

Full programme announced for 37th BFI Flare: London LGBTQIA+ Film Festival 2023

The programme includes a BFI Flare first: a selection of immersive art and virtual reality works from boundary-pushing LGBTQIA+ artists.

15 February 2023



Little Richard: I Am Everything (2023)

The 37th edition of BFI Flare: London LGBTQIA+ Film Festival (15 to 26 March), one of the world's most significant and long-standing queer film events in the LGBTQIA+ calendar, revealed its full programme today. BFI Flare will take place at BFI Southbank, and also offer a selection of titles on BFI Player to UK-wide audiences, and to international audiences via Five Films for Freedom – now in its eighth year, in partnership with The British Council.



BFI Southbank will be buzzing with special events and DJ nights during the festival, and for the first time will present Flare Expanded for the first four days of the festival from 16 to 19 March. BFI Flare is divided into three thematic programme strands: Hearts, Bodies and Minds and this year presents 28 world premieres (across features and shorts) with 58 features and 90 shorts from 41 countries. Tickets go on sale on 22 February for BFI members and 24 February for the general public.

“For the past 37 years, BFI Flare has brought audiences the best, most innovative and most boundary pushing LGBTQIA+ stories from across the globe,” says senior programmer Michael Blyth. “But as our audiences constantly grow and evolve, the festival must grow and evolve with them. This year, in addition to our world-class showcase of contemporary queer film, we will take audiences beyond the cinema screen with BFI Flare Expanded, a free programme of queer immersive art guaranteed to offer new insights and shift perspectives.”

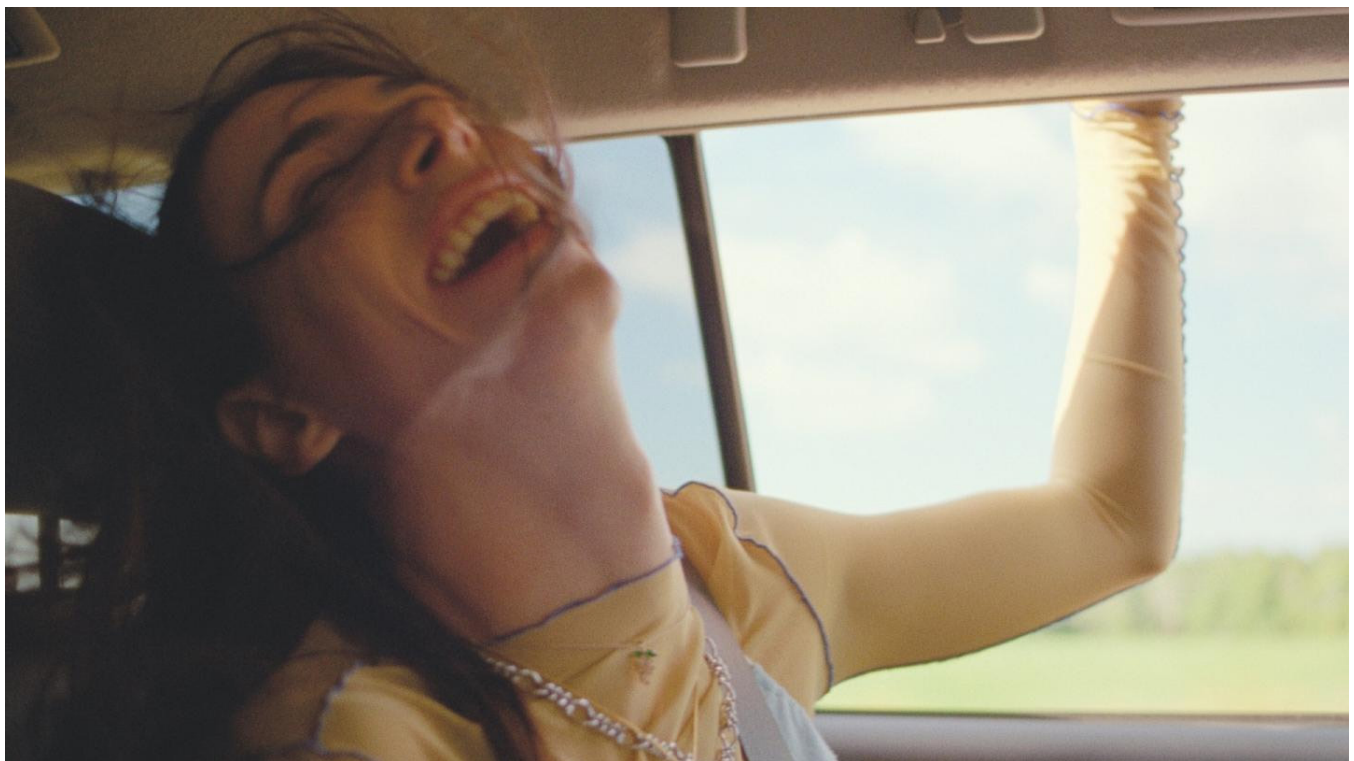
As previously announced, BFI Flare opens on Wednesday 15 March with the international premiere of Kristen Lovell and Zackary Drucker’s resonant documentary *The Stroll*, which won the Sundance Film Festival’s Special Jury Award: Clarity of Vision Award. The stirring and deeply personal documentary is the definitive story of trans sex workers of colour in New York’s Meatpacking District. The festival’s closing film on Saturday 25 March is the UK premiere of Hannes Hirsch’s debut feature *Drifter*, fresh off its world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival, the film is a scintillating portrait of a young man coming to terms with life, love, sex and relationships in contemporary Berlin. Both films and many in the festival demonstrate the themes of community and friendship running through this

