

# MIFF returns to cinemas and homes with Australian films and talent at its heart.

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MIFF 2021 Media Centre



The Drover's Wife  
The Legend Of Molly Johnson

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 6AM JUNE 17**

The Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) returns **August 5-22** with a packed program topped by MIFF's first-ever Opening Night film from a female Indigenous director, the debuts of a record 11 Premiere Fund films, the first Australian film in Cannes Competition in a decade, and much-anticipated titles from Berlin, Venice and Sundance film festivals.

Building on the success of MIFF's 2020 online-only festival – which reached the largest audience in the festival's history – the innovations of MIFF 2021 will give films their biggest ever platform at MIFF, presenting for the first time ever as a hybrid festival across cinema and digital. Once again meeting audiences where they are, MIFF returns to familiar theatres across Melbourne CBD, while expanding into five suburban sites, screening in eight regional centres and streaming online nationally via the festival's new digital platform, **MIFF Play**.

In a coup for Melbourne audiences, MIFF's Opening Night Gala features the Australian premiere of **Leah Purcell's** highly-anticipated *The Drover's Wife The Legend Of Molly Johnson*. A vivid reckoning with Australia's colonial history, the revisionist outback western speaks emphatically to the realities, both past and present, of racial injustice – told through the lens of an Indigenous woman. The film completes a multi-format trilogy based on Henry Lawson's 1892 short story, which began with Purcell's award-winning play and subsequent novel *The Drover's Wife*.

"I am excited to bring the Dreaming storytelling structure of *The Drover's Wife The Legend Of Molly Johnson* to the big screen and as part of such a prestigious festival" said Leah Purcell. "It is an honour to be the first female Indigenous director to have an opening night film at MIFF and I am thrilled to act as an ambassador for their stellar showcase of filmmaking."

Both director and actor, Purcell's amazing central performance as the impassioned matriarch Molly Johnson, which heralds a new Indigenous feminist heroine, is supported by stunning performances from **Rob Collins** (*Cleverman, The Wrong Girl*) as Yadaka, the fugitive turned friend, British sergeant **Sam Reid** (*The Riot Club*) and his activist wife **Jessica de Gouw** (*Arrow, The Secrets She Keeps*).

"Leah Purcell's monumental *The Drover's Wife The Legend Of Molly Johnson* will not just open MIFF this year – it will kick the doors in," said Al Cossar, the festival's artistic director. "This is a film made for MIFF's return to cinema – an outback western of grand vision; a resonant, revisionist force of filmmaking that has much to say about our country then, and who we are now. The film will lead a slate of extraordinary Australian storytellers – emerging, established, revered – who give momentum and meaning to the core of MIFF this year."

While *The Drover's Wife* will lead the charge, the 69th festival will be hallmarked by a formidable collection of world premiere Australian films, international award winners and special events, including the first Australian film in a decade to premiere in competition at the Cannes Film Festival. Ahead of the full program announcement on 13 July, a selection of the most anticipated films and events from the program includes:



## PREMIERE FUND FILMS

The MIFF Premiere Fund's 2021 slate is the largest collection of films in the Fund's 14-year history of co-financing and supporting 'stories that need telling' with a record 11 films premiering – five of those directed by alumni of emerging director initiative MIFF Accelerator Lab.

Timely themes around identity, activism, mental health, artistic endeavour and expression, and intercultural respect run through the star-studded slate which features such names as **Courtney Barnett**, **Essie Davis**, **Judy Davis**, **Stephen Fry**, **Elton John**, **Caleb Landry Jones**, **Sir Ian McKellan**, and **Hugo Weaving**.

Direct from its world premiere in competition at the Cannes Film Festival is *Nitram*, the first Australian film in Cannes Competition in a decade and the first Victorian film to earn that accolade in more than 30 years, from MIFF Accelerator Lab alumnus director **Justin Kurzel** (*Snowtown*). A narrative portrait of the troubled man behind modern Australia's worst mass-shooting, *Nitram* is produced by **Nick Batzias** (*The Australian Dream*, MIFF 2019) and **Virginia Whitwell** (*Below*, MIFF Premiere Fund 2019), and stars **Caleb Landry Jones** (*Get Out; Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*), **Anthony LaPaglia** (*Balibo*, MIFF Premiere Fund 2009), **Judy Davis** (*The Dressmaker*) and **Essie Davis** (*The Babadook*, *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*).

Touching on themes of mental health and identity are two astonishingly tender films exploring the highs and lows of artistic endeavour in the music industry. The notoriously shy and vastly talented **Courtney Barnett** pulls back the curtain in *Anonymous Club*, an intimate first-person exposition on creativity, vulnerability and artistic life on the road, directed by **Danny Cohen**; while storied Australian rock band The Triffids, and the triumph and ultimate tragedy of their brilliant frontman **David McComb**, are the focus for *Love in Bright Landscapes* from director **Jonathan Alley**.

