

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

4 – 15 JUNE 2025

FIRST FILMS ANNOUNCED FOR SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL 2025

The 72nd Sydney Film Festival (4–15 June) today revealed a sneak peek of 16 bold new films set to screen this June, offering a taste of the 2025 program ahead of the full Festival announcement on Wednesday 7 May.

“This first look offers a cross-section of the bold storytelling and distinctive voices that can be found at this year’s Festival,” said **Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley**. “From inventive new Australian work to major prize-winners from the international circuit, these films reflect the ingenuity and diversity of cinema today, and offer a glimpse of the rich and rewarding program to come.”

Two new Australian features will have their premieres at this year’s Festival. ***Fwends***, the debut feature from Sophie Somerville, a two-time Dendy Award-winner (*Peeps*, SFF 2021; *linda 4 eva*, SFF 2023), is a fast-talking buddy comedy about modern female friendship. In ***Lesbian Space Princess***, a Berlin Teddy Award-winning animated feature, an introverted heir to the throne goes on a mission to rescue her ex-girlfriend from evil incel aliens.

From SFF alum Kate Blackmore (*The Butter Scene*, SFF 2021) comes ***Make It Look Real***, a layered documentary following internationally in-demand intimacy coordinator Claire Warden as she works with actors and filmmakers on the set of an Australian feature.

Award-winning titles in this year’s sneak peek include ***The Blue Trail***, winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the 2025 Berlinale, about a 77-year-old woman who embarks on a mind-altering journey through the Amazon rather than submit to a dystopian fate. Sundance Audience Award-winner ***DJ Ahmet*** tells the story of a 15-year-old boy in a remote North Macedonian village who discovers electronic dance music, first love and the liberating power of art.

Among the prize-winning documentaries are: ***Mr. Nobody Against Putin***, winner of Sundance’s World Cinema Documentary Special Jury Prize, which follows a charismatic Russian teacher who secretly films the propaganda infiltrating his school during the invasion of Ukraine. ***Farming the Revolution***, which took out the top prize at Hot Docs, details the 13-month protest by 12 million Indian farmers who camped on the outskirts of Delhi to challenge unjust laws.

Star-driven international features include ***Bring Them Down***, starring Barry Keoghan (*The Banshees of Inisherin*) and Christopher Abbott in a drama of rivalry and retribution in rural Ireland. In ***The End***, director Joshua Oppenheimer (*The Act of Killing*, SFF 2013) makes his narrative debut with a post-apocalyptic musical set in an underground compound, starring Tilda Swinton and Michael Shannon.



Two music-focused documentaries also feature. **One to One: John & Yoko** is Oscar-winner Kevin Macdonald's (*Whitney*, SFF 2018) new film built around John Lennon and Yoko Ono's historic 1972 Madison Square Garden benefit concert, and **Marlon Williams: Ngā Ao e Rua – Two Worlds**, a portrait of the beloved Aotearoa musician as he reconnects with his roots and records his first album in te reo Māori.

A number of titles that made waves on the international festival circuit are included in this year's first look. **Stranger Eyes**, the first Singaporean film to screen in competition at Venice, is a twist-filled thriller about a grieving couple who receive anonymous surveillance footage after their baby goes missing. **On Becoming a Guinea Fowl**, a Cannes-selected drama from *I Am Not a Witch* (SFF 2017) director Rungano Nyoni, sees a Zambian family confront hard truths following the death of a relative.

From Sundance, documentary **Speak** follows five U.S. high school orators as they prepare for the country's most prestigious public speaking competition. Also from Sundance is **Obex**, a lo-fi, '80s-set genre blend about a reclusive man who enters a mysterious video game to rescue his missing dog.

Finally, **Exergue – on documenta 14** is an unprecedented 14-hour documentary, filmed over several years, charting one of the most major and politically charged art exhibitions in recent history, staged across both Germany and Greece.

Flexipasses and Subscriptions to Sydney Film Festival 2025 are on sale now. Call 1300 733 733 or visit sff.org.au for more information. The full Sydney Film Festival program is announced on Wednesday 7 May 2025, when tickets to specific film sessions will be on-sale.