year's programme. In addition, Tünde Skovrán's intimate documentary *Who I Am Not* will have its UK premiere as the Centrepiece Presentation. The film is an intimate portrait of the lives of two intersex South Africans and the challenges they face navigating binary sex and gender systems.

World premiere screenings the festival will be presenting include John Hay's illuminating documentary *Willem & Frieda*, where Stephen Fry investigates the inspiring and moving story of a gay man and a lesbian who led anti-Nazi resistance in Holland. Timothy Harris's timely documentary *Kenyatta: Do Not Wait Your Turn* follows 31-year-old Pennsylvania State Representative Malcolm Kenyatta who takes us along on his race to become the first openly gay person of colour with a seat in the United States senate.

Corin Sherman's hilarious and heart-warming *Big Boys* is a coming-of-age comedy about a teenage boy experiencing a sexual awakening when he falls for his cousin's boyfriend on a camping trip. Acclaimed filmmaker Shamim Sarif's visually arresting feature *Polarized* explores the unavoidable attraction that develops between two women as they navigate the barriers of race, religion and class that have kept them apart.

Two new mums navigate questions of intimacy and shifting power-dynamics in Emily Railsback's *American Parent*, a heartfelt exploration of queer parenthood. Mandy Fabian's lively and laugh-out-loud romantic comedy *Jess Plus None* follows Jess who is at an off-the-grid wedding and must find a way to deal with her ex, her friends and even herself.



Something You Said Last Night (2022)

The BFI Flare programme features trans filmmakers telling their own stories, with the previously mentioned *The Stroll* and also fresh from Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Audience Award and NEXT Innovator Award, D. Smith's bold documentary *Kokomo City*, about Black trans sex workers, that buzzes with passion, energy and intelligence. D. Smith knows what it means to come out as a Black trans woman and lose everything. After a successful career in the music industry ended, she turned to filmmaking, and, in the face of considerable odds, shot this punchy debut that looks into the lives of four sex workers. This is documentary filmmaking that pulls no punches and has no time for politeness.

This year's programme also features a number of films which showcase a progressive evolution of queer narratives, and trans narratives in particular. *Something You Said Last Night*, supported by BFI Flare main sponsor Campari, is a refreshingly authentic family drama. Director Luis De Filippis's stunning debut mined her own experiences as a transgender woman of Italian heritage to tease out extraordinary depth in the everyday relationships between twentysomething trans woman Renata and her family on vacation. Trace Lysette (*Transparent*, *Hustlers*) is captivating in *Monica*, a beautifully understated family drama, playing a woman belatedly seeking to rekindle a relationship with her estranged mother, magnificently played by Patricia Clarkson. The screening is supported by the Interbank LGBT+ Forum members.



XX + YY (2022)

Alongside the previously mentioned *Who I Am Not*, Soh-Yoon Lee's *XX + XY* follows an intersex teen and their friends navigating the complex feelings and urges that come with adolescence, in this unique coming-of-age comedy. The film is a fresh, funny and sex-positive spin on the high-school comedy, giving a voice to those whose stories are all too often overlooked by this genre.

Before *I Change My Mind*, BFI Flare shorts alumni Trevor Anderson's feature debut, is a hilarious and nail-biting rollercoaster ride through teen angst, crushes and friendships, following Robin, an androgynous newcomer at high school who refuses to join the binary world of single sex sports teams. A delightful road movie about connecting with your heritage, self-acceptance and finding love in unexpected places, *Egghead and Twinkie* is a sweet coming-of-age comedy featuring a young Asian American girl and her hapless best friend who hit the road to meet her online crush.



