim Weir present a challenging, darkly comic portrait of young Aussie men that strikes a little too close to home.

***THE BIG DOG*****A married Sydney stockbroker with a financial domination fetish has one day to save his life from ruin in this acidic Aussie comedy from writer-director Dane McCusker.**

Screwball comedy and corrosive social commentary are the juicy ingredients of a very modern tale that unfolds one sunny day in upper middle-class Aussie suburbia. A few hours before his despondent son's graduation party, alpha stockbroker Richard (Julian Garner, *Underbelly: Vanishing Act*) has his bank accounts drained by his "findom" mistress, Princess Paige (Asha Boswarva, *Lambs of God*). That's a (usually) non-sexual dominatrix hired by wealthy men to spend their money and humiliate them. Frantic farce and raw drama follow as Richard attempts to gather a mountain of cash that will prevent his unsuspecting wife Kelly (Felicity Price, *Last King of the Cross*) from discovering the truth.

***THE DEFENDERS*****Former Socceros captain, Craig Foster, and a team of human rights activists, challenge two monarchies and world sporting body FIFA to rescue the life of a fellow player Hakeem al-Araibi.**

When talented Australian refugee footballer Hakeem al-Araibi steps off the plane in Thailand for his honeymoon, he finds himself facing an Interpol arrest order for alleged terrorism offences. What unfolds is the gripping true story of a heroic whistle-blower who, on speaking out about his own torture, sets off a revenge plot involving three countries, two royal families and the world's most powerful sporting body, FIFA. As Hakeem awaits extradition back to Bahrain, a group of campaigners led by a retired Australian football captain Craig Foster fight for his release.

***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.

***ANATOMY OF A FALL***

**Winner of the Cannes Palme d'Or 2023, Justine Triet's tense psychological drama stars a brilliant Sandra Hüller (*Toni Erdmann*, SFF 2016) as an author accused of murdering her husband.**

Hüller plays Sandra, a successful German writer who has spent the last year living with her French husband Samuel (Samuel Theis) and 11-year-old son Daniel (Milo Machado Graner) in a chalet in the idyllic French Alps. When Samuel is found dead by young Daniel, lying in the snow with a severe head injury, the police begin investigations that gradually reveal a fractious relationship. A year later, Sandra is on trial for murder, with her son's testimony crucial to the outcome. As concerned with ideas around sexuality, art and marriage as with the twists and turns of the investigation and trial, *Anatomy of a Fall* is a searingly intelligent film that lingers in the mind long after the closing credits.

***PERFECT DAYS***

**Straight from the Cannes Competition, Wim Wenders' Japan-set charmer is a deeply moving and poetic reflection on the beauty to be found in the everyday.**

Hirayama (Koji Yakusho, *Shall We Dance?*, *Babel*) is a meticulous man of routine. Each day he awakes, grooms himself, waters his plants and looks up at the sky with a smile as he leaves home. And then he sets to his work as a toilet cleaner in Shibuya, Tokyo. In his car, he listens to classic rock tunes on cassettes – the music of The Velvet Underground, The Kinks, Prince and Van Morrison serving as the soundtrack to his day. Appearing to be utterly content with his life, Hirayama also finds pleasure in photographing trees and reading. The appearance of a young woman at his doorstep leads to revelations about Hirayama's past. Filled with surprising delight, and with a soaring lead performance by Koji Yakusho, *Perfect Days* is a gentle, inspirational ode to simple but profound pleasures.

***BEYOND UTOPIA***

**A family of five attempt a dramatic journey from North Korea to freedom, painting a devastating portrait of life under an oppressive regime. Audience Award winner, Sundance 2023.**

South Korean Pastor Seungeun Kim uses an underground network to rescue North Korean defectors who've make the hazardous trip across the Yalu River into China. Time is of the essence – if the Chinese authorities find them, they will be returned to face severe punishment. When the pastor hears of a family, including two children and a grandparent, in hiding he rushes to help. The family embarks on a treacherous journey wherein their understanding of the West is consistently challenged, revealing much about their repressive homeland. Director Madeleine Gavin's prize-

winning documentary, packed with hidden camera footage, is consistently gripping and totally unforgettable.

***LITTLE RICHARD: I AM EVERYTHING***

**The queer Black origins of rock 'n' roll and its ultimate architect – Richard Penniman – are honoured in this illuminating doc that sets the white-washed history straight.**

From Macon, Georgia, to the rock 'n' roll hall of fame, Lisa Cortes's documentary traces Little Richard's resounding impact through music history and uncovers a portrait of a man torn between the forces of music, sex and religion. His strict religious upbringing left an indelible mark and set him on a complicated road fuelled by contradictions. But it also propelled him to a new life, to find his true self and inspire others in ways that he was unable to do for himself. Featuring interviews with Little Richard, his family, Black and queer scholars, and legends of the industry – Billy Porter, John Waters, Mick Jagger – and complete with electrifying live performances, *I Am Everything* is a celebration of the impact of an indefinable star.

**OTHER 2023 SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL AWARD WINNERS INCLUDE:**

The \$60,000 Sydney Film Prize for 'audacious, cutting-edge and courageous' film was awarded to Moroccan filmmaker **Asmae El Moudir** for her film ***The Mother of All Lies***. The work was selected from 12 Official Competition films by prestigious jury headed by acclaimed director **Anurag Kashyap**.

The awarding of the largest prize pool in Sydney Film Festival history also included Australian filmmakers **Derik Lynch** and **Matthew Thorne** being awarded the [Documentary Australia Award's](#) \$20,000 cash prize for ***Marungka Tjalatjunu (Dipped in Black)***, which follows Lynch, a Yankunytjatjara artist, on a road trip back to Country (Aputula), as memories from his childhood return.

The 2022 recipient of the \$40,000 [Sustainable Future Award](#), the largest environmental film prize in the world, is Indian director **Sarvnik Kaur**, for her film ***Against the Tide***, an intimate documentary where two fishermen from Mumbai's Indigenous Koli community confront the impact of the changing environment.

Five short film prizes were awarded for [The Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films](#). The AFTRS Craft Award for Best Practitioner (a \$7,000 cash prize) went to **Kalu Oji, Faro Musodza** and **Makwaya Masudi**, screenwriters for ***What's In a Name?*** The inaugural Event Cinemas Rising Talent Award, with a cash prize of \$7,000 was awarded to **Robyn Liu**, lead actor in ***The Dancing Girl and the Balloon Man***.

The \$5,000 Yoram Gross Animation Award was awarded to ***Teacups***, directed by **Alec Green** and **Finbar Watson**. The \$7,000 Dendy Live Action Short Award was awarded to ***The Dancing Girl and the Balloon Man***, directed by **David Ma**. The \$7,000 Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director was presented to **Sophie Somerville**, director of ***Linda 4 Eva***.

**SYDNEY  
FILM  
FESTIVAL**

**70**

**7-18  
JUNE  
2023**

**ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL**

Sydney Film Festival celebrated its 70th edition 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](http://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.

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