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## The Review of 2017 Sydney Film Festival

It was that time of year again: Every June for 12 days and nights Sydney hosts new films, inspiring and entertaining premieres, talks and parties. Sydney Film Festival takes place at the flagship venue the State Theatre, as well as cinemas in the CBD, Newtown, Cremorne, Western Sydney and more, screening cinematic emissions you won't usually find in the multiplexes of this world. The program for the 64th Sydney Film Festival promised to be a season celebrating diversity, activism, discovery and seldom told stories. From refugees, gender rights, and political activism, to international blockbusters, punk parties and family friendly features, 2017's line-up showcased 288 films sourced from 59 countries including 37 world premieres.

One of the world firsts on offer was the opening this year's proceedings: Indigenous director Warwick Thornton's *We Don't Need A Map*. The film, exploring Australia's relationship to the Southern Cross – a symbol of both Aboriginal significance and colonial oppression – frames a conversation about the divides that still endure in Australian culture. The SFF was closed by one of the most well-heeled casts on offer in this year's program. Celebrated Korean director Boog Joon-ho, best known for his live-action adaptation of the French graphic novel *Snowpiercer*, has assembled a stellar cast including Tilda Swinton, Jake Gyllenhaal and An Seo-hyun in his Cannes Competition contender *Okja*. A fantastical perspective on the concept of man's dangerous impact on nature, it pits a young girl against a multi-national corporation as she tries to protect a massive animal from falling into the wrong hands. Joon-ho was not the only director with A-List talent in front of his lens.

Sofia Coppola's seductive new thriller *The Beguiled*, starring Colin Farrell, Nicole Kidman, Kirsten Dunst and Elle Fanning; German director Fatih Akin's *In The Fad* starring Diane Kruger; and 80-year-old Oscar-winning icon Vanessa Redgrave's directorial debut, *Sea Sorrow*, were also on the bill. Redgrave was in Sydney presenting her film in person, joined in conversation by legendary Aussie film pundit Margaret Pomeranz. Homegrown stars were also strongly represented. *Muriel's Wedding* and *Sixth Sense* star Toni Collette appeared opposite Harvey Keitel in French rom-com *Madame* – also a world premiere, and Emmy-winning actor and *Rogue One* star Ben Mendelsohn lead in director Benedict Andrews' debut feature *Una*.

To help audiences navigate the array of films on offer, Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley divided the program into several curated selections. These included an International Documentaries program, headlined by Laura Poitras' much-anticipated follow-up to her Edward Snowden expose *Citizenfour – Risk*; The Box Set sessions which presented the first two episodes from the second season of hit show *Cleverman*; *Feminism in Film* covering contemporary suffrage, gender disparity and indigenous female experiences; the *Freak Me Out*

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program – a mini-season of horror masterworks; and a First Nations program of films by Indigenous directors and performers. There was also be a major retrospective of punk on film, including a special performance of Derek Jarman’s iconoclastic genre-buster Jubilee hosted by The Music. There was be a panel discussion on the evolution of punk in Australia after the screening followed by a party where Richard Kuipers will be spinning punk 45s classics from ’77 and beyond. Indie-darlings

The Go-Betweens were also celebrated at a special event following the world premiere screening of Kriv Stenders’ documentary The Go-Betweens: Right Here. The night was jam-packed with every inch of the band’s back catalogue, including early singles such as Lee Remick and Cattle and Cane, as well as tracks from their ARIA-winning album Oceans Apart. Sydney, as one of eight UNESCO Cities of Film around the world, welcomed thousands to take in two weeks of discussion and diversity on the big screen. 2017 saw the launch of the Screenability program in partnership with the Department of Family and Community Services and Sydney Film Festival to extend the opportunities to see work produced by artists living with disability.

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