LGBTQ+ VR Museum

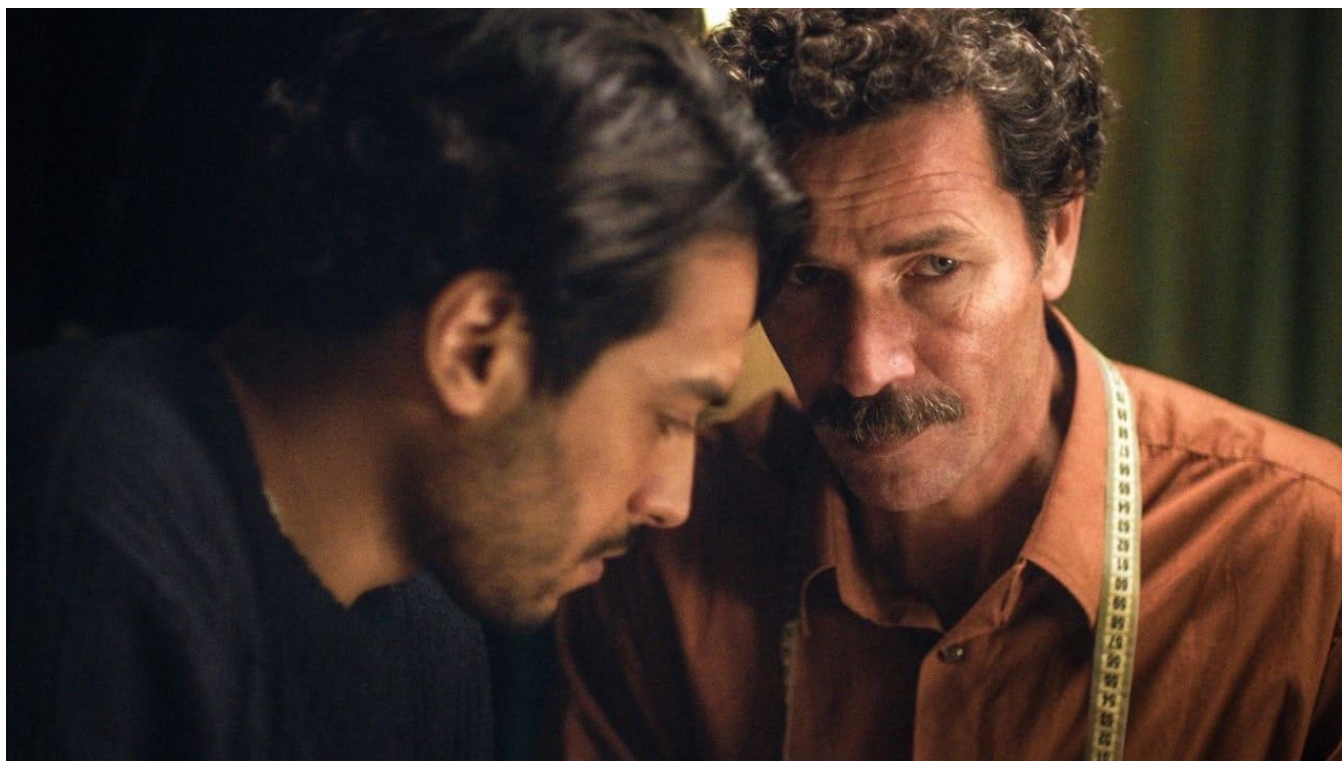
Over the first four days of the festival, we will be presenting BFI Flare Expanded – a selection of four immersive art and virtual reality works from boundary-pushing LGBTQIA+ artists, working across emerging technologies such as interactive virtual reality, screen-based installations and 3D-scanning. Exploring themes of identity, belonging, self-expression and vulnerability, these powerful and visionary works aim to shift perspectives and give new insight into our increasingly complex world.

