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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOCAL TALENT SHINES BRIGHTLY IN BYRON BAY INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL SHORTS SELECTION

As the Byron Bay International Film Festival returns in 2021, its range of feature-length films is again complemented by outstanding shorts from Australia and around the world.

ALL THE WAY TO THE TOP

As the Northern Rivers becomes known as 'Aussiewood', filmmaker and recent Byron Bay arrival Joelene Crnogorac finds much to mock in the casting process with the first episode of her series **All the Way to the Top**. Filmed in Hollywood, it is inspired by Crnogorac's personal experiences of casting sessions. As would-be stars endure a humiliating interrogation and respond in their own ways, it is a bold and hilarious female-driven comedy that anyone who has worked in film will recognise as one of the industry's more ridiculous and cringe-worthy traditions.

Crnogorac began working professionally at 13 in the beloved children's television series *Round the Twist* before going on to star in *The Man From Snowy River*, *Ocean Girl*, *Raw FM* and *Neighbours*, with feature film credits including *The Extra* and *Irresistible* (alongside Susan Sarandon and Emily Blunt).

OUR COUNTRY

McLeods Shoot resident Robert Sherwood's visually stunning work has been highlighted in previous festivals, to much acclaim. A graduate of SAE Byron Bay, Sherwood co-directed **Our Country** with Toby Finlayson. A film that explores the importance of connecting with country and culture to the South West Rocks community of Dunghutti Country, Sherwood's own connection to nature helps define his strong style of cinematography.

MOURNING COUNTRY

Ryan Lee is another local cinematographer whose work shines in Andrew Kainer's **Mourning Country**. A highly acclaimed and awarded surf filmmaker, Kainer steps into charred bushland to follow Budawang elder Noel Butler after the loss of his home and the local Aboriginal Cultural Centre. In this passionate, heart-wrenching story, Butler mourns not for the structures that once stood, but for the flora and fauna we share this land with.

INNER PORTRAITS

R J Poole's usual spot is behind the camera, capturing striking images of others, and creating mythical or topical stories from them. In the short documentary **Inner Portraits**, the charismatic Lismore photographer becomes the subject as, interspersed with some of his compelling photos, he relates his mainly enjoyable but occasionally horrific experiences as a young soldier in Australia's SAS Regiment.

Further afield, the festival features an eclectic and entertaining mix of films from other parts of Australia and throughout the globe.

THE KICKED DOG

Writer and director Max Hemmings cut his teeth as an editor in London after graduating from the Australian Film & Television School's (AFTRS) Directing program. **The Kicked Dog**, his black comedy about two aged East End gangsters stars Alan Ford (*Snatch*, *Lock Stock & Two Smoking Barrels*) and Clive Russell (*Game of Thrones*). The feuding brothers, relics from a bygone era and consumed with toxic male pride, embark on a low-rent heist and make some headway at reconciliation. But they may have left it too late?



THE HANDYMAN

Created by fellow AFTRS graduate Nicholas Clifford, **The Handyman** stars Alison Whyte (The Dressmaker) and Nathaniel Dean (Alien: Covenant, The Nightingale and Walking on Water). Alone at her country estate, Evelyn is about to end her life but is interrupted by the arrival of an awkward but endearing handyman. Evelyn's desire to make him leave collides with his need of a job and Evelyn discovers the poor man has problems of his own.

The collision of two wounded souls provides both with a moment of reprieve from their unhappiness to find a new perspective. Equal parts amusing and heart-warming, it's an account of best-laid plans being forced off-course.

CWA: JUDGEMENT DAY

Drama, rivalry, ambition – with sponge cakes and marmalade. Step inside the secretive world of the Country Women's Association (CWA) ladies who judge its cooking and baking competitions. How did they secure their role? Who judges the judges? Self-described 'chicks with attitude', the everyday CWA members are a force to be reckoned with, a quality monumentally embodied by the judges. Adelaide-based Marion Pilowsky's **CWA: Judgement Day** is a funny and fascinating look at the not-so quiet Australian women who are the backbone of rural living.

