



MARDI GRAS FILM FESTIVAL

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Presented by Queer Screen, this film festival promises to mesmerize audiences with a powerful programme, which boasts an impressive 58 features and 40 short films. Screening at even more venues and with added international guests, the filmmaker focussed events should also heighten interest for film enthusiasts who'd like to learn more about the creative processes involved in filmmaking.

There's something for all broad-minded audiences – with international comedies, dramas, documentaries, short film sessions and some of the best gay, lesbian and transgender related films in the world.

Paul Struthers, who has been the festival director for three years running, says that attendances have increased significantly, with high quality films generating audience interest. "The quality of films is constantly improving [in terms of] the acting, the stories and the writing..." explained Struthers. "There's a small market for these high calibre films, displayed by the fact that our opening night film *Summertime* will be having a national release soon."

"Each year we screen a family film and this year *Finding Nemo 3D*, in which Ellen DeGeneres voices Dory, will be screened leading up to the release of the sequel *Finding Dory*."

Struthers added: "this film festival is ideal for audiences who love good cinema with real human stories."

FROM THE WEB TO THE GRAS

A highlight at this year's festival is the world premiere screening of the fourth season of *Starting From... Now!*, an Australian web-series in which the first three seasons have generated a phenomenal 20 million views globally. The series stars Rosie Lourde, Bianca Bradey, Lauren Orrell and Sarah de Possesse and surrounds the romantic entanglements of four young lesbians who live in inner-Sydney. Each season contains six episodes with varying running times from 6 to 11 minutes, and the screening of Season 4 is the first web-content ever presented at the Mardi Gras film festival.

The show's creator, writer and director Julie Kalceff says what inspired her to create this show was that there simply wasn't enough diversity and content on our screens.

"I wanted to create a show with complex characters – a show about women who are lesbians," explained Kalceff. "Initially we planned a standalone season and then waited to see what happened. We had a target lesbian audience but word of mouth spread. The show now has a wide demographic audience – gay, lesbian and straight."

"The success of this show should definitely benefit local talent. We have so many talented people behind the scenes and great actors, but there's not enough work in Australia – a wider audience can only bring more success leading to more shows being produced."

"Come along and attend the world premiere of this internationally successful, locally made drama which touches on a subject you don't usually get to see," added Kalceff.

Rosie Lourde, a producer and actress who also plays the role of love-torn Darcy says she is delighted audiences have embraced the show. "It's a labour of love and everyone involved have their heart and soul in the project. I'm so blessed to be involved," said Lourde. "The first two seasons were self-funded and some funds were raised from the public for Season 3. We've received funding for seasons 4 and 5, but there's never enough money."

Show business is such a competitive and fickle industry. How could the show's success affect her stability in the industry? "Fans of the show should spread the word – we'd like as many eyeballs as possible. More success means more projects as a producer and actor I can achieve. I love Australian stories – I'm glad to be part of that, but I'm always happy to see what's available abroad."

And what can fans expect from season 4? Lourde remains tight lipped: "All I'll say is Darcy returns – but things are not as they seem..."

Feb 18–Mar 03. Event Cinemas George St, Cremorne Orpheum Cremorne (Check website for other venues). Single sessions \$20, 5 & 10 multi-session passes available. Tickets & info: queerscreen.org.au

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