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

EDITOR'S NOTES

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

The Sydney Film Festival is one of the world's longest-running and most prestigious film festivals. The 72nd edition, taking place from 4 to 15 June 2025, will showcase the very best in contemporary cinema and offer audiences the chance to experience premieres, red carpet events, and exciting special programs across Sydney.

The Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW and Destination NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia, and the City of Sydney.

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FEATURES

THE BLUE TRAIL

Dir. Gabriel Mascaro | Brazil, Mexico, Netherlands, Chile | 86 mins | In Portuguese with English subtitles | Australian premiere



This 2025 Berlinale Grand Jury Prize-winning delight from Gabriel Mascaro (*Neon Bull*, SFF 2016) sees a remarkable woman try to evade a dystopian fate via a grand Amazonian quest.

The near future. Having lived her 77 years in a small Brazilian town, Tereza (Denise Weinberg) receives a government order to relocate to a senior's housing colony – a place from which no one has ever returned. But before agreeing, Tereza decides to fulfil a long-held dream to fly on a plane. Unable to buy a ticket but undeterred, she hitches a boat ride with skipper Cadu (Rodrigo Santoro, *Love, Actually*), who introduces Tereza to the psychedelic use of a rare blue snail. Her journey through the Amazon's rivers and tributaries becomes a mind- and destiny-altering one. With its stunning imagery, Mascaro's unforgettable, anti-authoritarian fable is filled with surprises, delight and magic.

BRING THEM DOWN

Dir. Christopher Andrews | Ireland | 105 mins | In English and Irish Gaelic with English subtitles | Premiere status: Australian premiere

Oscar-nominee Barry Keoghan (*The Banshees of Inisherin*) and Christopher Abbott star in this searing drama of rivalry and retribution in an Irish farming community. Toronto 2024.

The burden of family expectations and the corrosive effects of male violence run deep in Christopher Andrews' gripping debut feature. Sheep farmer Michael (Abbott, *Piercing*, SFF 2018) is consumed by a long-ago tragedy and constantly berated by his embittered father (Irish great Colm Meaney). Jack (*Saltburn*'s Keoghan) is the meek-looking son of Michael's neighbour and rival, Gary. A dispute over prized rams sees old wounds burst open and hostilities between them escalate. What seems a simple story becomes increasingly suspenseful – and bloody – as Andrews' inventive screenplay brings new perspectives into play. Nora-Jane Noone is outstanding as Caroline, the sole woman in this whirlpool of poisonous male pride.

DJ AHMET

Dir. Georgi M. Unkovski | North Macedonia | 99 mins | In Turkish and Macedonian with English subtitles | Australian premiere

Charming, funny and uplifting, this Sundance Audience Award-winner tells the story of a 15-year-old North Macedonian boy who finds refuge in dance music and in first love.

Ahmet and his brother Naim are growing up in a family scarred by grief in a remote village, conservative as it is superstitious. The boys' stern father has no qualms forcing Ahmet to work on the family sheep farm rather than let him go to school, whilst he takes his little brother Naim, silent since his mother's death, to a suspect healer. Into this grim reality enters the beautiful Aya, who has returned from Germany in order to enter an arranged marriage. When Ahmet discovers a secret rave he is immediately transfixed by the music, and by Aya, and sees a path to a more joyous and free life. With a mostly non-professional cast, director Georgi M. Unkovski has made an authentic, jubilant feature debut about art's liberating power.

THE END

Dir. Joshua Oppenheimer | Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, UK, Sweden, USA | 148 mins | In English | Australian premiere

Tilda Swinton and Michael Shannon star in Joshua Oppenheimer's (*The Act of Killing*, SFF 2013) daring narrative debut – a post-apocalyptic musical about the last family on earth.