**Mark Leonard Winter** (*Measure for Measure*, MIFF 2019) depicts another form of vulnerability, as a man bereft by his wife's desertion until the sister of an Italian colleague breathes new life into his home and heart in *Little Tornadoes*, which also stars **Robert Menzies** (*Glitch*) and **Silvia Colloca**. Accelerator Lab alumnus **Aaron Wilson** (*Canopy*, MIFF 2013) and co-writer **Christos Tsiolkas** (*The Slap*) create a portrait of the human desire for connection, set against a backdrop of a rapidly-changing Australia in the 1970s.

Featuring another star-studded Australian cast including **Tilda Cobham-Hervey** (*I Am Woman*), **Chris Buntton** (*Kairos*, MIFF 2019), **Stephen Curry** (*Hounds of Love*) and **Hugo Weaving** (*Hearts and Bones*, MIFF 2019), *Lone Wolf* is an inventive political thriller co-produced by Accelerator Lab Alumnus **Mat Govoni** (*The Misfortune of Others*, MIFF 2013) and directed by **Jonathan Ogilvie**. Set in the near-future, a group of activists embark on a defiant act against state corruption and cyber surveillance, in this deft adaptation of Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent* with a very Melbourne feel.

Real-life activism is the focus of *Hating Peter Tatchell*, a deeply personal portrait of the revered and notorious Melbourne-born human rights activist and agitator extraordinaire, who took on the likes of Margaret Thatcher and Robert Mugabe in his fight for equality. The feature directorial debut of **Christopher Amos** is executive-produced by **Elton John** and features **Sir Ian McKellen** and **Stephen Fry** alongside Tatchell's candid and often indicting commentary throughout.

In a different story of activism, the feature directorial debut of Accelerator Lab alumnus **Adrian Francis** (*Lessons from the Night*, MIFF 2009), *Paper City* presents a poignant exploration of trauma and remembrance as it follows three elderly survivors of the 1945 firebombing of Tokyo in their fight against bureaucracy and indifference to demand recognition and reparation for those who have suffered.

The life and times of entrepreneur, impresario, entertainer and activist **Bill Onus** are explored in *Ablaze*, a compelling historical story of resistance and politically-driven art co-directed and narrated by his grandson, distinguished opera singer and academic **Tiriki Onus**, who also seeks to discover if his grandfather was Australia's first ever Aboriginal filmmaker.



Ab/laze

An eye-opening and empathetic feature documentary, from co-directors **Rhian Skirving** (*Rock n Roll Nerd*, MIFF 2008) and MIFF Accelerator Lab alumnus **John Harvey** (*Out of Range*, MIFF 2019), *Off Country* follows several Indigenous students as they navigate life far away from Country, boarding at the prestigious Geelong Grammar School on scholarships. The affecting film confronts questions of identity, belonging and how to ‘close the gap’ without creating new ones.

Jaded magician Dave Welzman also confronts questions of identity in *Uluru and the Magician*, as his plan to disappear Uluru takes him on a journey of discovery, teaching him about the sacred monolith, the Anangu people and reconciliation. Directed by Accelerator Lab alumna **Anna Broinowski** (*Aim High in Creation!* MIFF Premiere Fund 2013) and produced by **Trisha Morton-Thomas** (*The Song Keepers*, MIFF Premiere Fund 2017) and **Rachel Clements** (*Finke: There and Back*, MIFF 2018), this candid and comedic documentary explores the conflict between commodification and cultural respect and captures one man’s single-minded devotion to his craft being tempered by the magic at the heart of Australia.

In the final instalment of writer/director **Trevor Graham**’s culinary trilogy (*Make Hummus Not War*, MIFF 2012; *Monsieur Mayonnaise*, MIFF 2016), *Chef Antonio’s Recipes for Revolution* follows a hotel-restaurant in Italy staffed by young people with Down syndrome. With the identity, dreams and aspirations of people living with a disability at its centre, the uplifting and hunger-inducing film once again uses food as a vehicle to examine larger issues with an empowering message on individuality and independence.

#### AUSTRALIAN HIGHLIGHTS

National Rugby League star **Dean Widders**’ spirited call-to-arms to celebrate First Nations culture with a ceremonial ‘unity dance’ worthy of going up against the haka is at the core of NITV commission *Araatika: Rise Up!* Celebrated writer and director **Larissa Behrendt** foregrounds the bonds between sport and community in this powerful documentary featuring prominent Indigenous voices such as **Stan Grant** and **Adam Goodes**.

Based on the experiences of another sporting great, *Streamline* features a teenager fighting to stay afloat in the world of competitive swimming echoing Olympic gold medallist **Ian Thorpe**’s early career. Shining a piercing light on teenage masculinity, abandonment and the pressures of competitive sport, the feature debut of **Tyson Wade Johnstone** includes a cameo from Thorpe himself, who also Executive Produced, and a cast including **Jake Ryan** (*Underbelly, Savage*) and the inimitable **Jason Isaacs** (*Harry Potter*).

Two years in the making, **Archie Roach** and **Ruby Hunter**’s performance with Paul Grabowsky’s Australian Art Orchestra was legendary, winning the hearts of audiences across Australia – and a Helpmann Award. From long-time producer, first-time director **Philippa Bateman** (*Jindabyne*), *Wash My Soul in the River’s Flow* goes behind the scenes of the concert – and the story behind it – to produce a vital document on the transformative power of love, song and connection to country.

Another Australian icon **Franco Cozzo** takes centre stage in *Palazzo Di Cozzo*, a touching exploration of the Melbourne furniture mogul’s inspirational and aspirational story, directed by **Madeleine Martiniello** in a charming tale of multiculturalism and community.

Tragic and inspiring, *Geeta* is the story of an Indian acid attack survivor’s campaign for change in her community. Award-winning social justice filmmaker **Emma Macey-Storch** deftly depicts Geeta Mahour’s transformative love for her daughters, in a heart-warming call to action that’s both confronting and hopeful.

Restored in all their glory are two world-premiere restorations as part of the First Glance selection: **Rachel Perkins**’ affecting Aussie classic *Radiance* and **Margot Nash**’s acclaimed feature debut *Vacant Possession*. The former sees three estranged sisters (**Rachael Maza**, **Trisha Morton-Thomas** & **Deborah Mailman**) reluctantly reunite for their mother’s funeral and grapple with long-suppressed family secrets, in a dazzling, ageless story of grief and the powerful ties and truths that bond us. Also confronting memories of the past, *Vacant Possession* sees **Pamela Rabe** in a powerful performance as the teen caught between a white and aboriginal family as they reconcile the skeletons of their intertwined histories – a film as important now as it was in 1995.



## INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL FAVOURITES

Essential viewing at this year's MIFF, *Quo Vadis, Aida?* is the visceral new film from **Jasmila Žbanić** (*Grbavica*, MIFF 2006) portraying a UN translator torn between duty and saving her family during a tragic event in 1990s Bosnia. The unmissable film was nominated for Best International Feature Film at this year's Oscars and is a vital watch.

Japanese auteur **Ryūsuke Hamaguchi** continues his supple explorations of modern relationships with a playfully enigmatic, female-centric triptych *Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy*, which won the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize at this year's Berlinale. An unexpected love triangle, a seduction trap and a chance encounter in Tokyo are delivered in beguilingly fragmented style.

**Céline Sciamma** (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, MIFF 2019 Audience Favourite) returns with a delicate tale of childhood and intergenerational connection in *Petit Maman*. A highlight of the 2021 Berlinale competition, the film's beguiling premise explores the complexity of mother-daughter relationships, with a touch of magic realism.

A fascinating insight into the dramas, frustrations and triumphs of local governments is presented over 275 minutes by veteran filmmaker **Frederick Wiseman** (*Monrovia, Indiana*, MIFF 2019) in the critically lauded *City Hall*. Clear-eyed and full of optimism, the 91-year-old director's ability to find tension, emotion and drama in everyday existence is expansive and astounding.

Revered auteur **Andrei Konchalovsky** (*The Postman's White Nights*, MIFF 2015) won the Special Jury Prize at the 2020 Venice Film Festival with the aesthetically stunning historical drama *Dear Comrades!* based on the true story of a long-denied 1962 USSR massacre, in a moving, quietly satirical examination of the ruthlessness of unrestrained power and the limits of ideological commitment.

Two guerrilla auteurs, **Dennis Hopper** and **Orson Welles**, meet for a boisterous, uninhibited, alcohol-fuelled conversation in the 70s, documented and directed by Welles himself. Politics, sex, revolution, America and cinema are covered in never-before-seen footage recently unearthed for *Hopper/Welles*.

A runaway Sundance hit starring **Taylor Paige** (*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*) and **Riley Keough** (*The Girlfriend Experience*), *Zola* is a hyper-kinetic comedy based on an infamous tweetstorm about a wild, pole-dancing Florida road trip in a film that's part *Spring Breakers*, part *Hustlers*, all female gaze. The neon-lit world of palm trees, pimps and players is set to **Mica Levi's** pulsating, ethereal score and conjured by dreamy cinematography from Melbourne's own **Ari Wegner** (*In Fabric*, MIFF 2019).

Blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, director **Amalia Ulman** stars beside her real mother in her wittily droll feature debut based partly on her life, partly on the true story of infamous mother-daughter con artists. Charming and charismatic, *El Planeta* paints a playful and disarming picture of life on the edges.

A look at the controversial life of a pioneering fashion icon, **Helmut Newton: The Bad and the Beautiful** offers insight into his transgressive legacy, unflinchingly directed by documentarian **Gero von Boehm**; while **Lisa Rovner** rewrites the previously silenced history of the woman who blazed a trail through electronic music with narration by **Laurie Anderson** in *Sisters With Transistors*, a radical revision of a seminal sound.

Italian Fabio Zaffagnini's elaborate plan to lure his favourite band, The Foo Fighters, to his small hometown by conducting a thousand fellow rock fans to play *Learn to Fly*, was ingenious – and successful. *We Are the Thousand* is a joyful paean to pure enthusiasm from director **Anita Rivaroli**, winning an Audience Award at this year's SXSW with its celebratory message on the power of music and community.

Spanish auteur **Pedro Almodóvar** (*Pain and Glory*, MIFF 2019; *Julieta*, MIFF 2016) returns to MIFF with his much-lauded short, *The Human Voice*. Starring **Tilda Swinton**, *The Human Voice* is Almodóvar's English-language debut charting the twin pains of uncertainty and waiting in a dangerously dramatic film that premiered at the 2020 Venice Film Festival.



## SPECIAL EVENTS

Rounding out the 2021 First Glance announcement is MIFF's much-loved night of sound and cinema, *Hear My Eyes*, returning with *Two Hands x The Murlocs*.

Helmed by King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard's **Ambrose Kenny-Smith**, The Murlocs combine a psychedelic garage rock sensibility with ambling blues, which meld to deliver a blistering live show. Performing their own, reimagined live score to **Gregor Jordan**'s Aussie classic — featuring **Heath Ledger**'s breakout performance — the band will bring their distinctive sound to the Astor Theatre for this powerful homage to a cult Australian classic.

Tickets for *Hear My Eyes* at the Astor Theatre on Saturday 7 August are now on sale.

MIFF Memberships and Passes are now on sale.

## THE COMPLETE LIST OF FIRST GLANCE TITLES:

- *Ablaze (Australia)*
- *Anonymous Club (Australia)*
- *Araatika: Rise Up! (Australia)*
- *Chef Antonio's Recipes for Revolution (Australia, Italy)*
- *City Hall (USA)*
- *Dear Comrades! (Russia)*
- *El Planeta (Spain)*
- *Geeta (Australia)*
- *Hating Peter Tatchell (Australia)*
- *Hear My Eyes: Two Hands x The Murlocs (Australia)*
- *Helmut Newton: The Bad and the Beautiful (Germany)*
- *Hopper/Welles (USA)*
- *Little Tornadoes (Australia)*
- *Lone Wolf (Australia)*
- *Love in Bright Landscapes (Australia)*
- *Nitram (Australia)*
- *Off Country (Australia)*
- *Palazzo Di Cozzo (Australia)*
- *Paper City (Australia)*
- *Petit Maman (France)*
- *Quo Vadis, Aida? (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austria, Romania, Netherlands, Germany, Poland, France, Norway, Turkey)*
- *Radiance (Australia)*
- *Sisters With Transistors (UK, France)*
- *Streamline (Australia)*
- *The Drover's Wife The Legend Of Molly Johnson (Australia)*
- *The Human Voice (Spain)*
- *Uluru and the Magician (Australia)*
- *Vacant Possession (Australia)*
- *Wash My Soul in the River's Flow (Australia)*
- *We Are the Thousand (Italy)*
- *Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy (Japan)*
- *Zola (USA)*

**REGIONAL, SUBURBAN & CBD SITES :**

- *Comedy Theatre - Melbourne*
  - *Forum Theatre - Melbourne*
  - *RMIT Capitol Theatre - Melbourne*
  - *ACMI Fed Square - Melbourne*
  - *Kino Cinemas - Melbourne*
  - *Hoyts Melbourne Central - Melbourne*
  - *Coburg Drive-In - Coburg*
  - *The Astor - St Kilda*
  - *Palace Cinemas Pentridge - Coburg*
  - *The Sun Theatre - Yarraville*
  - *Lido Cinemas - Hawthorn*
  - *The Sun Theatre - Bright*
  - *The Sun Theatre - Bairnsdale*
  - *Peninsula Cinemas - Sorrento*
  - *The Star - Bendigo*
  - *The Pivotonian - Geelong*
  - *Theatre Royal - Castlemaine*
  - *Paramount Cinemas - Echuca*
  - *Wallis Cinemas Mildura - Mildura*
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**NOTES TO EDITOR**

- The 2021 Melbourne International Film Festival runs 5 - 22 August.
- Tickets to the *Hear My Eyes* special event are now on sale.
- The full program will launch on 13 July.
- MIFF Member pre-sale commences 13 July.
- General public tickets will be on sale 16 July.
- A printed guide will be in The Age on 17 July.

**MEDIA KIT**

Images and synopses [here](#)