

MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES 2016 NEXT GEN PROGRAM

FILMS TO ENCOURAGE IMAGINATION AND ENRICH THE CINEMA EXPERIENCE FOR YOUNGER VIEWERS

MELBOURNE, 10 May 2016 - The **Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF)** returns with its 2016 **Next Gen** program, the festival's all-ages strand that serves to enhance language learning, intercultural understanding and media analysis.

Now in its 10th year, the Next Gen schools' program will showcase eight outstanding films that delve into drama, animation and fantasy to engage and inspire students, exploring issues such as resolving conflict, taking responsibility for actions, family, friendship and resilience.

"This year the program was carefully put together so that all films screening are not only high quality, diverse and age appropriate, but also in languages most commonly taught in Victorian schools: French, German, Italian, Japanese and Mandarin," said Next Gen programmer Thomas Caldwell.

Included in the program are French titles ***Miss Impossible***, the cinematic adaptation of Marie Desplechin's bestselling French young adult novel series *Le journal d'Aurore*, which invites us to share the often hilarious perspective of a 'normal' teenager, and by doing so demonstrates that there is no such thing as a 'normal teenager'; and ***Adama***, winner of the Best of the Fest Award and the The Liv Ullmann Peace Prize at the 2015 Chicago International Children's Film Festival. This strikingly stylised animated film was inspired by real-life stories of West African men recruited to fight for French forces and will take audiences on an energetic quest brimming with emotion, excitement and impressive technical artistry.

Continuing the French strand is ***The New Kid***. With a knock-out cast of emerging young actors, this is a film that shines a charming new light on a familiar story, offering a sharply humorous take on the perils and pitfalls of surviving high school and the universal maxim that being cool isn't as important as being yourself. Described by *Hollywood Reporter* as "*Freaks and Geeks*, French style".

From Italy, Next Gen will present ***Banana***, the feature film debut from Academy Award nominated writer/director Andrea Jublin. Banana is blessed with more self-belief than talent, and is missing goals both on and off the field; worst of all, his goal-kicking foot is shaped like an actual banana! This light-hearted film is a winning testament to the fact that happiness isn't measured in the success you find, but in the way that you try to find it.

The latest adaptation of the beloved Chinese fairytale *Ma Liang and his Magic Brush* is Zhi-xing Zhong's gorgeously animated adventure, ***The Magic Brush***. Produced in collaboration with Disney, the film follows young artist, Ma Liang, who is gifted with a brush that magically brings to life whatever it paints. Delighted, Ma Liang dreams of being a hero, but soon learns that magic can have consequences, in this fun and fantastical tale about the power of art and imagination.

For an older teenage audience, ***What's in the Darkness*** brings shades of *Twin Peaks* and a backdrop of insular communities, serial killers and sexual awakenings. When a shocking series of crimes rock a small town in China in 1991, detective Qu Zhicheng is placed on the case. Writer/director Wang Yichun draws upon her own background

and offers an astute personal perspective on the gender inequalities, generational differences, moral hypocrisy and double standards at the heart of her homeland.

Japanese filmmaker Diago Matsui (*Wonderful World End*, MIFF 15) returns to the screen with the defiantly teenage road movie, *Our Huff and Puff Journey*. This is a film that revels in the dream of freedom and the flow of youthful rebellion — a captivating story of the power of friendship and the strength we find when we stick together.

And finally, German film *Mara and the Firebringer*. Like any other 15-year-old, protagonist Mara just wants to fit in with her peers, and find her place in life. But schoolyard bullies and a weird, embarrassing mum will soon be the least of her problems, because Mara has just learned the she's a mystic seer; that the ancient legends are all true; and that the fate of the world rests on her shoulders. Warm-hearted, funny and empowering, *Mara and the Firebringer* is a world away from the dystopian fare Hollywood currently serves adolescents.

Since 2007, the **Next Gen** program has strived to provide school students with the opportunity to enjoy a diverse range of entertaining and stimulating cinema. Through the identification and exploration of current social and cultural issues, students and teachers are encouraged to engage with these films, with the assistance of complimentary webinars provided by the Modern Language Teachers Association of Victoria (**MLTAV**). These webinars provide a greater context for students to interact with the themes raised in this year's **Next Gen** program.

For program information and to book tickets visit miff.com.au/nextgen.

School bookings are now open.

The 2016 Melbourne International Film Festival runs 28 July – 14 August 2016. MIFF's First Glance will be announced on 31 May 2016 and the full program will be launched 5 July 2016, with public tickets on sale 8 July 2016.

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