

City heads west as festival returns to the big...

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City heads west as festival returns to the big screen

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A stolen baby, a man on his deathbed, and a refugee family who dream of selling carpets are among the stories in a new anthology set to woo the crowd at the post-lockdown opening of the Sydney Film Festival.

The annual festival, which had run continuously since 1954 until Covid-19 struck, is back from a two-year hiatus and will launch at the State Theatre on Wednesday with the film *Here Out West*, a collection of stories from some of Sydney's more multicultural areas.

Here Out West's premiere comes after months of division across Sydney's affluent east and working class west. As one end of the city flaunted the rules and enjoyed beaches, the other faced an increased police presence, with mounted horses and helicopters flying overhead.

One of the film's writers, Claire Cao – whose story, *Closing Night*, involves a Chinese restaurant's last service – said the film depicts some of the subtle differences between Sydney's two sides which are not always obvious.

"I think the film really portrays a more innocent perspective of western Sydney, the one I had when I was younger before I started travelling to the city more for university. Before, I wasn't super cognisant of the view of western Sydney because it was just home," she said.

Although not a direct representation, the story is particularly close to Ms Cao's

own upbringing – not just

because she was born and raised in Canley Vale, but her parents, of Burmese-Chinese descent, also ran a takeaway store.

Like many migrant families with Asian backgrounds, the store served Chinese food. "In real life, my dad ran a Chinese restaurant but at home he cooked Burmese food," she said.

Here Out West is one of 233 films from 69 countries screening at the festival this year, including 111 feature films, 50 documentaries and 72 films.

About half of this year's line-up were directed or co-directed by female filmmakers.

Festival director Nashen Moodley said this year's event had arrived just as restrictions eased and Sydneysiders were at last getting out to enjoy the warmer months of the year.

"With major disruptions in cinema releases, the festival selection brings together some of the best films of the past two years; extraordinary works from major award-winners to some of the most anticipated films of the year," he said.

Grainne Brunson of Screen NSW said she was excited the festival was back in cinemas.

Here Out West will screen for the first time at the State Theatre at 49 Market St, at 7.30pm on Wednesday.

'The festival selection brings together some of the best films of the past two years'

NASHEN MOODLEY
SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL