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## PREVIEW: THE 1ST LONDON FEMINIST FILM FESTIVAL

We take a look at the London Feminist Film Festival's inaugural programme and chat to its organiser, Anna Read

Iman Qureshi, DIVA film editor

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Wed, 07 Nov 2012 13:43:49 GMT | Updated 2 years today


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The lesbian movement of the 70s and 80s, particularly in America, but across the wider world too, was also one of the first and most forceful feminist movements. Along with the civil rights and anti-war activism, a new strand of feminism emerged; it was based on the simple yet radical idea to invent a new way of life entirely centred on women.

A vibrant, productive lesbian culture came to life through innovative women who created physical and cultural spaces in which to live, meet, discuss and organise this parallel revolution. They created literature, films, music, theatre and a new body of political and philosophical theory, and as a result, numerous lesbian communities were established in diverse countries.

Perhaps it's for this reason that the 1st London Feminist Film Festival sees fit to begin its hefty 4-day programme with the film 'Lesbiana - A Parallel Revolution' by Canadian director Myriam Fougere; the film documents this unique moment in history when the lesbian movement was at its strongest and brightest.



The film draws its material from Myriam's travels in the 80s which took her across America and through these lesbian communities, and it includes archive footage filmed at the time, and present-day interviews with activists.

The screening of *Lesbiana* is followed by a panel discussion which includes the director, and then the Opening Night Party of the Festival.

Organiser Anna Read hopes that the evening will set the tone for the rest of the Festival - "a good, friendly vibe, with mostly women coming together to celebrate feminism." Anna does however want the festival to be an inclusive space; everyone is welcome.

Anna dreamed up the Festival last year when she realised that although there were film festivals for women directors, the films in the festival weren't necessarily feminist in content. So while the rest of us were going gaga over the Olympics this summer, Anna was hard at work with the help of some friends, putting together an entirely new film festival with no budget, and inviting feminist film submissions from all around the world.

And submissions came from every corner of the globe - "176 films in total, from every continent except Antarctica" Anna clarifies. The four day festival has programmed 16 films; six feature length ones, and a number of shorts which can run up to 30 minutes in length. They include films from Senegal, Kenya, India, Sri Lanka, Canada, China and of course Britain.

'Beautiful Sentence', by Suzanne Cohen is a documentary about the poet Leah Thorn who worked with female prisoners in the UK, to help them find a voice through creative writing. Leah herself will be on the panel discussion after the film.

Also included in the same session on Prisons is the Ghanaian film 'The Witches of Gambaba' - an award-winning documentary about a community of women condemned to life in a camp for 'witches' in Northern Ghana.

Other international films include 'Kung Fu Grandma' from Kenya where women undertake a self-defence course, 'Ladies' Turn' from Senegal about a women's football team, and 'I Too Have A Name' about a Tamil nun in war-ravaged Sri Lanka, by first-time filmmaker, Suba Sivakumaran.

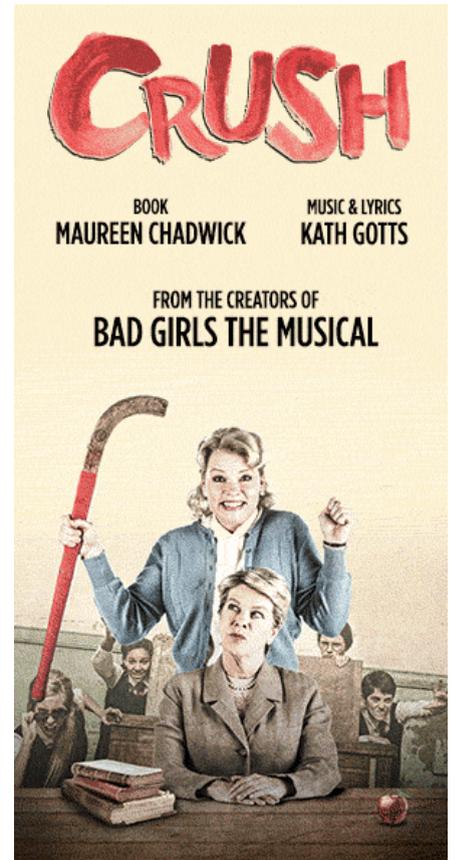
'Audre Lorde - The Berlin Years 1984 - 1992', a documentary about the famous lesbian feminist poet, also takes centre stage; it charts Lorde's contribution to the Afro-German movement, where she examines what it means to have a hyphenated identity, and challenges white privilege.

Bidisha, the festival's 'matron' will be chairing panels throughout. Panelists include filmmakers and directors as well as academics and critics, including Linda Bellos the prominent lesbian feminist. Anna has organised it so that the festival and its participants are engaging with audiences throughout. In fact, the four day festival concludes with a session titled 'Fighting Back!' Here the festival aims to encourage its audience to think about what they can do to change outlooks and encourage a greater awareness of feminism.

And will the festival be back next year? "Yes, hopefully," Anna says. Bigger and with more people involved. It certainly looks all set to succeed; tickets are selling fast - within a few days of going on sale, they've sold over half. So hurry up and get yours at [www.londonfeministfilmfestival.com](http://www.londonfeministfilmfestival.com).

### Details:

The 1st London Feminist Film Festival  
Hackney Picturehouse  
29th November - 2nd December 2012  
[londonfeministfilmfestival.com](http://londonfeministfilmfestival.com)



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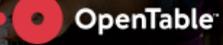


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