Deep underground, in a compound inside a salt mine, a nameless wealthy family and their close friends and servants live a seemingly cheery life. Mum (Swinton) fusses over her fine art collection. Dad (Shannon), a former oil baron, reminisces fondly, but maybe a little defensively, about his life and work before the environmental collapse – while Son (George MacKay), too young to remember, writes up his father's romanticised stories as a memoir. When a young woman (Moses Ingram) shows up unexpectedly, an infatuated Son starts to question the family narrative. This Toronto-selected genre concoction blends dystopian love story with unsettling musical numbers and a cutting satire of privilege and denial.



FWENDS

Dir. Sophie Somerville | Australia | 92 mins | In English and French with English subtitles | Australian premiere

Two besties reunite over a weekend in Melbourne in this freewheeling, fast-talking buddy comedy about modern female friendship. A buoyant, Berlinale prizewinning feature debut.

Taking a breather from her Sydney lawyer job, Em heads to Melbourne to reconnect with her old friend Jessie for the weekend. Where Jessie's head is in the clouds, Em is decidedly more level-headed. From the city to the inner north, the two twentysomethings walk and talk, bonding over office horror stories, breakups and existential crises. Long takes and meaty monologues lend a distinct vulnerability to this tale of modern female friendship from two-time Dendy Award-winning filmmaker Sophie Somerville (for *Peeps*, SFF 2021, and *linda 4 eva*, SFF 2023). *Fwends*, her feature debut and winner of the Berlinale Forum's Caligari Film Prize for innovation, is a prickly and perceptive slice of mumblecore, Australian style.

LESBIAN SPACE PRINCESS

Dir. Leela Varghese and Emma Hough Hobbs | Australia | 86 mins | In English | Australian premiere

Introverted lesbian space princess Saira goes on an inter-gay-lactic mission to rescue her ex from evil incel aliens in this riotous, Berlin Teddy Award-winning Aussie animation.

Awarded LGBTQIA+ cinema's highest honour at Berlin, this rip-roaring comedy centres on Saira, introvert heir to the throne of planet Clitopolis. She's still reeling from being dumped by her hot bounty hunter girlfriend, Kiki, when Kiki is kidnapped by the "Straight White Aliens". Steeling herself, Saira recruits the help of an enby popstar and a cantankerous boomer spaceship and launches a mission to rescue Kiki and, she hopes, win her back. The love child of Adelaide's Leela Varghese and Emma Hough Hobbs, complete with a stellar voice cast including Shabana Azeez (*Birdeater*, SFF23), Richard Roxburgh, and the Auntie Donna boys, *Lesbian Space Princess* is a one-of-a-kind, out of this world triumph.

OBEX

Dir. Albert Birney | United States | 90 mins | In English | Australian premiere

This gloriously weird, lo-fi mix of sci-fi, fantasy, comedy and horror set in 1987 follows a reclusive nerd's quest into a mysterious video game to rescue his dog. Sundance 2025.

Whirring floppy disks and clickety-clacking dot matrix printers rule both the real and virtual worlds in this eccentric, handcrafted delight by Baltimore filmmaker Albert Birney (*Strawberry Mansion*, 2021). Conor (played by Birney) is an oddball hermit whose dog Sandy goes missing soon after he installs a new interactive game called OBEX. In search of Sandy, Conor is transported into the fantastical realms of OBEX, where a fearsome computer demon awaits. Amid the nostalgic glow of monochrome photography and fabulous '80s synth music – cooked up by Josh Dibb, aka Geologist of Animal Collective – *OBEX* might be pre-dial-up but it has much to say about the relationship between humans and screens today.

ON BECOMING A GUINEA FOWL

Dir. Rungano Nyoni | Zambia, United Kingdom, Ireland | 99 mins | In Bemba and English with English subtitles | NSW premiere

In Rungano Nyoni's surreal and searing Cannes-selected drama, a Zambian family comes to terms with hard truths as the funeral of a relative sparks revelations and disputes.

