

MOVIES FEATURES »

## Vancouver Queer Film Festival seeks to define its space

by Craig Takeuchi on August 9th, 2017 at 5:05 PM



Connection counts to VQFF artistic codirector Anoushka Ratnarajah.

While the Vancouver real-estate debate has raised concerns about housing and cost of living, for marginalized groups such as queer people, the crisis means opportunities to socialize, organize, empower, and politically activate are also being threatened.

This is something Vancouver Queer Film Festival artistic director Anoushka Ratnarajah has given much thought to.

“Queer spaces and art spaces in Vancouver are rapidly disappearing because of gentrification and the cost of being able to rent a performance space,” she said by phone.

Consequently, some of the programming at this year’s festival reflects these issues.

Take, for example, Ray McEachern’s “Stay Gold Man Up”. Ratnarajah says this short documentary, about a monthly multigender drag show at the Cobalt in East Vancouver, shines a light on the importance of venues for LGBT people. It’s paired with Cory Ashworth’s

“The March Sweater”, featuring five stories from local queer elders about what has and hasn’t changed in their lifetimes.

Ratnarajah, who shares programming responsibilities with poet and author Amber Dawn, said although it was “quite a hustle” to program everything in only two months, after starting in mid-March, they are proud of what they have to offer. While they bring their own unique perspectives and aesthetic approach, she said diverse representation was a priority for both of them.

“As a queer person of colour myself, I think it’s incredibly important that folks who share my identity get to see aspects of their lives represented at the festival,” Ratnarajah said. In particular, she sought to avoid the stereotypical narrative that ethnic queer lives are “inherently tragic”, or that queer identities are at odds with racial or cultural identities.

*Signature Move*, for instance, follows a female Pakistani Muslim lawyer falling in love with a Chicana bookstore owner. They each have different relationships with their mothers. While the main character has a semicloseted relationship with her mother, her Mexican girlfriend, on the other hand, is out to her mother, who is accepting and supportive of her queer identity.

Meanwhile, the Thai film *Fathers* depicts a young male couple who are raising an adopted son. Unfortunately, they face legal and social barriers—such as only one partner being permitted to be the legal adoptive parent—which affect their relationship. Nonetheless, Ratnarajah says it’s a “funny, sweet, joyful film”.

The fraught Mexican love story *I Dream in Another Language* opens this year’s program, thanks to its high calibre and its examination of the impact of Catholicism and colonization on Indigenous and queer identities.

Irish feature *Handsome Devil* was chosen to end the festival on a celebratory note—a decision that turned out to be timely as Leo Varadkar, who is of Indian descent and openly gay, became the country’s newest prime minister in June.

Breaking new ground is how LGBT people have created a variety of spaces for themselves. However, as Ratnarajah points out, it remains important for a marginalized community to physically gather together.

“We can be so isolated from each other in so many ways, and to be able to actually call ourselves a community, we have to gather in community,” she says. “It can’t just be because we share an identity. It has to be because we share space together.”

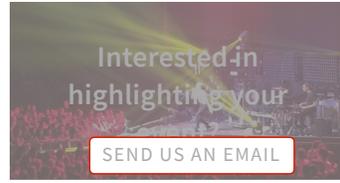
**The Vancouver Queer Film Festival runs from Thursday to next Sunday (August 10 to 20) at various venues. More information is at the [Queer Film Festival website](#).**



You can follow Craig Takeuchi on Twitter at [@cinecraig](#) or on [Facebook](#).

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

HIGHLIGHTED THINGS TO DO



**Vancouver Bach Festival**  
Christ Church Cathedral

POPULAR



4 Vancouver dining spots nominated for Canada's Best New Restaurants awards



Justin Trudeau extends olive branch to Indigenous people opposed to Site C dam and new pipelines



Delta police warn of Craigslist scams about intimate encounters, house parties, and free stuff



Your horoscope for August 10 to 16, 2017



NDP government won't permit Kinder Morgan to put shovels in ground on public land for pipeline

HOLD THE MOMENT