

MIFF 68½ DANCES INTO FINAL WEEKEND WITH LARGEST CLOSING NIGHT AUDIENCE IN FESTIVAL'S HISTORY.

As MIFF 68½ — the 2020 online iteration of Melbourne International Film Festival — enters its final weekend, preparations are underway for the festival to host its largest closing night audience ever. When the digital curtain is lifted on this Saturday's closing night film — Pablo Larrain's reggaeton-fuelled dance-drama, *Emilia* — it will be MIFF 68½'s most streamed film, with an anticipated audience of more than 3,000 online attendees.

This record-setting event caps off a remarkable run for MIFF 68½, which has surpassed both the festival's box office and audience participation expectations. With over 205,000 confirmed streams and an estimated national audience in excess of 307,500 — the largest in the festival's 69-year history — MIFF 68½ has set a new precedent for the online delivery of an Australian film festival. Interstate viewers are estimated to be 20% of the audience.

"I'm incredibly proud that MIFF, at a time of utmost vulnerability for our festival, working as a small scale team in a context of immense uncertainty, has realised a massive ambition: to continue, and to do so by bringing a world-class festival experience to audiences" say Artistic Director, Al Cossar.

"Delivered amid Stage 4 lockdown restrictions, MIFF 68½ has been about meeting people where they are this year. We hope that the festival has offered something positive and enduring to those seeking cultural connection or a sense of escapism in these difficult times."

In a proud achievement for the festival team, MIFF 68½ realised the festival's long-held aspiration of gender parity in its programming, with 59 of the festival's 118 films (50%) having at least one female director attached to them.

Storied Australian director and MIFF 68½ ambassador Gillian Armstrong was effusive about the accomplishment: "I think it's fantastic that MIFF has achieved equal gender parity in the MIFF 68 ½ program. In a context where only 17% of films made in Australia are directed by women, this sends a very strong message to filmmakers, audiences and other festivals everywhere. We should be doing all we can to encourage more women to make and direct films."

Elsewhere across the festival, two of the program's top three streamed films — *Looky Looky Here Comes Cooky* (2300+ streams) and *Paper Champions* (2,400+ streams) — were Australian features having their world premiere at MIFF 68½. Furthermore, Australian content represented 32% of total streams.

Given the financial circumstances that many Australians found themselves in this year, MIFF 68½ had a particular focus on ensuring that a significant portion of the program was available to audiences at no cost. Pleasingly, 36% of all content was available for free, with free streams accounting for 69% (142,000) of all films streamed throughout the festival, including 135,000 streams of individual short films; enabling the amplification of new voices in filmmaking to a broad MIFF audience.

As Cossar puts it: "Despite the complexity and challenges of wholly reinventing the Southern Hemisphere's largest film festival, it is heartening to see the simple, resilient truth here: that stories, whether viewed on a big screen or in your living room, still connect and compel us, perhaps more than ever."

While films will still be available to stream on Sunday 23 August, the festival will celebrate on Saturday with a free online performance — *Schlockdown* by the Huxley's, in which Melbourne's incomparable performance artists will deliver a sparkling close to the festival.

NOTES TO EDITOR

MIFF will return 5 – 22 August 2021.

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