



4 October 2017

## #CINEMAFORTHESENSES BYRON BAY FILM FESTIVAL 6-15 OCTOBER

### Films not miss: Powerfully relevant dramas from around the globe

Two feature films at the **Byron Bay Film Festival** come from the front line of the contemporary world, capturing horribly familiar slices of the zeitgeist, from 2008's extremist massacre in Mumbai to the mean streets of ethnically divided Leeds.

#### **ONE LESS GOD**

***One Less God*** is a dramatised version of murderous true-life events – from the perspective of the guests staying at Mumbai's large and very grand **Taj Mahal Palace Hotel** – cowering in their rooms as they hear bombs exploding and gunmen roaming the hallways, blazing away with their AK-47s at anything that moved. It's chaotic, desperate and, yes, terrifying.

The film also covers events from the perspective of one of the terrorists, possibly controversially. He is not immune to the horror of his actions.

The independent Australian production is adrenalin-charged, nightmarish in its way but with empathic depth and breadth.

The film enters the claustrophobic realms of the disaster movies of yore, where the threat sways and closes in, as dread levels rise; this time it's humans turned into killing machines by a lunatic ideology.

But this is not simply a survival story or an action thriller; it's real theatre-of-the-mind.

The episode was seen as a failure of responsibility from politicians to the country's security agencies to the media, and had an unprecedented impact on the nation's psyche.

"It was not just about the fear of the hundreds trapped inside or the multiple bombings and shootings ... Rather, the attack on the Taj symbolised something way more powerful. It was a brazen combat against the most affluent and celebrated in

the financial capital. It was a brutal strike upon an establishment that symbolised the emergence of an entrepreneurial elite in India,” the Times commented.

*One Less God* is the debut feature by writer-director **Liam Worthington**, and features a multicultural cast chosen from his countrymen.

This Australian-esque quality to the action, direction and writing give it a gritty authenticity, which is enhanced by the fact that parts of the dialogue draws upon transcripts taken from the actual event.

A huge amount of time and effort went into getting things right, and into satisfying the ambition to go deeper into the story; to search for the human detail among the carnage.

“With 166 people killed, over 600 injured and thousands swept up in the events, it was India’s 9/11” Worthington said. “We spent years researching and writing, and once we became immersed in the events and the geo-politics, we knew we needed to get beyond the timeline of events that were filling the news cycles. We wanted to get to the heart of the tragedy, and also beyond it, to the people on both ends of the guns.”

It’s a but powerfully relevant story, and one we cannot turn away from – real world events, on our doorstep.

## **LIES WE TELL**

*Lies We Tell*, on the other hand, is pure fiction, a dramatic “story” from contemporary life.

Fiction, however, located firmly at the crossroads of cultures in cities such as Leeds, where it is dangerous to get caught standing in the middle.

A brilliant young lawyer, **Sybilla Deen**, crosses that intersection routinely – travelling between a traditional home-life, a multigenerational family of Pakistani origin, where arranged marriages are customary, and the Western professional world, with its contemporary undercurrent of colonialism.

Exposure of her modern Western lifestyle threatens to ostracize her from her community and even endangers her life, and the lives of her vulnerable younger brother and sister.

Similarly caught is **Gabriel Byrne**, in a wonderfully subtle playing of Donald, the dogged and hyper-loyal driver to fat cat **Harvey Keitel**; left to “tidy up” after his boss’s unexplained death, which includes his mistress, the conflicted Ms Deen.

Donald, a salt-of-the-earth-Yorkshireman, is drawn reluctantly out of his shell, and way out of his depth to protect her, from criminals and predators on both sides of the cultural divide, and from her own unhappy past.

He is drawn not only into a culture he doesn't understand, but a dark criminal world whose casual cruelty is even more baffling.

A passive individual, crushed and subservient, he steps up when his affections and outrage at injustice are pricked, and takes some action.

**Raindance** commentator **Derek Ravenscroft** noted that it follows “in the tradition of British thrillers such as *Mona Lisa* with its odd-couple pairing in a world of corruption and sleaze”.

But, he added, “the setting with its underbelly of arranged marriages, sexual exploitation and British Pakistani gangster culture gives it a unique, contemporary focus”.

Director **Mitu Misra** was born in Punjab, India and raised in Bradford, England, where he faced appalling bigotry – “the usual problems that first generation immigrants have faced throughout time. At school, I was beaten up regularly. If you weren't white in England at that time, it was common to be labelled either a Paki or a Nigger”, he says.

His safe haven was being among other immigrants. In Bradford predominately there were Pakistani immigrants, so most of his friends were from Pakistan, with whom he developed family-like relationships.

After the September 11 attacks in New York and the deadly bombing of London buses in 2005 Mitu saw many of his Muslim friends and colleagues show a degree of joy at the tragic events.

He sought to understand the phenomena that were dividing Muslim and non-Muslims and became interested in writing a story about the on-the-ground responses “that would reach all Muslims and change their way of thinking”.

**Cast and crew from both films will be in attendance at the festival.**

**Tickets for these and other festival films are on sale now at [www.bbff.com.au](http://www.bbff.com.au)**

## **THE FESTIVAL**

The Byron Bay Film Festival is illuminated with two dazzling red carpet gala events in the heart of town. Opening Night offers a chance for industry networking and a taste of the flavour of the festival to come, and features a highlight film screening. The culminating celebration event is an exciting night of recognition for filmmakers, the festival, Byron Bay, and the international film industry, and not to be missed.

The 11th Annual Byron Bay Film Festival is held on Friday 6 – Sunday 15 October 2017 in multiple venues throughout Byron Bay and surrounding suburbs.

Program is OUT NOW.

**Tickets are on sale now via [www.bbff.com.au](http://www.bbff.com.au)**