- LGBTQ+ VR Museum – Conceived by acclaimed British creative technologist Antonia Forster, along with Thomas Terkildsen, this immersive project is the world's first virtual reality museum. Containing 3D scans of personal artifacts chosen by people in the LGBTQ+ community and accompanied by stories told in their own words.
- He F**** the Girl Out of Me – Taylor McCue's provocative and hugely affecting interactive game tells the deeply personal and moving story of Ann, a trans person from America, who is forced into sex work to pay for the costs of her hormone replacement therapy – with traumatising consequences.
- Chroma 11 – Based on a true story of lost love, this immersive Virtual Reality experience reunites a gay couple by means of digital media and the power of memories. Ix Wong Thien-pau (Malaysia) and Aaron Khek Ah Hock (Singapore) worked as a dance duo for many years, sharing their joint love and passion for their art. During the filming of Tsang Tsui-shan's Ward 11, a short documentary about their work, Aaron passed away. As an extension of the film, the beautiful and poignant Chroma 11 envisions a reunion of the two lovers in the form of a dance duet through clips of rearranged memories and volumetric video.
- We Are Here Because of Those That Are Not – Working at the intersection of gender, race and collective memory, Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley utilises new media techniques to create thought-provoking projects about Black trans existence and legacy. Her interactive Black trans archive poses existential questions of collective memory and self-expression through digital media.

The festival sees a fascinating selection of features and documentaries which tell the story of queer elders including Aseneth Suárez Ruiz's Clara that follows a filmmaker who returns home to Colombia to find out about her mother's past love and encounters unexpected twists along the way. Jieun Banpark's Life Unrehearsed is a captivating and witty portrayal of two retired Korean nurses living their best lives in Berlin. Roberta Torre's The Fabulous Ones follows a group of older trans women, who reunite following the discovery of a lost letter containing the last wishes of a dearly departed friend. In addition, Ageing With (Out) You is a strand of shorts that features queer elders of various ethnicities and orientations experiencing the unique challenges – and blessings – of ageing, with or without a partner.

Following the well-received world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival, Lisa Cortes' Little Richard: I Am Everything is a fierce, fun and glitter-flecked documentary exploring the real and complex story about the life of the architect of rock and roll, with contributions from a host of famous faces including John Waters, Billy Porter and Elton John who try to find the man behind the self-created myth. A pioneer for Blackness and queerness in music who never got his dues, Little Richard was also someone who was at war with his sexuality and religion throughout his life. Also at Sundance, It's Only Life

After All recounts the story of the classic lesbian singer-songwriter duo the Indigo Girls, told with humour and heart, through a blend of archival material and camcorder footage over the last three decades, shot by Indigo Girl Emily Saliers herself. Country music at its queerest: big hair, big heart and a truck load of guitar.



The Blue Caftan (2022)

The BFI Flare programme features a wide variety of films with a global perspective including *The Blue Caftan*, set in Salé, one of Morocco's oldest medinas, The film tells the story of a married tailor who falls for his younger apprentice in Maryam Touzani's richly textured and sweepingly beautiful exploration of love, desire and tradition. Set in Bhopal, India, Ektara Collective's *A Place of Our Own* is a sensitive portrayal of two Indian trans women's fight to find a place to live after the sudden eviction from their home by a prejudiced landlord. Set in Slovakia at the turn of the 20th century, Mariana Cengel Solcanská's *The Chambermaid* is a fast-paced, sexy and witty period film about the love between two teenage girls from opposite sides of the social ladder.

Unfolding over a single day in Seoul, *The Dream Songs* is Cho Hyun-chul's South Korean hazy fever dream of teenage longing, adolescent emotions and a lesbian love triangle. Sex is political in Julia Murat's sensually directed *Rule 34*. The Brazilian winner of the Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival, focuses on a young woman who explores her erotic desires at home as a camgirl by night, while during the day working on sexual violence cases as a law student. A young man in emotional freefall embarks on a journey of sex and self-discovery in Christophe Honoré's richly textured, semi-autobiographical teen

drama, *Winter Boy*, supported by BFI Flare official partner Mishcon de Reya and PGIM Real Estate.

This year's BFI Flare programme takes a closer look at two iconic queer literary women: Madeleine Lim's sensitive documentary *Jewelle: A Just Vision* is a celebration of the achievements of Jewelle Gomez, whose vampire stories and engagement with Black and Indigenous histories were well ahead of their time. Eva Vitija's *Loving Highsmith* is a beautifully textured study revealing the rich and troubled private life of the woman behind *Strangers on a Train*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *Carol*. *Loving Highsmith* reveals some disturbing truths about the much-loved writer, audiences can discuss this further at the event *We Need to Talk About Loving Highsmith* in the BFI Library.

From the archives, *Prejudice & Pride: Swedish Film Queer* is a fascinating history of LGBTQIA+ representation on Swedish cinema screens. Doing for Sweden what *The Celluloid Closet* did for Hollywood, Eva Beling's hugely enjoyable documentary explores the rich legacy of queer cinema from her home country.

