



Photograph: BFI Flare

BFI Flare: seven movies to see at the UK's biggest queer film festival

Romcoms, rock docs and some vintage 1970s gay porn

Written by Phil de Semlyen | Wednesday 15 February 2023

The UK's biggest LGBTQIA+ film festival, BFI Flare, is back next month with its usual cargo of the best in new queer cinema, retro gems, talks, discussions, parties and the odd packed dancefloor. If you're into queer cinema or just want to connect with this inclusive, welcoming community, a trip or two down to the South Bank beckons.

It opens at BFI Southbank on March 15 with 'The Stroll'. This groundbreaking story of transgender sex workers in New York City's Meatpacking District is followed by 57 more feature films, as well as 90 shorts. And because that's a lot of films and there's only one of you, we asked BFI Flare's senior film programmer Michael Blyth to help narrow down the choices a little. Here's seven more films to look out for.



Photograph: BFI Flare

Drifter

'This is a film made by, and for, young queer people. It's about a young man who moves to Berlin to be with his partner, but finds himself left alone in this new city. He falls in and out of love, has sex, does drugs, does BDSM, and gets involved in this queer arts scene. It feels genuinely like youth culture.'



Photograph: Ellen Rifkin Hill, Courtesy Swiss Social Archives

Loving Highsmith

'This documentary is about Patricia Highsmith's craft and her life. It's a celebration of her but it also sheds light on the pretty extreme views she expressed later in life. They're difficult to contend with when you consider how loved she is. We're having a discussion event around that: what you do when you learn something about queer icons that makes you question how you feel about them, especially when there are so few of them in the mainstream.'



Photograph: BFI Flare

Jess Plus None

'We have the world premiere of this lesbian romcom about a chaotic woman called Jess who goes to this off-grid wedding. Her ex is there and all these dramas unfold. She's this lovable, stressful heroine you really relate to. It" really, really good fun – one of those big laugh-out-loud films.'



Photograph: Jeremy Cowart

It's Only Life After All

'This one is fresh from Sundance and it's about The Indigo Girls: their music and who they were. If you're a fan, it's a treasure trove, but I think young queer and lesbian audiences will really relate to them too. If you're new to them and want to prepare for the screening, check out their self-titled second album. It's got everything you could ever want – catchy hooks, big emotions and Michael Stipe.'



Photograph: BFI Flare

Kenyatta: Do Not Wait Your Turn

'Malcolm Kenyatta is the first openly gay Black man to run for the US Senate and this documentary follows him through that election campaign. He's a queer legend and this portrait of him and what he stands for is simultaneously hopeful and hopeless in making you wonder how anyone could not want to go along with him. We're hoping he'll be at the festival, and it'll be really exciting to have him. He's an inspiring figure.'



Photograph: BFI Flare

Who I Am Not

'It's about two South African intersex people and their lives in a world that exists as a binary – their friendship and solidarity, and how they carve out a space for themselves in a world that refuses to recognise intersex identities. A film about intersex identities comes along once in a blue moon, so it's great to have this incredibly rich and empathetic documentary at the festival.'



Photograph: BFI Flare

Le Beau Mec

'We're showing this 1979 masterpiece of vintage gay porn in NFT1 on a Saturday afternoon and it's going to be pretty wild. It was shot by Néstor Almendros, who was the cinematographer on "Days of Heaven" and "Sophie's Choice", so it's quite beautiful. There are a few explicit, boundary-pushing films dealing with pornography and sex work this year, so it's great to reclaim this lost porn masterpiece. Book early to avoid disappointment!'



Photograph: LGBTQ+ VR Museum, 'Memorial to a Marriage' by Patricia Cronin

And one non-film...

LGBTQ+ VR Museum

'This is part of the free BFI Flare Expanded, four days of VR, XR and immersive work that runs from March 16 to 19. It's a virtual museum you walk into and you can touch different artefacts curated by queer people; anything from a pair of wedding shoes to a teddy bear. Rather than a museum of iconic moments in queer history like Stonewall, it's about the individual stories that get lost along the way. It's really moving and like all the BFI Flare Expanded installations, it's free to experience.'

BFI Flare runs March 15-26. Tickets go on sale on Feb 22 to BFI members and Feb 24 to the general public. Head here for the full programme.

Phil de Semlyen Global film editor

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