



MIFF INDUSTRY

Stories that need telling . . .

REMINDER: Premiere Fund open for submissions

Seeking MIFF 2024 premieres, **MIFF Premiere Fund** Round 65 is **open for submissions** - with **applications closing** Thursday 09 March 2023

Providing co-finance to support production of new Australian films that then premiere at **Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF)**, the **Premiere Fund**, operated by **MIFF INDUSTRY** with funding from Victoria's State Government, has since 2007 supported **more than 90** "*stories that need telling*" (see show-reel [here](#)).

PREMIERE FUND FILMS: acclaim, notice, awards

For 15-years, MIFF **Premiere Fund's** annual offering of **diverse voices telling essential stories** launched films that are amongst the **most popular with MIFF audiences**, and **critically-acclaimed & widely-noticed** with almost **200 awards** from nearly **500 nominations** and more than **700 festival selections** globally to their credit.

Celebrating MIFF-70, a record **11 Premiere Fund (PF) titles** debuted in 2022 enthraling **MIFF audiences** and resulting in:

- 50% of PF 2022 films winning **50%** of places in **MIFF-Audience-Voted-Top-10-Favourites**
- 35% of PF films making-up 25% of **MIFFplay 15 most-watched 2022 titles** (excluding schools)
- 50% of PF's 2022 films comprising 25% of MIFF-70's 25-most-watched 'in-theatre' titles

Since then ...

2022's slate of **Premiere Fund** films **won two** of Australia's three **richest film prizes**, with the slate's prize tally thus far at **13 awards from more than 40 nominations**. More than half the 11 titles **have scored** major international A-list festival (including Rotterdam & Berlinale) invitations contributing to an overall tally of **55+ festival selections**.

More details below ...

OF AN AGE: out & about

World premiering in 2022 as **MIFF-70's Opening Gala**, **Accelerator Lab** (Acclab) alumnus director **Goran Stolevski's** MIFF **Premiere Fund**-supported **OF AN AGE** had its International Premiere at January's **Palm Springs International Film Festival** (a homecoming of sorts as Palm Springs is where trade publication **Variety** annually names its global **10 Directors to Watch** which last year included Stolevski) before opening the recent Sydney **World Pride's** Mardi Gras Film Festival ahead of its USA release, and then Roadshow's 23 March local release (with **new trailer**).

Hailed a "modern queer classic" (**Guardian**) and named among the year's 10 best films by **Saturday Paper**, **Cinema Australia**, and **ScreenHub**, **Causeway's** **acclaimed** film also won **Cinefest's \$100k Film Prize** - the fifth **Premiere Fund**-supported film to do so during Cinefest's thus far eight Competitions, after: **Robert Connolly's** \$10m Australian box-office-grossing **PAPER PLANES** (2014); **Nicole Ma's** **PUTUPARRI & THE RAINMAKERS** (2015); **H IS FOR HAPPINESS** (2019) from **Acclab** alumnus **John Sheedy** (whose short **TARNEIT** won Cardiff's £30,000 **Iris Prize**); and **Acclab** alumnus **Justin Kurzel's** **NITRAM** (2014).

Stolevski, who, like fellow **Acclab** graduate **Jub Clerc** (**SWEET AS**) is a **20-year-gestating "overnight success"** discusses **here** **Acclab's** help in his career.

SWEET AS: Berlin Bear the latest charm!!

MIFF **Accelerator Lab** alumna director **Jub Clerc**'s MIFF **Premiere Fund**-supported **SWEET AS** won **Crystal Bear for Best Film** at its European premiere in **Berlinale's Generations** K-plus selection, having won **MIFF Awards'** inaugural **BlackMagic \$70,000 Innovation Prize** from its world premiere in **MIFF 2022 Headliners**, before its international-premiere in **Toronto International Film Festival's Discovery** where it was Australia's first film to win **Best Asian Feature Film** from the *Network for Promotion of Asian Cinema* (NETPAC).

Australia's first feature helmed by a female Western Australian Indigenous filmmaker, **SWEET AS** has charmed numerous festivals, including on Clerc's Pilbara-Kimberley **home ground at CinefestOz Broome**. "I just can't wait for mob to see it – I wrote it with countrymen in mind and young Indigenous kids as well, teens and young adults," said Clerc, who drew on her teenage experience of growing-up in Port Hedland and Broome and being on a National Geographic photo safari herself before becoming involved in the arts through her uncle, Jimmy Chi, who wrote musical **BRAN NUE DAE**, that she spent her teenage years performing in the traveling stage production, which later became a hit **Premiere Fund**-supported film. "You can only imagine what our young Indigenous kids are going through, especially because the Kimberley has the highest rate of youth suicides in Australia. I always hope that there's something there that resonates with them, that might just help change their life trajectory."

Releasing a **new trailer** ahead of the local release campaign, Roadshow's Joel Pearlman recalls acquiring the film after: "watching it with an audience at MIFF" where "it earned a standing ovation. Clerc's directorial debut is an extraordinary coming-of-age story that audiences are going to adore. Australian teenage audiences deserve films that are specifically made for them."

Meantime, the **Berlinale Series** strand had the international premiere four-part Stan/Matchbox/Uni series **BAD BEHAVIOUR** from **AccLab** alumna director **Corrie Chen**, who won Best Episode Director for four-part Goalpost/SBS-TV series **NEW GOLD MOUNTAIN** at December's **Australian Director Guild (ADG) Awards**, where prizes went to fellow **AccLab** alumni **Brietta Hague** (short film **BALTASAR**) and **Sian Davies** with two nods - one for each online series **SURVIVING SUMMER** (ZDF) and **SPREADSHEET** (ITV).

Sundance & Sony: SHAYDA shines

Sony Pictures Classics acquired all rights to the Americas, Benelux, Eastern Europe and Middle East for MIFF **Accelerator Lab** alumna director **Noora Niasari**'s **acclaimed** MIFF **Premiere Fund**-supported **SHAYDA** after its **world premiere** at January's **Sundance Film Festival**.

"I have held the deepest admiration for Sony Pictures Classics since childhood. For my debut feature to be distributed by them is a dream," said Niasari. "They will set the stage for a wonderful release so that audiences worldwide can experience the emotional depth and power of *Shayda*."

Declared "one of 10 films that stood out at Sundance 2023" (amongst 119 selected from 4044 submissions) by *Screen International*, **SHAYDA** won the **Audience Award at Sundance's** exclusive **World Cinema Dramatic Competition** (with just 12-films - another of them being fellow **AccLab** alumna **Alice Englert**'s feature helming debut **BAD BEHAVIOUR**). Executive Producer **Cate Blanchett** told *Deadline* that "whilst set firmly in Australia in the 1990s" the film, inspired by Niasari's mother, in Niasari's "deft hands powerfully resonates domestic personal tribulations into an urgent cultural conversation" given the present situation for women in Iran, which Blanchett described in *Variety* as "hideous, horrible, horrific events that are now unfolding that make this film more timely and more urgent."

Praised by *Guardian Australia* as **one of 2023's ten-most anticipated Australian films**, **SHAYDA**, which stars Cannes best actress-winner **Zar Amir-Ebrahimi** (**HOLY SPIDER**), **Osamah Sami** (*Ali's Wedding*), **Leah Purcell** (*Drover's Wife*) and **Rina Mousavi**, is part of MIFF-2023's **Premiere Fund** slate of "**Stories that need telling**" that also includes **THE ROOSTER**, the directing debut of actor **Mark Leonard Winter** (from **Premiere Fund**-supported films **BALIBO** and **MEASURE FOR MEASURE**) starring **Hugo Weaving** & Iran-born **Phoenix Raei** that was hailed by *Screen International* as one the four Australian films to be on the look-out for in 2023

RECAP: Premiere Fund 2022 slate shines at 70th MIFF

Almost **half 2022's Premiere Fund slate** won **half the places on MIFF-70's top-10 audience-favourite list** derived from votes on the 370-strong program (including 257 features).

