

Encounters Documentary Festival announces film selection

The Encounters South African International Documentary Festival has announced the film selection for its 24th edition.



Source: www.unsplash.com

In a time of growing global nationalism, political upheaval and uncertainty, the voice of resistance features strongly in several films screening in this year's line-up. As well as the hard-hitting thriller-doccies, there are a variety of uplifting music-themed films, humanitarian- and social justice centred films and, for lovers of films -films about films and filming.

Winner of the Sundance 2022 Audience Award, *Navalny* (Russia), directed by Daniel Rohr, is a gripping fly-on-the-wall documentary thriller, shot as the story unfolds, about anti-authoritarian Russian opposition leader, Alexei Navalny. Recovering in Berlin after nearly being poisoned to death with the nerve agent Novichok, he makes shocking discoveries about his assassination attempt and bravely decides to return home, whatever the consequences. Phil Harrison of *The Guardian* calls it "one of the most jaw-dropping things you will ever witness."

A true scoop for the festival, and in partnership with The Labia Theatre, Encounters presents *Summer of Soul* or *When the Revolution Could Be Televised* (USA). The film is the Winner of the 2022 Academy Award for Best Documentary and Winner of the 2022 Bafta Award for Best Documentary. It is directed by Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson and is a powerful and transporting piece of cinema that is part-music film and part-historical record, created around an epic event that celebrated Black history, culture and fashion in the late 60s. The footage of 1969 The Harlem Cultural Festival in New York was never seen and largely forgotten until now and the film features incredible performances by Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Sly & the Family Stone, Hugh Masekela, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Ray Baretto, Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln and more. The film is best described by Mark Kermode of *The Observer* as a debut feature "intertwining music and politics in one of the best concert movies of all time."

The Conductor (USA), by director Bernadette Wegenstein, tracks the success of the internationally renowned female conductor Marin Alsop, who knew from an early age that she wanted to conduct and was fortunate enough to be mentored by the great Leonard Bernstein. The film traces her trajectory through life, in which she reflects on her career in a male-dominated profession. This film is presented in association with the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra.

A must-see for music and opera-lovers is *Cesaria Évora* (Portugal), about the Barefoot Diva, who refused to wear shoes, even in Carnegie Hall, as a show of solidarity with the poor in her country. Directed by Ana Sofia Fonseca, the film offers rare footage and recordings of her music, following Evora from her island childhood in Cabo Verde (formerly a major hub for the slave trade) to grand performances in front of thousands of fans around the world.

In Three Minutes - A Lengthening (Netherlands/UK), directed by Biance Stigter, is a highly innovative film, comprised of three minutes of footage taken in Poland in 1938 by David Kurtz, who had returned to the place of his birth and filmed in the area where many of the Jewish families lived. In 2009 this footage was found by his grandson, who passed it on to the Holocaust Museum in Washington. Using this limited record, the film reminds us that these people existed prior to being sent to the extermination camp at Treblinka, but also examines the nature of celluloid in this context. It is narrated by Helena Bonham Carter. Presented in partnership with the Cape Town Holocaust and Genocide Centre.

Young Plato (Ireland/UK/Belgium), directed by Neasa Ni Chianin and Declan McGrath, is an inspiring documentary that charts the dream of maverick and Elvis-loving school headmaster Kevin McArevey, who is determined to change the fortunes of an inner-city community plagued by urban decay, sectarian aggression, poverty, and drugs. McArevey's attempt to place philosophy at the centre of his school, both in terms of the curriculum and a more general approach to education, including conflict resolution, yields amazing results amongst the students. *Young Plato* hums with the confidence of youth, a tribute to the power of the possible.

Milo Rau's *The New Gospel* (Germany/Switzerland/Italy) is a manifesto of solidarity for the poorest and a cinematic uprising for a fairer, more humane world. Searching for a modern moral response to the world in which we live, he asks: "What would Jesus be preaching in the 21st century?" Together with a former farm worker and activist from Cameroon, he creates a 'new gospel' for the 21st century in Southern Italy. It is wonderfully described by Mark Fisher of *The Guardian* as "a thrilling and unsettling Easter story."

Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power (USA), is based on director Nina Menkes's cinematic presentation, *Sex and Power, the Visual Language of Cinema*, that uses film clips by A-list directors from the 1940s through to the present, to show how the visual grammar of cinema contributes to conditions that create discriminatory hiring practice, pay inequity and a pervasive environment of sexual harassment in the film industry and beyond.

The Living Record of Our Memory (Spain/Canada), by Inés Toharia Terán, is a love letter to film archivists, curators, and restorers all over the world. It shows how the recorded image in all its forms – from cinema to home movies to corporate archives to YouTube videos – is one of our most important resources and the closest thing we have to collective memory, and vital as a means of recording lived history.

Director Simon Lereng Wilmot's *A House Made of Splinters* (Denmark/Ukraine) is a delicately observed document of a halfway house in Eastern Ukraine, for children who have been removed from their parents and is gently transcendent, despite its bleak subject matter. Its portrait of fragile and beautiful little lives is testament enough to the foolishness and destruction of the adult world.

More films will be announced in the upcoming weeks. The following cinemas will be screening the 2022 Encounters' line-up: In Cape Town - The Labia Theatre, The Bertha House Mowbray and The Bertha Movie House Isivivana Community Centre Khayelitsha. In Johannesburg - The Bioscope Independent Cinema and CineCentre Killarney.

Encounters takes place from 23 June to 3 July. For more information, go [here](#).

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