

TWO FILMS SELECTED FOR BFI SUPPORT FOLLOWING SECOND BFI FILM FUND PITCHING SESSION

- ***BFI FILM FUND BACKS TWO DOCUMENTARY FEATURES FOLLOWING DECEMBER PITCH MEETING IN LONDON***
- ***THE INSPIRATIONAL JOURNEY OF AN ISRAELI MAN WHOSE HIV DIAGNOSIS BECOMES A CATALYST FOR A LIFE-CHANGING RECONCILIATION, AND A REVOLUTIONARY LOVE STORY AMIDST A BACKDROP OF POLITICAL REPRESSION AND BRUTALITY, FIND BACKING FROM THE BFI FILM FUND***
- ***PROJECTS SELECTED FROM A STRONG SHORT LIST BY PANEL OF EXPERTS FROM BFI FILM FUND, SHEFFIELD DOC/FEST, DOGWOOF AND DUTCH PUBLIC BROADCASTER VPR***

LONDON – Tuesday 28th January 2014: The BFI Film Fund today announces support for two feature documentaries following its latest pitching round in London.

The projects were selected from a short list of the strongest projects submitted to the BFI for support through the second round of the Film Fund's documentary pitch meetings, in partnership with Sheffield Doc/Fest, the UK's leading documentary festival, and this time held 'in camera' at the BFI Southbank on Monday 9 December.

Five applications were shortlisted by a team of senior executives from the BFI and Doc/Fest, and selected to present to a panel including representatives from the BFI, Sheffield Doc/Fest, leading documentary distributor Dogwoof and Dutch Public Broadcaster VPR.

In line with the panel's recommendations, the Film Fund has committed to supporting two films:

Tomer and Barak Heymann's ***Who's Gonna Love Me Now?***, which is co-directed and co-produced with Alexander Bodin Saphir, follows the inspirational journey of an Israeli man rejected by his community, but whose HIV diagnosis becomes a catalyst for him to make drastic changes to his life; and

Sean McAllister's ***A Syrian Love Story***, produced with Elhum Shakerifar, a political love story filmed over four years in Syria, Lebanon and France, where two revolutionaries struggle for freedom on a journey of hope, dreams and despair for their homeland, each other and an unfolding civil war.

Ben Roberts, Director of the BFI Film Fund, said:

“It's as difficult as ever to predict which projects will resonate with cinema audiences, and the calibre of the shortlist was very strong, but the presentations for these two projects were particularly moving and quite profound. We're excited to be involved with both of them.”

Charlie Phillips, Deputy Director of Sheffield Doc/Fest said:

“We're delighted that this 2nd edition of the new Film Fund Pitch has led to two brilliant new documentary projects being supported by the BFI - both Sean McAllister and the *Who's Gonna Love Me Now?*, team are committed to telling thought-provoking engrossing stories which will interest large audiences and we're excited to follow their development with BFI backing”

The short listed teams were asked to give a seven minute pitch followed by questions from the panel in order to demonstrate the project's cinematic potential.

The panel comprised Director of the BFI Film Fund, Ben Roberts and Senior Executive, Lizzie Francke; BFI Creative Director Heather Stewart; Sheffield Doc/Fest Deputy Director Charlie Phillips; Dogwoof co-Founder and CEO Anna Godas; and Commissioning Editor Documentaries for Dutch Public Broadcaster VPR, Barbara Truyen.

The teams chosen by the panel receive a positive decision in principle and will be issued with a Letter of Intent from the BFI Film Fund.

The documentary genre has been gathering pace at cinemas in recent years, and it is a form in which the UK excels. Homegrown films including *Pussy Riot – A Punk Prayer*, *The Stone Roses: Made of Stone* and *The Spirit of '45* have won awards and critical acclaim and have also proved a hit with cinema audiences. Due to renewed industry interest in the documentary form and following a sharp increase in applications for funding, the BFI Film Fund designed its new pitching events in recognition of the specialised consideration the genre requires, particularly for emerging talent.

At the last pitching round, held at Doc/Fest in June, the Film Fund backed Louise Osmond's *Dark Horse*, and Brian Hill's *Thomas Quick*, both of which are now in production.

The next BFI Film Fund documentary pitch will take place at Sheffield Doc/Fest on Wednesday 11 June 2014. The deadline for applications is Friday 7 March 2014, with a workshop for selected projects on Monday 12 May 2014.

Information about the successful projects:

Who's Gonna Love Me Now?

Production company: Breaking Productions Ltd. and Heymann Brothers Films

Directed and produced by Tomer and Barak Heymann
Co-directed and co-produced by Alexander Bodin Saphir

Saar grew up in a conservative kibbutz on the Israeli/Jordanian border; when he was 19 years old and away on military training, his mother found a love letter he had written...to another man. Rejected by his community Saar fled to London, where he started to build a new life, but when he is diagnosed with HIV his world falls apart and the one thing he craves more than anything else is reconciliation with his family. But will they, after all these years, welcome him back into the fold or will his HIV status cause him to be shunned for the rest of his life?

A Syrian Love Story

Production company - 10ft Films Ltd.

Director/writer - Sean McAllister

Producer - Sean McAllister and Elhum Shakerifar for 10Ft Films

Filmed over four years in Syria, Lebanon and France; two revolutionaries struggle for freedom on a journey of hope, dreams and despair for their homeland, each other and an unfolding civil war. Amer and Ragda were political activists who met and fell in love in a Syrian prison; when Ragda is imprisoned again for publically condemning the Assad regime Amer must bring up their children alone. The film follows the family as they are reunited and are forced to flee to Lebanon and finally find safety in France, but in their new found 'freedom' they find themselves at now war with each other. This intimate family portrait helps us to understand why people are literally dying for change in the Arab world, and reveals the brutality of a regime not yet prepared to allow for that change.

– Ends –

For media enquiries please contact:

Emma Hewitt, Head of Press and PR (interim), BFI

emma.hewitt@bfi.org.uk / 020 7173 3256/ 07584 264 618

Roxanne Hunt, Comms Coordinator, BFI

Roxanne.hunt@bfi.org.uk / 020 7173 3261 / 07584 264608

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body 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

- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is now a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.

The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Greg Dyke.

About Doc/Fest

Sheffield Doc/Fest is the UK's premier documentary and interactive festival. It is the place to see world and UK premieres of the best creative documentaries from the cinema, television and online arenas, and to hear from and meet filmmakers at Q&A sessions. Highlights of the film programme are honoured with an award programme including the Sheffield Special Jury, Crossover Innovation, Green, Youth Jury, Inspiration, Student Doc, Short Form and Audience Awards. In 2013, 3,129 full festival pass holders from 69 countries attended the Festival and it attracted over 22,000 members of the film-loving public.

Early Bird Passes for Sheffield Doc/Fest 2014 (7-12 June) are on sale now for £249 plus VAT. Interactive at Sheffield Pass now on sale £199 plus VAT. See www.sheffdocfest.com for details.

