

London Film Festival

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REASONS TO GET EXCITED ABOUT THE

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The biggest film event of the year gives us plenty of excuses to venture into Leicester Square (and beyond)

1 Catch one of next year's most talked about films

The London Film Festival has a track record of premiering buzzy Oscar movies months ahead of release (see: 'Room', '12 Years a Slave' and 'Birdman'). This year, all eyes are on **'La La Land'**, a gorgeous 1950s-style musical starring Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling as lovers trying to make it in showbiz. It's not out until January, but LFF-goers will be able to see it next month. Ditto **'Manchester by the Sea'**, an awards favourite that features a staggering performance by Casey Affleck as a man struggling with grief – again not out till January.

2 Try out a whopping 800-seat pop-up cinema by the Thames

A huge temporary riverside cinema is opening next to Embankment station for 12 days only. The cinema will seat 780 people, making



it one of the biggest in London for the duration of the festival. It's called the **Embankment Garden Cinema** and will be located in Victoria Embankment Gardens, the small park between the Strand and the river. Amazingly, it will be fully kitted out with proper cinema seats, Dolby surround sound and 4K digital projection. It will be fancy but it won't be around for long.

3 The world is coming to London

Flicking through the 112-page LFF programme is like spinning a globe and stopping it with your finger. So I did just that: closing my eyes and randomly poking a finger into the guide. I came up with **'The Space in Between – Marina Abramović and Brazil'**, a documentary about the famous performance artist. And a second spin... this time getting **'Nocturama'**, a controversial French drama about a terrorist attack on Paris. See what I mean?



4 The London Film Festival is genuinely diverse

Post #OscarsSoWhite, the LFF is making an effort to be part of change by celebrating a diversity of stories and experiences. The festival opens with **'A United Kingdom'**, a true-life 1940s love story about a high profile mixed-race marriage, directed by Amma Asante (*'Belle'*). Its star, *'Selma'* actor David Oyelowo, will also lead a debate about diversity in film. Other galas include a premiere of Uganda-set *'Queen of Katwe'* featuring this week's cover star Lupita Nyong'o. Time Out will be at the festival on October 6 to present **'13TH'**, a stunning new documentary about racial inequality in American prisons directed by *'Selma'* filmmaker Ava DuVernay.

5 We get to gawp at the stars

The guest list for the festival sounds like Oscar night. Some of the paparazzi-baiting folk walking the red carpet will include **Rosamund Pike** and **David Oyelowo** for their opening-night film *'A United Kingdom'*, **Marion Cotillard** (*'It's Only the End of the World'*), **Lupita Nyong'o** (*'Queen of Katwe'*), **Nicole Kidman** (*'Lion'*) and **Cillian Murphy** for the closing film, *'Free Fire'*. Who needs LA when you've got LS (Leicester Square)?

6 Watch a film by your new favourite director

The LFF's programmers spend 11 months of the year travelling around the world discovering work by the best and brightest new filmmakers. The festival even has a First Feature Competition to showcase the best debuts. My picks this year are: **'Divines'**, an award-winning story about young women



trying to get by in a tough Paris suburb, and **'Lady Macbeth'**, a low-budget British adaptation of a nineteenth-century Russian novella starring the talented Florence Pugh. Be brave, take a risk on something by someone you've never heard of.

7 Get inspired by a filmmaker talking about their work

Conversation is a big deal at the LFF. This year veteran filmmaker **Werner Herzog** (*'Grizzly Man'*) will be grilled on stage by actor and *'Submarine'* filmmaker Richard Ayoade following a screening of his new doc about the Internet age, *'Lo and Behold, Reveries of the Connected World'*. **Ben Wheatley** (*'Sightseers'*) will also be discussing his career ahead of a premiere of his 1970s-set action thriller *'Free Fire'*. And pretty much every film is followed by a Q&A. Talking is high on the agenda – just not during the films, please.

8 It's not just about the West End

The festival's HQs are the Odeon and Vue cinemas in Leicester Square and the BFI Southbank in Waterloo. But the LFF also spreads itself across the city, so you might find a film near your gaff – if you happen to live near the Ritz in Brixton, the Picturehouse in Hackney or the Curzon in Chelsea.



9 Sod the VIPs, we can all get tickets

Some big film festivals, like Cannes, are swanky industry-only dos, where tickets are like hen's teeth. The LFF is different. Sure, getting into the big galas is only a fraction less impossible than scoring Glastonbury tickets. But the festival is releasing more tickets to sold-out films this Thursday (September 29). So you've got two days to decide what to see. You can also enter our competition to win a pair of tickets to the closing-night film, **'Free Fire'**.

10 It's not all chin-stroking and seriousness

Film festivals have a reputation (not entirely unjustified) for showing subtitled films about death and existential struggle. Not the LFF! Yes, there are plenty of challenging films, but they're showing alongside sci-fi, horror, action and comedies. Top of my to-book list is British low-budget occult crime movie **'The Ghoul'** and French cannibal movie **'Raw'** (warning: an ambulance had to be called to one screening of this after several people in the audience fainted). The festival is handily split into strands to help you find what you're looking for: Laugh, Love, Thrill, Cult, Family... well, you get the picture. ■



By Dave Calhoun

Who took his first trip to the London Film Festival in 1999 to see Michael Winterbottom's brilliant *'Wonderland'*