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barbican

Queer 80s: Cinema on the Brink of Global Change

Wed 5 – Wed 26 Jun

Presenting ground-breaking movies from across the globe, as part of the Barbican's Pride season this summer, **Queer 80s: Cinema on the Brink of Global Change** invites audiences to time travel back to a decade when LGBTQ+ representation and creativity on screen thrived.

Throughout the 80s, queer filmmakers across the world seized the camera to tell new stories in different ways with provocative and unapologetic depictions of LGBTQ+ people making it to the big screen.

The world was on the edge of transformation. Borders were about to shift (three of the films in this film programme originate from countries that would not exist beyond 1991), the work to end Apartheid in South Africa continued while - even as archaic laws around homosexuality began to be revoked - the Aids crisis led to a terrible wave of homophobia.



Era Vermelho Seu Batom, Brazil 1983, Dir Henrique Magalhães

Alex Davidson, Barbican Cinema Curator, says: *“Following on from the success of last year’s Queer 90s season, I’m excited to reflect on the preceding decade, when change was*

in the air, and bring these 1980s LGBTQ+ films, most of which hardly ever screen in the UK, to the Barbican cinemas.

“With films from the last years of the Brazilian dictatorship, South African Apartheid and the former countries of the Soviet Union and East & West Germany, these remarkable films, including a wild and wonderful take on Virginia’s Woolf’s *Orlando*, a gorgeous Azerbaijani folk tale by a filmmaker jailed for his sexuality, an outrageous, gay, erotic satire from Japan, and Almodóvar’s cunning gender play in *Law of Desire*, are emblematic of a world on the brink of massive change.”

- ***Freak Orlando*** (West Germany 1981) + ScreenTalk with Ulrike Ottinger – **Wed 5 Jun**
- ***Beautiful Mystery*** (Japan 1983) + introduction by Tony Rayns – **Thu 6 Jun**
- ***Beyond Gravity*** (New Zealand 1988) + other Gay Shorts from New Zealand + introduction by Daniel Theophanous – **Sat 8 Jun**
- ***The Farewell*** (Sweden-Finland 1982) + introduction by Mekella Broomberg – **Sun 9 Jun**
- **Radical Defiance: Queer Brazilian Super-8 Shorts 1982-3** + introduction – **Wed 12 Jun**
- ***Tongues Untied*** (US 1989) + introduction by Rikki Beadle-Blair and live poetry – **Thu 13 Jun**
- ***Ashik Kerib*** (Soviet Union 1988) + introduction by Michael Brooke – **Tue 16 Jun**
- ***Law of Desire*** + introduction (Spain 1987) - **Thu 20 Jun**
- ***Quest for Love*** (South Africa 1988) + introduction by Tara Brown – **Sat 22 Jun**
- ***Coming Out*** (East Germany 1989) + **ScreenTalk** with actor Dirk Kummer – **Wed 26 Jun**

Queer 80s: Cinema on the Brink of Global Change is bookended by two films from West and East Germany. The season opens with Ulrike Ottinger’s ***Freak Orlando***, from West Germany, a bold and bizarre take on **Virgina Woolf**’s gender-changing hero, which came at the beginning of a wave of astonishing LGBTQ+ works made in the last decade of the country’s existence. Ulrike Ottinger will attend Opening Night for a ScreenTalk.

The season closes with ***Coming Out***, one of the last films made in the former East Germany which premiered there on 9 November 1989, the same night that the Berlin Wall came down. Directed by **Heiner Carow**, an established filmmaker from the former GDR, this is a powerful story about a teacher’s sexual awakening and self-acceptance. Following the film there will be a ScreenTalk with actor **Dirk Kummer**, hosted by **Timothy Phillips**.

In Spain, the cultural movement Movida – which took place following the death of Franco – was well underway when Almodóvar cast cisgender actor Maura as a trans character and trans actor Bibiana Fernández as her cisgender niece in his twisted gay romance ***Law of Desire***.

Sweden and Finland paved the way to greater LGBTQ+ equality in the 1980s and the repressive 1930s society depicted in ***The Farewell*** shows just how far they had come. A gay woman struggles to cope in the repressive home of her bourgeois father on the eve of WWII in Helsinki, in **Tuija-Maija Niskanen**’s haunting period drama.

Gay women’s lives are also central in **Helena Nogueira**’s rarely screened lesbian romance ***Quest for Love***, made in South Africa, where it was banned for its anti-Apartheid stance

and gay storyline. The film is critical of the then government policy, and it is remarkable that it got made in the last two years of Apartheid.

From Japan comes ***Beautiful Mystery***, a 1983 Japanese 'pink film' (used to describe a type of Japanese film with explicit erotic content). **Genji Nakamura's** outrageous gay erotic comedy satirises author and nationalist **Yukio Mishima** and is an irreverent take down of nationalist hysteria and po-faced patriotism.

