

# Press release

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 Thursday 17 March**

## **fiveFilms4freedom announce first global LGBT influencers list**

The British Council, the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, and the BFI (British Film Institute) today (17th March) launch **fiveFilms4freedom**, a 24-hour online celebration of LGBT film which promotes love and diversity, through encouraging people to watch five short films from BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival.

**fiveFilms4freedom** is the world's first global, digital, LGBT campaign and is promoted through the British Council's network in more than 60 countries and regions around the globe, reaching audiences across the Americas, China, India, Israel, Mexico, Ukraine to the Far East

For the second year of **fiveFilms4freedom** we are announcing a list of global LGBT influencers. These 33 people are being recognised for their work to support and promote LGBT rights and equality around the world.

The list includes:

- Geng Le, founder of China's leading LGBT web portal and social media app Blued, which has 27 million users. Geng uses his platform to raise awareness of HIV prevention, workplace protection for LGBT people and campaigns for recognition of same sex marriage.
- Mahmoud Hassino, who started the first Syrian LGBT online magazine Mawaleh, and works at a Berlin-based refuge for LGBTI refugees.
- Bilge Tas, the director and co-founder of Pink Life QueerFest in Ankara, Turkey.
- Tiffany Kagure Mugo, co-founder and curator of HOLAA!, an online Pan Africanist Womanist hub that allows women to speak about their sexuality.

- HiaMyat Tun and Billy Stewart, the co-founders of &PROUD, the first LGBT film festival in Yangon, Myanmar. It was established to bring together the LGBT community in Myanmar and create greater awareness of issues facing LGBT communities across Asia.
- Dr Frank Mugisha, executive director of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) – a human rights network raising awareness of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression in Uganda. Today the network comprises 18 LGBTI organisations. Dr Mugisha was also a Nobel Peace Prize Nominee in 2014.

The [full list is available here](#).

**fiveFilms4freedom** is a chance for audiences, wherever they are, to enjoy LGBT cinema; to find out a little bit more about emerging LGBT filmmakers from around the world; and most importantly, to show support for freedom and equality everywhere.

From travelling communities to Easter bonnets to the wonderment of growing up, the five films tell a range of affecting stories about contemporary LGBT life in countries including Brazil, Ireland, Spain, the Philippines and the UK. They are polished, rough, funny, sad and inspiring and each has a different voice. The films are:

- **SWIRL** Two girls, young and in love, move backwards through the city in Petersen Vargas' lyrical short from the Philippines.
- **XAVIER** is a film by Brazilian director Ricky Mastro about a father who notices that his 11-year-old son pays a lot of attention to slightly older boys.
- **BREATHE** is a British-Irish film by James Doherty, about an Irish traveller is increasingly concerned that his son is 'soft', so sets about toughening him up.
- **TAKE YOUR PARTNERS** In this British short film by director Siri Rodnes, Miss Paterson expects Ollie to make an Easter bonnet like the other girls. But Ollie is not like the other girls.
- **THE ORCHID** A man has something important to tell his son, but can only get through to his voicemail in this film by Spanish director Ferran Navarro-Beltrán.

The five films will be available to watch online on 17th March on the [British Council website](#) and BFI player for the duration of BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival (16-27 March)

**Alan Gemmell, Director fiveFilms4freedom, British Council** said:

“**fiveFilms4freedom** is a ground-breaking LGBT campaign supporting freedom and equality all over the world. It showcases some of our finest short film makers to help celebrate love and diversity through one of the world's most powerful and accessible cultural forms: film.

“To celebrate our second year we are announcing our list of global LGBT influencers – people who work tirelessly to promote equality and shine a light on diversity. Often working

in countries and cultures where LGBT communities are overlooked; regardless of borders, they are united in their efforts to raise awareness of issues affecting LGBT communities and promote the freedom to love who you choose.”

**Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture said:**

“I’m incredibly proud that the UK is staging fiveFilms4freedom, the first initiative of its kind anywhere in the world. It will give global audiences the opportunity to celebrate the work of filmmakers who are raising awareness of LGBT issues. This is a fantastic collaborative project from the BFI and British Council. Together they continue to deliver exciting programmes of activity that not only educate, but also challenge audiences to better understand and appreciate the diversity of the world we live in.”

**Briony Hanson, Director Film, British Council said:**

“The British Council’s job is to connect people around the world and **fiveFilms4freedom** explores the diversity, freedom of expression and celebration of difference that characterise UK society. We believe passionately in the power of culture and film to change people’s lives and hope that this programme has a long lasting, far reaching and positive impact. This campaign uses film and the internet to cross borders and share the message of equality.”

**Tricia Tuttle, Deputy Director of Festivals at the British Film Institute said:**

“LGBT film festivals are great spaces for nurturing new film talents and creating dialogue between filmmakers and audiences. In this, our 30th edition of BFI Flare, we are thrilled to present a rich and diverse programme which shows LGBT cinema to be in great shape. And it’s fantastic to work with British Council to connect filmmakers to a truly global community united in a love of film and a belief that love is a basic fundamental human right.”

ENDS

**Notes to Editors**

The British Council ran a 20-day campaign to find the influencers using its staff and networks in 110 countries and through a global social media promotion. Nominees were ranked against criteria and a final list was decided by The British Council and British Film Institute. The full list is available [here](#).

**About fiveFilms4freedom**

fiveFilms4freedom run alongside BFI Flare 2016, the British Film Institute’s LGBT Film Festival. Using the BFI

player and the British Council's global network it promotes five films from this year's Flare Festival to people all over the world.

### **About the British Council**

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create international opportunities for the people of the UK and other countries and build trust between them worldwide.

We work in more than 100 countries and our 8,000 staff – including 2,000 teachers – work with thousands of professionals and policy makers and millions of young people every year by teaching English, sharing the arts and delivering education and society programmes. We are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter. A core publicly-funded grant provides 20 per cent of our turnover which last year was £864 million. The rest of our revenues are earned from services which customers around the world pay for, such as English classes and taking UK examinations, and also through education and development contracts and from partnerships with public and private organisations. All our work is in pursuit of our charitable purpose and supports prosperity and security for the UK and globally.

For more information, please visit: [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org).

### **About BFI Flare**

BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival is the UK's longest running LGBT film event. It began in 1986 as Gay's Own Pictures. By its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition it was tagged the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and since then has grown to become the largest LGBT film event in the UK, and its most anticipated. The Festival changed its name to BFI Flare was 2014 to reflect the increasing diversity of its audience and its programme. Last year's festival saw admissions of over 23,000. The festival is programmed by Jason Barker, Jay Bernard, Michael Blyth, Brian Robinson and Emma Smart, led by Deputy Head of Festivals, Tricia Tuttle and Head of Festivals, Clare Stewart.

The full programme of BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival will include 50 feature films, an expanded industry programme, selected films on BFI Player VOD service, a series of special events and archive screenings. fiveFilms4freedom will see Flare offer five LGBT short films for free across the world and promoted through the British Council's global networks. The festival runs 16<sup>th</sup> March – 27<sup>th</sup> March 2016. [www.bfi.org.uk/Flare](http://www.bfi.org.uk/Flare)