

WESTENDER

EVERYTHING VANCOUVER

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REEL PEOPLE'S PICKS FOR 28TH VANCOUVER QUEER FILM FESTIVAL

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— Contributed photo

Whether you're in the mood to laugh or cry, ruminate on social injustices or celebrate queer victories, feel all the romantic feels or lose yourself in a solid sci-fi thriller, the 28th Vancouver Queer Film Festival (<http://queerfilmfestival.ca/>) (VQFF) has got you covered. With nearly 70 narrative features, documentaries, and shorts on the schedule, VQFF is second only to the juggernaut Vancouver International Film Festival when it comes to scale and scope. It's pretty difficult to make a wrong choice when plotting out your VQFF experience, but if you need some entry points, Reel People serves up this list of must-see VQFF films – 'cause we're cool like that.



It Runs in the Family

Shortly after Joella Cabalu's brother Jay came out to their kin, the siblings learned that at least six other members of their deeply religious Filipino family were gay, lesbian, or gender-fluid. "The most alarming comment was that our ancestors sinned so much that our blood was cursed, which is why there were so many gay people in our family," the Vancouver director says in a voiceover early on in her feature-length documentary debut. And so the siblings journeyed from Vancouver to California and then the Philippines to engage with their queer relatives and ask them how they navigate family, culture, loss, love, and Catholicism. *It Runs in the Family* is a surprising, illuminative, and ultimately heartening look into a single family. 9pm, Aug. 16, International Village Cinemas



"The Coast is Queer"

"The Coast is Queer" is one of the most highly anticipated VQFF programs every year, with good reason: The bill boasts a wildly eclectic selection of short films directed by homegrown filmmakers, spanning genres and styles and POVs. This year's crop of 13 films range from sci-fi to animation to rom-com to biting social commentary. Highlights include *10579km: A Queer Journey from Damascus to Vancouver*, in which recently arrived Syrian refugee and activist Danny Ramadan shares his experience as a newcomer and delves into racism and privilege within the local queer community; Elisha Lim's *100 Crushes Chapter 6: They*, a claymation monologue about a friend's decision to use the gender-neutral pronoun "they"; *The Promise* by Jason Karman, a gorgeous short wherein two men dance in an open field, jumping from reality to dream as each follows his own path; and *Collider*, which finds the eternally daring and evocative Ali Liebert (*The Devout*, *Bomb Girls*) shifting into parallel dimensions in search of her deceased partner.

8:45pm, Aug. 13, SFU GCA



Fire Song

On a northern Ontario Anishinaabe reserve plagued by a high suicide rate, Shane (Andrew Martin), a closeted high school senior, dreams of leaving for university in Toronto. As Shane tries to deal with the loss of his sister, he is faced with the choice between his family and his future, while also trying to be true to himself. Martin, a young Mohawk actor from Six Nations in Ontario, the largest First Nations reserve in Canada,

shines in his debut performance – as does Vancouver's Mary Galloway (*Ariel Unraveling*) as Shane's girlfriend Tara, a role that garnered her a Leo nomination. *Fire Song*, the debut feature from writer/director Adam Garnet Jones, premiered to rave reviews at last year's TIFF and won two audience awards on the festival circuit. 5pm, Aug. 18, International Village Cinemas



In Alliance

The important work of Vancouver's Trans Alliance Society (TAS) takes centre stage in *In Alliance*, a documentary short by Christine Lord. TAS has long fought for the removal of gender markers from birth certificates, as well as for human rights code protections for transgender people. We learn about TAS and its impact via Morgane Oger, TAS' chair and a trans mom, as she marches in the Pride parade, seeks solitude on a boat, and expounds on what a block of text in the film describes as her "ongoing quest to normalize transgender." The compelling short is part of a program entitled "Changemakers" spotlighting the work of local trans activists. The other moving and inspiring films in the showcase include *Handsome and Majestic* – about Milan, a transgender teen in Prince George whose courage in the face of adversity offers lessons in hope, survival, and connection – and *To be a Man*, in which audiences meet the charismatic Levi in his first year, outwardly, as a man. The filmmakers will be in attendance for a post-screening discussion. 7pm, Aug. 13, SFU CGA



Strike a Pose

Madonna's 1990 Blonde Ambition World Tour is the stuff of legend – as anyone who has viewed the cult-favourite 1991 documentary *Madonna: Truth or Dare* can attest – and one of the many factors that intersected to make that particular tour next-level was the dancers: a troupe of fierce and astoundingly talented (mostly) gay men, many of whom had reigned in the NYC underground dance scene before Madonna scooped them up for an experience unlike any other. Twenty-five years later, six of the dancers remain, their collective stories at turns illuminating and heartbreaking. Documentarian Ester Gould (*Shout*) and co-director Reijer Zwaan bring a touching, intimate tale of a group of men who flew very close to a brightly shining but scorching star. 6:30pm, Aug. 17, Vancouver Playhouse (Post-film Q&A with Blonde Ambition World Tour dancers); 2:30pm, Aug. 19, International Village Cinemas.

The 28th Vancouver Queer Film Festival runs Aug.11-21 at various Vancouver venues. Find tickets and schedule information at www.queerfilmfestival.ca (<http://www.queerfilmfestival.ca>).

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