Nyoni's buzzy debut, *I Am Not a Witch* (SFF 2017), announced a major new talent. She delivers on her promise with this potent, meticulously crafted and comic tale of a Zambian family's descent into darkness. One night while driving, Shula (Susan Chardy) – dressed outlandishly, for reasons only made clear later – comes upon the corpse of her uncle. She reports her grisly discovery without any sadness. Only gradually is it revealed why Shula and her cousins are largely indifferent to their uncle's death, as past trauma resurfaces to reveal a community riven by abuse, sexism and greed. Intricately culturally specific, *On Becoming a Guinea Fowl* finds universality in its brilliant depiction of complex familial ties.



STRANGER EYES

Dir. Yeo Siew Hua | Singapore, Taiwan, France, United States | 126 mins | In Mandarin with English subtitles | Australian premiere

Anonymous CCTV recordings show up on a grieving couple's doorstep after their baby goes missing in this twisty thriller, the first-ever Singaporean film in competition at Venice.

In bustling Singapore, young couple Junyang (Wu Chien-ho) and Peiyong (Anicca Panna) are despondent after the abduction of their child. Soon, they begin receiving DVDs with footage of their final moments with her, setting off a tense police investigation. Suspicion falls on their enigmatic neighbour, Wu (longtime Tsai Ming-liang collaborator Lee Kang-sheng, superb), and surveillance on everyone intensifies, causing cracks in the couple's own façade. Soon, buried secrets and hidden desires surface in their cramped high-rise apartment. This evocative and surprising thriller from Locarno winner Yeo Siew Hua (*A Land Imagined*) brings *Rear Window* and *Hidden (Caché)* into the age of screens, surveillance culture and urban sprawl.

DOCUMENTARIES

EXERGUE – ON DOCUMENTA 14

Dir. Dimitris Athiridis | Greece | 848 mins | In English | Australian premiere

Over 14 incredible hours, this monumental, addictive documentary follows curator Adam Szymczyk and his team as they assemble the world's most prominent art exhibition, documenta.

As he took on the huge task of curating the 2017 edition of documenta, Szymczyk made the crucial decision to stage the prestigious exhibition not only in its hometown of Kassel, Germany, but also in Athens, at a time when Greece was subject to harsh austerity measures by more prosperous European nations. Szymczyk and his curatorial team also took a radical approach, seeking to present a number of intensely political works. Media scandals, logistical challenges, financial deficits, and political fallout followed. With behind-the-scenes access to the key players, *exergue – on documenta 14* is absolutely vital viewing for curators, arts workers, and everyone with a serious interest in how arts organisations function. ***Each screening will take place over three days in 4-5 hour segments with scheduled 15 minute intervals.***

FARMING THE REVOLUTION

Dir. Nishtha Jain | India, France, Norway | 100 mins | In Punjabi and Hindi with English subtitles | NSW premiere

This immersive documentary captures a mass movement in vivid close-up, as 12 million farmers challenge the Indian government, forcing it to retract its unjust farm laws.

For 13 months between 2020-21, 12 million farmers in Punjab, in the north of India, took to the streets protesting the government's unjust farm laws. They occupied the outskirts of the capital city of Delhi, setting up a tent-city that only expanded over the protest's duration. In *Farming the Revolution*, Nishtha Jain applies a microscope to this exceptional moment in Indian history.

Characters slip in and out of this quietly compelling film as the farmers and their families endure the brutal summer and cold winter, and come together to advocate for justice as though it was the most natural thing to do. Ultimately gesturing towards hope, this monumental achievement took out the top prize at Hot Docs 2024.

MAKE IT LOOK REAL

Dir. Kate Blackmore | Australia | 78 mins | In English | NSW premiere

For the first time on screen, witness the important work of an intimacy coordinator, one of the most discussed film industry jobs today, in this buzzy Australian SXSW title.

Claire Warden is an internationally in-demand intimacy coordinator who has helped to choreograph numerous sex scenes in major Hollywood films and TV shows. Hired for the Australian film *Tightrope* by director Kieran Darcy-Smith, Warden must balance his vision with the safety and comfort of the



actors, ensuring both parties feel supported. There are scenes to be blocked and modesty garments to be designed, all in line with the actors' personal boundaries. Blending insight and entertainment, this layered documentary feature debut from SFF alum Kate Blackmore (*The Butter Scene*, 2021) illustrates the benefits of having an intimacy coordinator on set as it reveals how the illusion of sex on screen is made.