- Winning MIFF-70's **Audience Choice** Award, **GREENHOUSE BY JOOST** crowned **most popular film**;
- in **third place** was fellow GoodThing title **VOLCANO MAN** (MIFFregional staging extra screenings, for "remarkable" & "heart-breaking" film, while Shoreline took rights for international sales via **37°South Breakthru Screenings**);
- **eighth** was Acclab alumna **Jub Clerc's SWEET AS** (won **MIFF Awards'** inaugural *BlackMagic \$70,000 Innovation Prize*, with Roadshow taking-on local release after a deadly **MIFF Headliners** world premiere, whilst sales agent Sphere snared international rights at **37°South Breakthru Screenings**);
- **ninth** was Acclab director alumnus **Kasimir Burgess' Hugo Weaving**-narrated feature documentary **FRANKLIN** (Melbourne world premiere with Bob Brown, **MIFFregional's** nine-town **First Night Feature**, **MIFFschools** program and **MIFFplay's** 7th most-watched);

and

- **tenth**, from Acclab alumnus **Goran Stolevski** (discussing **here** Acclab's career-help) was **OF AN AGE** (won *CineFest \$100k Prize*, Roadshow taking local release after dazzling **MIFF 70th Opening Night** world premiere, whilst Bankside earlier sold foreign rights during post to Focus/Uni) which was also MIFF's **most-watched (in-theatre) title**, with other Premiere Fund titles to make MIFF's 25-most-watched in-cinema titles being **SWEET AS** (13th) and **FRANKLIN** (14th), plus:
- **Margot Robbie**-narrated **UNDERCOVER**, a TV-hour version of which has debuted on **ABCiView**, coming-in at 18th on the in-cinema list and fourth most watch title overall on **MIFFplay**;
- At 21st, Acclab alumna **Alena Lodkina's PETROL** (first **Premiere Fund**-supported film world premiering in **MIFF Competition** for new **MIFF Awards'** *\$140,000 Bright Horizons Prize*).
- Other **Premiere Fund**-supported 2022 titles that debuted at MIFF-70 were:
- **SENSES OF CINEMA**, which the recent 2023 **Film Critics Circle of Australia (FCCA) Awards** named Joint **Best Feature Documentary** (along-side Acclab alumnus **Amiel Courtin-Wilson's MAN ON EARTH** and ahead of fellow **Premiere Fund**-supported **VOLCANO MAN**);
- **BECAUSE WE HAVE EACH OTHER**, that had its international premiere at January's **Rotterdam Film Festival** and was nominated for best feature documentary at AIDC (as has **FRANKLIN**), world premiered at **MIFF 2022** and included the PF's first "sensory-friendly/comfort" screening [all PF titles are required to deliver with captions for deaf and audio descriptions for the blind];
- **MOJA VESNA**, which world premiered at 2022's Berlinale Generations ahead of its international premiere at MIFF-70;
- And **THE ENDANGERED GENERATION**, narrated by Oscar-winner **Laura Dern** (*Jurassic Park*).

Factoid

- Premiere Fund films are routinely voted in top-10 favourites by MIFF audiences with others so honoured including, **BRAN NUE DAE** (voted top film overall by MIFF 2009 audiences, followed by top-grossing Australian release and selections for Toronto, London, Dubai, Sundance and Berlin Film Festivals), **BALIBO** (voted second favourite at MIFF 2009 where presence of Jose Ramos Horta generated saturation press coverage), **AUTOLUMINESCENT: ROWLAND S HOWARD**, **BUOYANCY**, (praised as "a powerful reminder of cinema's ability to provide a window to the world" by *Guardian Australia* having won 2019's Berlinale Panorama Ecumenical Jury Prize and Asia Pacific Screen Awards (APSA) Best Youth Feature Film, and Australia's 2020 Oscars entry), **COMING BACK OUT BALL MOVIE, H IS FOR HAPPINESS** (opened Berlinale 2020's Generation K- plus having won 2019's CineFest \$100k Prize, with Jury Chair **Rachel Ward** saying: "If we have the power as jurors to change the world to be a better place, then voting for *H is for Happiness* to win CinefestOZ 2019 is our contribution"), **IN BOB WE TRUST, EMO THE MUSICAL, MOTHER OF ROCK: LILLIAN ROXAN, NO TIME FOR QUIET, PUTUPARRI & THE RAINMAKERS** (won 2015's CineFest \$100k Prize, with Jury Chair **David Wenham** remarking: "A story and characters so compelling and emotionally engaging that it reinforced the power of cinema to entertain, touch us deeply and stay with us forever"), **UNDERMINED: TALES FROM THE KIMBERLEY, SONG KEEPERS, WEDDING PARTY**

PREMIERE FUND FILMS: charming critics & winning awards

MIFF **Premiere Fund**-supported films and filmmakers (many of them also **MIFF Accelerator Lab (AcLab)** alumni) are being lauded more than ever:

- Two **AcLab** alumni-directed **Premiere Fund**-supported titles made *Guardian Australia's Ten Most Anticipated Australian Films of 2023*: **Noora Niasari's SHAYDA** and **Goran Stolevski's OF AN AGE**;
- Three **Premiere Fund**-supported titles made *Guardian Australia's Ten Best Australian Films of 2022*: in 9th spot was **AcLab** alumnus Kasimir Burgess' **FRANKLIN** (which was also nominated for a *Walkley Award*), 7th was **MOJA VESNA**, and in 5th spot was MIFF 2021's **LITTLE TORNADOES** (which won the prize for Best Direction of low-budget narrative feature at December's Australian Director Guild Awards for **AcLab** alumus Aaron Wilson);
- Eight **Premiere Fund**-supported titles made *FilmInk's Top 2022 Cinema Films*, led by **MOJA VESNA** (which the magazine hailed as "one of the best Australian features in recent memory," with *TIME OUT* adding "this Melbourne-set melancholia is worth the watch"), and followed by **FRANKLIN, UNDERCOVER, GREENHOUSE BY JOOST,, ANONYMOUS CLUB, ABLAZE, CHEF ANTONIO'S RECIPES FOR REVOLUTION** (which airs this week on SBS-tv on March 20th to coincide with World Down Syndrome Day), **LITTLE TORNADOES**;
- **MOJA VESNA** also scored four nominations (Best Film, Actress (Loti Kovacic), and Sara Kern for both direction & screenplay) in the upcoming **Australian Film Critics Association (AFCA) Awards**, where three **Premiere Fund**-supported films compete for Best Documentary: MIFF 2021's **ABLAZE** (which won **Best Documentary Feature** at December's **Australian Directors Guild Awards**) MIFF 2022's **FRANKLIN** and **ANONYMOUS CLUB** (MIFF 2021 & SxSW 2022)
- **NITRAM** won a place in *The Season's Most Overlooked Performances* from London-based critic **Guy Lodge** (*Guardian, Observer, Variety*), who marvelled at the performance of **Judy Davis** as the "hardened but haunted mother, her scalpel-carved mouth tensely pursed around a cigarette as she stares down the impossible abyss of parental failure" in "Justin Kurzel's "harrowing, dread-filled" and further noted: "Davis has been away from the big screen since 2015; here she reminds us why she remains one of its most searing presences."
- **MIFF Accelerator Lab** alumnus director **Adrian Francis'** **Premiere Fund**-supported **PAPER CITY** won the Audience Award at its Japanese premiere in January's Tokyo Documentary Film Festival - the latest in the long-tail festival/awards life for **PAPER CITY** which world premiered at MIFF 2021, had its international premiere at 2022's Santa Barbara International Film Festival and is being re-versioned for **Al Jazeera Witness**.
- The prestigious **Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Drama** was bestowed (for script **THE RETURN**) upon **AcLab** alumnus **John Harvey** who earlier won (with co-director Rhian Skirving), for NITV's serialisation of MIFF 2021 **Premiere Fund**-supported feature documentary **OFF COUNTRY** (streaming at **SBS-On-Demand**), the **Best Documentary TV Series Episode Direction** prize at December's **Australian Directors Guild Awards**, where **Best Documentary Feature Direction** winner was fellow MIFF 2021 **Premiere Fund**-supported title **ABLAZE** (showing now on **ABCiView**).
- Also on **ABCiView** is **AcLab** alumnus **Dylan River's** six-part **MYSTERY ROAD: ORIGIN** which had its international premiere at September's **Toronto International Film Festival Prime-Time** section