SHELTER

From country kitchens we move to the living rooms of the world in **Shelter**, where 176 dancers perform solo lockdown dances as a way to deal with COVID-19 induced isolation and both express their sense of loss while finding a means of escape from it. Martin Ponferrada's poignant film takes the simplest of materials - a lone dancer, at home - and transforms it into art that uplifts and adds to our own personal portfolio of ways to cope with solitude and uncertainty.

PERFECT STORM

Continuing the theme of pandemic-imposed isolation, **Perfect Storm** demonstrates the endurance of the beauty of nature and humanity's interconnectedness. Directed by Morag Brownlie, it follows one man's enforced isolation on the wild west coast of Auckland. Pacing into the unknown, he wonders if those dear to him will ever be seen again.

MIRADOR

An equally experimental look at performance art comes in **Mirador**, a dreamlike ballet featuring performance artist, Angela Goh, as she uses movement to navigate through the labyrinthine interior of the Phoenix Central Park building in New York.

Goh's exploration takes us down stairwells, corridors, dark corners and doorways that suddenly open out onto rooftops, conveying the mysterious truth of some buildings — that there is always more to discover.

LOST CONTACT

Lost Contact has just won the Australian Directors Guild's Award for Best Direction in a Documentary Short after winning Best Documentary at St Kilda Film Festival. Directed by Jaina Kalifa and Amelia Paxman, the film fuses stop motion animation with live action footage to introduce Aldo, who has always felt like a being from another planet. Stranded on Earth, out of sync with others and full of self-doubt, Aldo has turned his condition into a strength, to help him shine a light onto meditative techniques and esoteric knowledge that enable him to rise above his difficulties in the 'real' world.

LOTUS

Local free divers will appreciate **Lotus**, an invitation to dive deep within, reconnect with the soul and experience the profound power of life. Created by Angelika Furstler and Austin Ahlborg, the French production was filmed underwater in the sacred Mayan Cenotes and tells the story of growth from pain, anxiety and fear to surrender, coherence, harmony and flow.

The Lotus flower is regarded in many cultures as a symbol of rebirth, growth and transformation and this film is an expression of that process. Just like the lotus seed grows from dark waters to become the most beautiful flower, we too have the ability to grow to our full potential.



DANDELION

Finally, Jane Ballentyne's comedy drama **Dandelion** is a story about supporting the one you love through their mental health journey. Interested in creating serious comedy that exposes universal vulnerabilities through quirks, Ballentyne revels in showcasing female protagonists as shambolic and nuanced - a dishevelled and relatable antidote to the 'strong female character' trope.

Opening with a special screening event in Lennox Head on Friday 17 December, BBFF2021 continues for another four days at Palace Cinemas Byron Bay. Up to two short films will precede most feature length sessions, with session times and tickets available at bbff.com.au and Palace Cinemas.

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Media Enquiries:

J'aimee Skippon-Volke, Festival Director
+61 427 668 717
Jaimee@bbff.com.au

About BBFF

Established in 2005, the Byron Bay International Film Festival exists to empower creatives and expand audience horizons, fostering connectivity and innovation. Its mission is to provide audiences and global industry professionals access to the best film and immersive experiences which move, motivate and resonate with viewers. Showcasing a mixture of mediums that incorporate the latest cinematic and immersive technologies, it connects passionate filmmakers and audiences while pushing cinema's technological boundaries.

Ticketing

Meet the Wallers Opening Night Event:

Friday 17 December 2021 at Lennox Head Cultural Centre
<https://www.trybooking.com/BWCOY>

Palace Cinemas Byron Bay Screenings:

Friday 17 to Tuesday 21 December
<https://www.palacecinemas.com.au/events/bbff2021/>

BBFF Online

Website: www.bbff.com.au
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