MARLON WILLIAMS NGĀ AO E RUA – TWO WORLDS

Dir. Ursula Grace Williams | New Zealand | 92 mins | In English and Māori with English subtitles | Australian premiere

Follow the charming Aotearoa New Zealand singer-songwriter on a life-changing journey of self-exploration as he embraces his roots and creates his first album in te reo Māori.

Beloved for his alt-bluegrass stylings, Christchurch-born Marlon Williams has spent years on the road, touring with the likes of Florence + The Machine and Bruce Springsteen, and even making a fan of Bradley Cooper, who handpicked the musician to appear in *A Star Is Born*. This sensitive documentary finds Williams at a crossroads: he returns home to reconnect with his Ngāi Tahu and Ngāi Tai roots, and to write an album entirely in te reo Māori – calling upon his friend Lorde to contribute. Director Ursula Grace Williams crafts a loving portrait of an artist at his peak. Set against stunning Aotearoa New Zealand landscapes, her film celebrates the creativity that flows from exploring one's own heritage and identity.

MR. NOBODY AGAINST PUTIN

Dir. David Borenstein | Denmark, Czech Republic | 90 mins | In Russian with English subtitles | Australian premiere

This urgent, Sundance prize-winning documentary follows a brave and charismatic Russian teacher as he exposes shocking new propaganda at his school amid the invasion of Ukraine.

Pavel "Pasha" Talankin loves his job as a teacher in the small Russian town of Karabash – until his country invades Ukraine. He is outraged by the new government propaganda in the curriculum, not to mention the school's being used as a military recruitment ground. In class, Pasha finds ways to playfully protest the regime; more crucially, he becomes a whistleblower, secretly filming the alarming shifts under the guise of his work as school videographer. He risks his life to send the footage overseas to filmmaker David Borenstein – while also planning his own escape. Winner of Sundance's World Cinema Documentary Special Jury Prize, this hugely daring and noble collaboration is one of the strongest docs of the year.

ONE TO ONE: JOHN & YOKO

Dir. Kevin Macdonald | United Kingdom | 100 mins | In English | Australian premiere

In this astonishing doc by Oscar-winner Kevin Macdonald, the rock royalty duo let loose onstage at their historic "One to One" concert and let their hair down at home in NYC.

In the early 1970s, John Lennon and Yoko Ono spent 18 months in a small Greenwich Village apartment, absorbing the New York scene and, by their own admission, watching a lot of TV. Both things would shape the music they were making and their activism too – culminating in what would be Lennon's only full-length post-Beatles performance, alongside Yoko: the "One to One" benefit concert at Madison Square Garden. Interweaving the incredible live footage – vividly restored and remastered – with a trove of candid photos and never-before-seen home movie clips, Oscar-winner Kevin Macdonald (*Whitney*, SFF 2018) and co-director Sam Rice-Edwards immerse viewers in this fraught but fecund time in American history.

SPEAK.

Dir. Guy Mossman and Jennifer Tiexiera | United States | 103 mins | In English | Premiere status: uncertain

Five talented U.S. high school orators prepare for the ultimate public speaking tournament in this rousing, Sundance-selected doc that has echoes of *Spellbound* (SFF 2003).

Each year, the most articulate and ambitious students from across the United States gather for the National Speech & Debate Association's highly prestigious public speaking competition, with notable



alumni including Oprah, Bruce Springsteen and Paul Rudd. *Speak.* follows five top contenders in the lead-up to the 2024 edition, as they obsessively rehearse and refine speeches that bravely tackle hot-button social and political topics including race, sexuality, disability and discrimination. This crowd-pleaser from Jennifer Tiexiera (*Subject*, SFF 2023) and Guy Mossman offers a beacon of hope for the next generation of leaders, and will have you cheering for your favourites as you get to know each competitor up close.

