

# Queer Film Festival brings to screen wide range of experiences

ERIKA THORKELSON, VANCOUVER SUN 08.04.2016 |



The film *Waiting for B* focuses on a group of poor, young, gay men and women waiting in line for a Beyoncé concert in Sao Paulo, Brazil. It's part of the 2016 Vancouver Queer Film Festival, running Aug. 11-16. (Photo credit: Courtesy VQFF) [PNG Merlin Archive] COURTESY, VQFF / VANCOUVER SUN

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Vancouver Queer Film Festival

Aug. 11 to 21 | *Various Locations*

Tickets & Info: [QueerFilmFestival.ca](http://QueerFilmFestival.ca) (<http://QueerFilmFestival.ca>)

With the deaths of a number of cherished queer characters ramping up the tragedy in TV series like *Orange is the New Black* and *The 100*, it seems the old “bury your gays” trope is alive and well in pop culture.

But by bringing to screen a wide breadth of queer experiences, this year's Vancouver Queer Film Festival is setting that old sawhorse on fire.

Artistic director Shana Myara says this kind of range has been the festival's mandate "from Day 1."

"Even though our language wasn't intersectional at the time, we've always been an intersectional organization," she says. "We understand the incredible multiplicities of identities and small communities that make up a queer community."

It can be a little overwhelming, so this year's festival has been organized into a number of spotlights to help guests explore the different ways of being.

Two of the spotlights in this year's festival focus on the intersection of race and queer identities: Black Lives Matter and Two-Spirit Reelness. But even within these two categories, there is a rainbow of focuses, styles and genres.

Major!, a documentary that celebrates the work of Major Griffin-Gracy, a black transwoman who took part in the Stonewall Riots and who was inspired by her own time in prison to advocate for incarcerated transwomen and men, gives a powerful snapshot of the history of the queer movement.

Waiting for B, on the other hand, explores the movement's future by focusing on a group of poor, young, gay men (and a few women) waiting in line for a Beyoncé concert in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Staying with them for two months through clashes with soccer fans, broken hearts and lots of dancing, the film becomes much more than a portrait of super-fandom.

Paulo César Toledo, who co-directed the film with his wife Abigail Spindel, sees it as a story of one group's fight to be out and proud within a society that would like to keep them quiet and invisible.

"These kids might look alienated, but they know exactly what's happening," he says. "They live in a country that doesn't treat them well because they're black. They live in a society that fights them for being homosexual, that did not provide a decent education because they're poor. They have so much against them and still they are brave, courageous and funny."

Immediately following the screening of Waiting for B next Thursday night, the Black Lives Matter Vancouver Coalition will host a Bae-themed dance party at Alexander Gastown.

The Two-Spirit Reelness spotlight, curated by scholar and activist Harlan Pruden, offers glimpses of that same determination within this country's

indigenous communities to reclaim a tradition of same-sex relationships that predates colonization.

The documentary *Two Soft Things, Two Hard Things*, looks at the way a small group of two-spirit people are fighting the homophobia spread by the colonization of the north. The feature *Fire Song* tells the touching story of an Anishnaabe teen seeking acceptance amongst the poverty of his Northern Ontario community.

But it isn't just about education — there's also space for entertainment. The first full length film by Canadian Film Centre graduate Brett Hannam, *North Mountain*, has been described as *Brokeback Mountain* meets *Rambo*.

"I love that they don't do any exposition," says Pruden. "They don't try to explain what two-spirit is. It's just part of who we are. I think that's a beautiful statement."

Myara sees this kind of nuance, also evident in films like the festival's opener *Summertime (La Belle Saison)* and Ingrid Jungermann's dryly comedic *Women Who Kill*, as part of a big leap forward for queer film.

"Now that we're in a place where more queer directors are out and unapologetic about their identity, we're getting much richer representations of what queer and trans people's lives look like," she says. "We can be flawed, three-dimensional people, just like anybody else."

But when it comes to mainstream film, representation is still a struggle. She points to the controversy over the recent release of the all-female *Ghostbusters* movie as evidence of the kind of pressure to conform that still exists in Hollywood.

"As a queer film festival, we've always known this reality," she says. "That's why we've worked so hard in our programming to make an idyllic little world of 11 days where diversity and acceptance is the norm and our stories take centre stage."