

## The Vancouver Queer Film Festival Shines Its Spotlight August 11 – 21



Kiki | image courtesy of Out On Screen

By Kendell Yan

It's a beautiful and inspiring moment when members of a community can come together with the unified purpose to lift each other up, to share a platform to raise each other's voices, and to help each other shine. The team behind the Vancouver Queer Film Festival have been doing that for 28 years, and this year the spotlight is as bright and wide as it's ever been.

The Vancouver Queer Film Festival (VQFF) is a truly remarkable 11-day event in August that celebrates the very best in independent queer cinema and the myriad of queer lives lived in and through them. Not only is it the second largest film festival in Vancouver, but it is also the largest queer arts event in Western Canada. VQFF 2016 will be showcasing films that shine a spotlight on the most disenfranchised in our communities, including [Black Lives Matter](#), Indigeneity and two-spirit traditions.

The festival's Artistic Director, Shana Myara, first attended the Festival in 1999 after moving to Vancouver from Nanaimo. "Even in '99," she remembers, "being in that space watching films about Lesbians in New York felt like stepping into an underground club or secret society. I felt instantly like I belonged, it was love at first sight."

This year, Myara, who has worked as a programming committee member and guest curator, publicist, and fundraiser, has curated over 80 films this season along with parties and talkbacks with notable directors to entertain you and provoke thoughtful dialogue within our communities.



It Runs in the Family | image courtesy of Out On Screen

The ability to give screen time to independent queer films and filmmakers that might otherwise find it difficult to reach a mass audience is at the core of what makes the VQFF special. Films such as *First Girl I loved*, by Kerem Sanga, Myara suggests for its risk-taking and depth, “*First Girl* is unflinching and honest, and thrilling. It doesn’t sugarcoat its characters or the issues they’re dealing with.”

“The VQFF is about bringing people together in a magical, affirming environment where the diversity and multi-faceted identities of our community are embraced – and our stories take centre stage,” says Myara, “we’re as much about bringing people together as we are about exposing hearts and minds to challenging, celebratory and world-view altering cinema.”

It is this ethos that propels the VQFF’s Community Partnerships with local non-profit organizations and community groups, offering a rich cultural landscape that provokes meaningful dialogue about social issues in the city, drawing attention to members of the LGBTQ2+ community who need it most.

This year the VQFF will be honouring Black Lives Matter Vancouver as one of their Community Partners with a selection of three films in their “Spotlight” section. Closing the ceremony will be the documentary film *Kiki*, which follows the lives of seven youth of colour as they vogue their way across the fierce stages of the underground ballroom scene.



Kiki | image courtesy of Out On Screen

*Kiki* explores the ways in which gentrification and police brutality threaten the lives of queer, trans, and intersexed youth while also celebrating the informal networks developed by youth to foster leadership, support, and refuge in New York. These are trans and queer youth owning their futures while paying homage and respect to the trailblazers that came before them.

*Kiki* hits the screen at the Vancouver Playhouse on August 21st, 7pm.

In addition to Black Lives Matter, the VQFF will also be honouring Indigenous communities with a special focus on Two-Spirit traditions in their spotlight section titled “Two-Spirit REELness”, curated in collaboration with Harlan Pruden of *Two-Spirit Journal*.

*Two Soft Things*, *Two Hard Things* is a documentary from directors Mark Kenneth Woods and Michael Yerxa that explores what happens when a remote Arctic community holds an LGBTQ2+ Pride celebration. The film provides historical context on the effects of colonization, religion, forced migration, and cultural assimilation on gender/sexual identity in Inuit culture. A special focus is then given to the Inuit conceptions of gender/sexual identity that predate colonization.



Two Soft Things, Two Hard Things | image courtesy of Out On Screen

*Two Soft Things* , *Two Hard Things* will be playing at SFU's Goldcorp Centre for the Arts on August 20th, at 6:30pm. The film will be followed by a workshop with Harlan Pruden. If you're interested in learning about decolonization and reclamation, and the restoration of pre-colonial Two-Spirit traditions, please do take advantage of this free event.

"Simply put," Shana Myara states, "we're allies because it takes all of us to create change. Our mission to celebrate, illuminate and advance queer lives through film means that we are committed to social justice across queer communities, including black and diverse communities of colour."

Festival guides are available online at [queerfilmfestival.ca](http://queerfilmfestival.ca) as well as at festival venues, [Little Sister's Book & Art Emporium](#), and [Black Dog Video](#).

**What:** The 28th annual Vancouver Queer Film Festival hosted by Out On Screen.

**Where:** Various venues across Vancouver.

**When:** August 11th-21st, 2016

All tickets on sale now at [queerfilmfestival.ca/tickets/](http://queerfilmfestival.ca/tickets/)

Sign up for the [Out In Vancouver newsletter](#) if you are interested in hearing about more non-heteronormative news, events, and culture that are part of Vancouver's colourful mosaic, and to get notified on the latest contests.