

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

05-16 JUNE 2019



MEDIA RELEASE

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SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL TO FOCUS ON NEW ZEALAND

The 66th Sydney Film Festival announces New Zealand as this year's country of focus, showcasing seven feature-length films celebrating New Zealand's history and community, as well as its rich Māori and Pacific Island culture, in partnership with the New Zealand Film Commission.

The selection of films includes one World Premiere: Hamish Bennett's warmly humorous directorial debut *Bellbird*, about a community pitching in to help a sheep farmer following the death of his wife, which also screens in the Festival's Official Competition.

Highlighting New Zealand's vibrant music scene are: *The Chills: The Triumph & Tragedy of Martin Phillipps*, following the ups and downs of one of New Zealand's most beloved bands; and New Zealand box office smash hit *Daffodils*, a musical romance brimming with New Zealand hits from Crowded House to Bic Runga.

Two films will also screen as part of the Festival's First Nations program: *Merata: How Mum Decolonised the Screen*, a portrait of trailblazing Māori filmmaker Merata Mita, reportedly the first Indigenous woman to direct a feature film, directed by her son Heperi Mita; and eight-part portmanteau film *Vai* about an imaginary figure encompassing every woman of every age, by nine women filmmakers from the South Pacific.

Also screening will be *The Heart Dances*, about the re-imagining of Jane Campion's *The Piano*, by Czech choreographers working with the Royal New Zealand Ballet; and *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, a stirring adaptation of French economist Thomas Piketty's global bestseller.

Guests from all films will attend the Festival to introduce their screenings, including director **Julia Parnell** and *The Chills* frontman **Martin Phillipps** (*The Chills: The Triumph & Tragedy of Martin Phillipps*); director **David Stubbs** (*Daffodils*); and director **Rebecca Tansley** (*The Heart Dances*).

The festival will also be premiering six New Zealand short films: *Falling Up*; *The Gravedigger of Kapu*; *Hinekura*, *Hush*; *A Matter of Time*, and *Rū*.

Hosted by UNSW Arts & Social Sciences, talk **The Work of Freda Glynn and Merata Mita** will feature filmmakers behind *She Who Must Be Obeyed* and *Merata: How Mum Decolonised the Screen* discussing the ground breaking work of these two trailblazers at the Festival Hub (Friday 14 June, 8:15pm).

"Sydney Film Festival is thrilled to present these seven excellent films showcasing the very best cinema from our island neighbours, including the World Premiere of Hamish Bennett's quietly powerful *Bellbird*, which will also compete for the Sydney Film Prize," said **Festival Director Nashen Moodley**.

"We are honoured to be invited by the Sydney Film Festival as the 2019 country of focus. This is an important showcase for New Zealand films and filmmakers and will enable their stories to reach new audiences. New Zealand films have had a long relationship with the Sydney Film Festival and we are



very happy to strengthen our relationships with the Festival and with Australia through this focus,” said **New Zealand Film Commission CEO Annabelle Sheehan**.

Other New Zealand stories screening at the Festival will be *Come to Daddy*, the directorial debut of Ant Timpson (*Deathgasm*, SFF 2015) starring Elijah Wood, as part of Freak Me Out.

The full Sydney Film Festival 2019 program can be found online at sff.org.au.

Sydney Film Festival runs 5 – 16 June 2019. Tickets for Sydney Film Festival 2019 are on sale now. Please call 1300 733 733 or visit sff.org.au for more information.

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

EDITOR'S NOTES

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

From Wednesday 5 June to Sunday 16 June 2019, the 66th Sydney Film Festival offers Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, red-carpet openings, in-depth discussions, international guests and more.

Sydney Film Festival also presents an Official Competition of 12 films that vie for the Sydney Film Prize, a highly respected 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 Prize winners: *The Heiresses* (2018), *On Body and Soul* (2017); *Aquarius* (2016); *Arabian Nights* (2015); *Two Days, One Night* (2014); *Only God Forgives* (2013); *Alps* (2012); *A Separation* (2011); *Heartbeats* (2010); *Bronson* (2009); and *Hunger* (2008).

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: sff.org.au.

The 66th Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW and Destination NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia and the City of Sydney. The Festival's Strategic Partner is the NSW Government via its tourism and major events agency, Destination NSW.

