



**BFI Flare: Opening Night - World Premiere AGAINST THE LAW
BFI Announce LGBT50 Season**

Directed by Fergus O'Brien and starring Daniel Mays

16th March, BFI Southbank



London, Thursday 9th February 2017 The BFI is thrilled to announce that the opening night gala of the 31st edition of BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival (16th-26th March at BFI Southbank) will be the world premiere of *AGAINST THE LAW*, a powerful and timely factual new British drama for BBC TWO, directed by Fergus O'Brien and starring Daniel Mays (*VERA DRAKE*, *ANOTHER YEAR*). The cast also features Mark Gatiss (*SHERLOCK*, *THE LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN*), Richard Gadd and Charlie Creed-Miles (*NIL BY MOUTH*, *WILD BILL*). The film is produced by Scott James Bassett and written by Brian Fillis (*AN ENGLISHMAN IN NEW YORK*, *FEAR OF FANNY*). *AGAINST THE LAW* is a BBC Studios production.

2017 sees the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act which decriminalised homosexual acts in England and Wales between adult males, in private. While it would take several decades before homosexuals would reach anything like full equality in this country, this legislation marks the beginning of this journey. The BFI is marking the 50th anniversary with a new season of screenings and events. This summer **Gross Indecency** will explore the pioneering –and sometimes problematic – depictions of LGBT life in British film and TV in

the years immediately before and after the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. Further details will be announced during BFI Flare.

AGAINST THE LAW is a timely and sensitive biopic based on Peter Wildeblood's bestseller which tells the story of his affair with a handsome serviceman he met in Piccadilly and the devastating consequences of their relationship. Wildeblood had been a celebrated and well-connected journalist on the Daily Express, with a range of acquaintances that included Lord Montagu of Beaulieu. He is played by Daniel Mays, in a beautifully nuanced performance that charts his journey from Fleet Street via public vilification to his imprisonment under the same legislation that sent Oscar Wilde to Reading Gaol. Mark Gatiss gives a chilling performance as a prison doctor charged with administering therapeutic measures to homosexuals acquiescing to the idea that they can be 'changed'.

The importance of Peter Wildeblood's case (jointly brought against him, Lord Montagu and Michael Pitt-Rivers) is that it brought the debate about homosexuality into the public domain. It led the way to the creation of the Wolfenden Committee on sexual law reform that eventually resulted in the passing of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which changed the lives of thousands of gay men with its partial decriminalisation of homosexual acts. This film offers a profoundly moving portrait of what it meant to be gay in the 1950s, underlining the importance of understanding our recent history and the immense social and emotional burdens endured by generations of gay men.

AGAINST THE LAW will be shown on BBC Two later this year.

Director Fergus O'Brien said:

"Making this film for the BBC not only allowed us to tell a powerful and important story in the evolution of LGBT rights in this country but also to capture for posterity the voices of some of the men who lived through these dark days in gay history. Their story, and the story of Peter Wildeblood, are timely reminders of the difficult journey it took to arrive at the rights enjoyed by gay people today and why it's so important that we safeguard them. I'm delighted and honoured that the film will be the Opening Night of BFI Flare".

Quote from Clare Stewart, BFI Head of Festivals

"Following on from a year in which we celebrated the 30th Anniversary of BFI Flare, world events have indicated that the need for our Festival is as urgent as it ever was. Against the Law is the perfect opening night film, a powerful British production that elegantly combines factual and historical drama, marking a key moment in the struggle for LGBT rights in the UK – an anniversary the BFI will also be commemorating with a season of film and TV this summer."

NOTES TO EDITORS

BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival is the UK's longest running LGBT film event. It began in 1986 as Gay's Own Pictures. By its 3rd edition it was tagged the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and since then has grown to become the largest LGBT film event in the UK, and its most anticipated. The Festival changed its name to BFI Flare in 2014 to reflect the increasing diversity of its films, filmmakers and audience. The festival is programmed by Jay

Bernard, Michael Blyth, Zorian Clayton, Brian Robinson and Emma Smart, led by Deputy Head of Festivals, Tricia Tuttle and Head of Festivals, Clare Stewart.

The full programme of BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival will include 56 feature films, an expanded industry programme, selected films on BFI Player VOD service, a series of special events and archive screenings. fiveFilms4freedom will see Flare offer five LGBT short films for free across the world and promoted through the British Council's global networks. The full programme will be available on Thursday 15th February 2017. The festival runs 16th March – 26th March 2017. www.bfi.org.uk/Flare

PRESS CONTACTS: Chris Lawrance, Publicity Consultant, BFI Flare
Chris@chrislawrance.com / Mob: 07967 647726

Judy Wells, Head of Press and PR, BFI Judy.wells@bfi.org.uk / Tel: 020 7957 8919 / 0798418501

Victoria Millington, Press & PR Co-ordinator and Flare Accreditation, BFI
Victoria.millington@bfi.org.uk / Tel: 020 7957 4833

Elizabeth Dunk, Press Office Assistant, BFI Elizabeth.dunk@bfi.org.uk / Tel: 020 7957 8986

Images available for press use: www.image.net/BFI/Flare 2017

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About the BFI

The BFI is the lead organisation for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world