MIFF INDUSTRY

Celebrating 15-years of stories that need telling. . .

PREMIERE FUND FILMS: *Statistics that need sharing . . .*

Continuing to support **diverse voices** telling **vital stories**, across the 2022 slate:

- Some 54% of films had **female directors**, and 64% had female producers
- 45% had Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) themes/major characters, while 45% had CALD creative principals (director(s)/producer(s))
- 33% featured LGBTQ+ themes/key-characters; 27% had LGBTQ+ creative principals
- 27% had First Nations' themes/key-characters, with 9% First Nations creative principals
- 63% had regional themes/shoots, while 54% had youth themes
- 45% highlighted issues around health, disability and/or mental-health
- One-third significantly-featured Languages Other Than English (LOTE)
- Investment in 11 films had Victorian state spend leveraging of 11:1 and overall production budget leveraging factor of 17:1
- 37% secured elements of their financing/distribution at MIFF **37°South Market**
- 37% were helmed by first-time directors, and 37% were directed by **AccLab alumni**

Cumulatively, of the **90+** co-financed & screened **Premiere Fund films** thus far:

- Some 31% of films had female directors, and 63% had female producers
- 32% had Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) themes/major characters, while 12% had CALD creative principals (director(s)/producer(s))
- 18% featured LGBTQ+ themes/key-characters; 22% had LGBTQ+ creative principals
- 20% had First Nations' themes/key-characters, with 9% First Nations creative principals
- 48% had regional themes/shoots, while 46% had youth themes
- 50% highlighted issues around health, disability and/or mental-health
- 21% significantly-featured Languages Other Than English (LOTE); with more than 25 languages to date, including Amharic, Arabic, Bahasa- Indonesian, Burmese, Butchella, Cantonese, English, Farsi, Filipino, French, Guna, Gunditjmara, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Maori, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, Spanish, Tagalog, Thai, Ukrainian, Yiddish
- Investments stimulated Victorian state spend leveraging of 10:1 overall production budget leveraging factor of 21:1
- 43% secured elements of their financing/distribution at MIFF **37°South Market**
- 14% of titles (in 10 out 15 years) premiered in Gala slots (six Opening, three Mid-Point, two Family, and two Closing) including **BALIBO, BRAN NUE DAE, COMING BACK OUT BALL MOVIE, H IS FOR HAPPINESS, JUNGLE, NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD, OF AN AGE, PAPER PLANES, SAVE YOUR LEGS, SWEET AS, TURNING, WEDDING PARTY**
- 48% were helmed by first-time directors, and 27% were directed by **AccLab alumni**

RECAP: Abundant **AccLab alumni** at 70th MIFF

MIFF's 70th featured 15 Australia/NZ titles from **19 MIFF Acc Lab alumni** including:

- **Alena Lodkina**, with **PETROL**, the first **Premiere Fund**-supported film world premiering in MIFF Competition seeking the \$140,000 Bright Horizons Prize at the inaugural **MIFF Awards** and also the first Australian film in 26 years competing at Locarno Film Festival, where sales agent Alief took foreign rights
- **Jub Clerc** whose **Premiere Fund**-supported **SWEET AS** world premiered in MIFF **Headliners** and won **MIFF Awards'** inaugural *BlackMagic \$70k Innovation Prize*
- **Stef Smith**, with CannesSeries2022-selected 12-part short-form series **IT'S FINE, I'M FINE** which later was adapted for SBS-tv drama;
- **Michelle Savill** with Kiwi dramedy **MILLIE LIES LOW** (later selected for Berlinale 2023)
- **Rudolf Fitzgerald-Leonard** with short film **TREMOR**;
- **Kasimir Burgess**, whose **Hugo Weaving**-narrated **Premiere Fund**-supported **FRANKLIN** world premiered as First Night Film across **MIFFregional's** nine-towns)

- **Amiel Courtin-Wilson** with feature documentary **MAN ON EARTH** which the recent 2023 **Film Critics Circle of Australia (FCCA) Awards** named Joint Best Documentary with **Premiere Fund**-supported **SENSES OF CINEMA**.

MIFF **Acc Lab alumni** with double-entries at **MIFF-70** were:

- **Goran Stolevski** with *Guardian Australia's* top-2022 Australian film **YOU WON'T BE ALONE** and **Premiere Fund**-supported **OF AN AGE**, which world premiered as 70th MIFF Opening and won Cinefest \$100k Prize);
- **David Easteal**, with Rotterdam-2022-selected **THE PLAINS** and short **MONACO**
- **Eddie Martin**, with feature documentaries **WE WERE ONCE KIDS** and **FIRE FRONT**
- **Tracey Rigney** with short film **ENDANGERED** and **WE ARE STILL HERE**, an Australia-New Zealand First Nations anthology film also directed by **AcLab alumni** Chantelle Burgoyne, Danielle MacLean, Dena Curtis, Mario Gaoa, Miki Magasiva, Renae Maihi, Richard Curtis, & Tim Worrall



Accelerator Lab is possible thanks to multi-year funding from Principal Government Partners **Screen Australia** and **VicScreen**; with Major Government Partner the **City of Melbourne**; and support from Official Government Partner the **New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC)**, and key partners **FACB** (First Australian Completion Bond Company) and **AFTRS** (Australian Film, TV & Radio School).

MIFF INDUSTRY

Operating with Victorian Government funding since commencing in 2007, **MIFF Industry** reinforces Melbourne's standing as a creative city and supports the Antipodean screen sector through selective programs to enable creative connections and foster creative collaborations in myriad manners and levels, including: **37°South Market** to facilitate sourcing, acquisition, development & production-financing of local screen content & talent; **Accelerator Lab** to nurture emerging directors; and **MIFF Premiere Fund** to support co-commissioning Australian "stories that need telling" into films which then premiere at MIFF. **MIFF Industry** also offers a limited collection of on-sale-to-the-public **ticketed-sessions** - specialist subjects for audience niches, media students, film culture buffs, select industry personnel, and film lovers in general - which have included: **Illustrated Film Talks**; **AcLab's Behind the Scenes** classes; **Script+Story Seminars**; and other **Special Events**.

MIFF Industry events occur during the **Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF)**, which, having celebrated 70-years in 2022, is amongst the world's oldest film festivals - and one of the largest; each August MIFF runs **public screenings & events** (including feature films, shorts, talks, XR projects & TV-specials) across CBD, suburban, regional & digital contexts, plus **Schools**, **Critics Campus**, **Short Awards**, and in 2022 introduced the Southern Hemisphere's richest film **Competition** with a top prize of \$140,000 - leading **VARIETY** to declare: "**MIFF has to be one of the lengthiest, liveliest and now most lucrative film festivals in the world.**"



MIFF Industry acknowledges traditional custodians of Country across Australia, and pays respect to Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and celebrates the history and creativity of the world's oldest living culture