Shaun Dunne and Anna Rogers's profoundly moving and inspiring documentary *How to Tell a Secret* explores the stigma of living with HIV in Ireland. The film is cleverly constructed around Dunne's stage play, *Rapids*. Actors speak the words of people who can't acknowledge their HIV status in public, contrasting with activists – young and old – determined to break down the need for the secrecy around HIV. The lack of education around the topic, the terror of first diagnosis and the search for community support, are themes explored by this cast of performers, friends, ex-lovers and healthcare professionals. Courage, friendship and a passionate engagement with history are all on display in this moving and compelling film.

Co-presented with the Human Rights Watch Film Festival, *Silent Love*, Marek Kozakiewicz's intimate documentary debut, is an insight into what it takes to build a new type of family. The film follows Aga, who moves back home to Poland to care for her brother after their mother's death while hiding her relationship with her girlfriend from the authorities.



Le Beau Mec (1979)

BFI Flare celebrates the rediscovery of Wallace Potts lost masterpiece of 1970s gay porn, *Le Beau Mec*, featuring the camerawork by legendary cinematographer Néstor Almendros (*Days of Heaven*, *The Blue Lagoon*, *Sophie's Choice*). The film's legendary reputation over the decades makes it a festival must-see.

Following his recent death, BFI Flare will screen the late pioneering gay British filmmaker Ron Peck's *Strip Jack Naked: Nighthawks II* in his memory. Peck's 1979 feature film *Nighthawks* told the story of a gay schoolteacher and his relentless search for a partner. Thirteen years later, *Strip Jack Naked: Nighthawks II* comprises outtakes from the first film as Ron gave an account of his life as a young gay man growing up in 1960s and 70s Britain and details the making of *Nighthawks*, itself a product of the gay liberation movement. This is a rare and fascinating film that presents a powerful and poignant insight into our recent history. The screening will include Ron Peck's 1974 short *Its Ugly Head*. Peck's *Nighthawks* and *What Can I Do With a Male Nude?* are also available to subscribers on BFI Player.

BFI Flare will also include a wide range of events, talks and debates, which include *Remembering Ron Peck*, an intimate library event which will provide the chance to learn more from friends of this sensitive giant of gay independent film and learn more about this important, unassuming yet driven auteur and gay rights champion.

Other event highlights include We Have Always Been Here!, highlighting the importance of queer disability representation within the landscape of film and culture with a panel led by film curator Tara Brown to discuss the intersections of queerness, disability and film. Bisexual Visi-bi-lity in Film & Television, a panel discussion on Bisexual representation in film and television, BFI Flare's Big Gay Film Quiz, covering the full gamut of queer cinema old and new, plus BFI Flare's ever popular DJ Nights at the BFI Bar.

This year's BFI Flare Shorts programme is split across 12 thematic selections, including the strand I Need I Want I Will, a collection of UK-produced shorts offering a thrilling miscellany of experience and imagination.

This year's festival will see the return of #FiveFilmsForFreedom in partnership with the British Council. This landmark initiative presents five films for free to audiences globally, and invites everyone everywhere to show solidarity with LGBTQIA+ communities in countries where freedom and equal rights are limited. Since its launch in 2015, Five Films for Freedom films have been viewed by 20 million people, in over 200 countries and principalities. Full details of the five selected films and how to access them to be announced separately.

Now in its ninth year, the BFI Flare x BAFTA Mentoring programme in partnership with BFI Network, is once again offering six emerging LGBTQIA+ filmmakers the opportunity to strengthen their professional networks. The professional development programme, which is open for applications now, will include access to bespoke events and case studies during BFI Flare, one-to-one meetings with senior industry figures and filmmakers, and free annual membership to BAFTA Connect. Alumni include Georgia Oakley (Blue Jean), Dionne Edwards (Pretty Red Dress), Joy Gharoro-Akpojotor (Blue Story, Boxing Day), Amrou Al-Kadhi (Little America) and Georgi Banks-Davies (I Hate Suzie); previous mentors have included Luca Guadagnino, Kate Herron, Iain Canning, Isaac Julien, Desiree Akhavan and Russell T Davies.

BFI Flare is programmed by Grace Barber-Plentie, Jay Bernard, Michael Blyth, Zorian Clayton, Brian Robinson and Ulrich Schrauth has curated the BFI Flare Expanded programme. The BFI has also appointed two new programmers this year: Rhianna Ilube and Wema Mumma.

For professionals working in the film and screen industries, this year's BFI Flare industry programme will return with delegate networking and dedicated events. Press and Industry screenings will be back in venue at BFI Southbank and the digital viewing library will be powered by Shift72. The full BFI Flare industry programme line-up will be announced in the coming weeks.