New Zealand decriminalised same sex activity in 1986 and just two years later came ***Beyond Gravity***, a charming romance between a neurotic gay man who meets a cocky Italian man. Both leads share a cute chemistry, and the sexual frankness of their relationship is surprising for a film of this era. This screens alongside two gay Kiwi shorts ***Singing Seas*** and ***My First Suit***.

Shot in Azerbaijan, ***Ashik Kerib*** is the last completed film by **Sergei Parajanov**, a director jailed for his sexuality. An Azeri-Turkish love story about a wandering minstrel forced to roam the world for 1001 nights to win the hand of his beloved, the film is a glorious tribute to Azeri culture, filled with music and joy, and although any queerness is kept at a subtextual level, it is a feast for the senses and a fitting swan song for this talented, unique director.

Three powerful Brazilian short films explore queer lives in the last years of the military dictatorship in **Radical Defiance: Queer Brazilian Super-8 Shorts 1982-3**, which will be screened in the UK for the first time. These films denounced the conservatism and religious oppression and celebrated gay lives at a time of intense, machismo-fuelled prejudice.

Tongues Untied, **Marlon Riggs'** classic essay film is an intense depiction of the Black, gay American experience during the 1980s and is an arresting mix of documentary and performance. Riggs died five years after the film's release, but his legacy lives on, and the imagery of *Tongues Untied* can be seen in the works of filmmakers such as **Isaac Julien** and **Barry Jenkins**. This screening will be introduced by **Rikki Beadle-Blair** and includes live poetry.

Queer 80s: Cinema on the Brink of Global Change is part of Barbican's wider Pride season, celebrating queer representation in music, film and visual arts across the Centre this summer.

Season images are available to download [here](#).

LISTINGS

***Freak Orlando* (18*) + ScreenTalk with Ulrike Ottinger**

West Germany 1981, Dir Ulrike Ottinger, 126min

Wed 5 Jun, 6.30pm

Cinema 2

Years before Sally Potter's ***Orlando*** and Paul B. ***Preciado's Orlando, My Political Biography*** came queer icon Ulrike Ottinger's wild, sprawling interpretation of Virginia Woolf's gender-changing time traveller, Orlando, played by cult actor Magdalena Montezuma. Alongside residents of so-called 'Freak City,' Orlando bounces from a modern department store to the Middle Ages to the Spanish Inquisition, encountering weird and wonderful characters on the way.

The film came at the beginning of a wave of astonishing queer cinema works made in the last decade of West Germany's existence. Ottinger's work with a variety of unconventional actors, the depiction of disabilities and the diversity of the human form, continues to be provocative to this day. It invites us to challenge our own ways of thinking about Queerness and the way we live and conceive it.

Following the film there will be a ScreenTalk with **Ulrike Ottinger**, hosted by **Professor Rosalind Galt**. Co-presented with the Goethe-Institut.

***Beautiful Mystery* (18*) + introduction by Tony Rayns**

Japan 1983, Dir Genji Nakamura, 61min

Thu 6 Jun, 6.30pm

Cinema 1

Political correctness flies out the window in Genji Nakamura's outrageous gay erotic comedy, which satirises author and nationalist Yukio Mishima and his private army.

Aspiring, patriotic bodybuilder Shinohara is spotted by the dominant Mitani (a caricature of queer writer and ardent nationalist Yukio Mishima) and recruited for militia, with plans to launch a coup d'état. The soldiers have more than revolution on the mind, though, and Shinohara finds himself in a world of gay sex and worship of the body. This film is a real one-of-a-kind, while the satirical hara-kiri 'rehearsal' conducted by Mitani is quite something to behold. In partnership with the Japan Foundation.

***Beyond Gravity* and other Gay Shorts from New Zealand (15*) + introduction by Daniel Theophanous**

New Zealand 1988, Dir Garth Maxwell, 48min

Sat 8 Jun, 6.30pm

Cinema 2

Richard (Robert Pollock) lives in Auckland with his sister and drives her and his mates up the wall with his obsession with the cosmos and the possible explosion of the sun. His life is upended when he meets Johnny (Iain Ray), an adventurous guy who encourages Richard to loosen up. Can their romance last or is the notion of opposites attracting just a myth?

Both leads share a cute chemistry and the sexual frankness of their relationship is surprising for a featurette made just two years after the decriminalisation of homosexuality in New Zealand, which paved the way to the country becoming one of the most queer-friendly in the world.

Showing with

Singing Seas

New Zealand 1988, Dir Mark Summerville, 9 min

This impressionistic short imagines gay tribal life on a fantasy South Pacific Island.

+ *My First Suit*

New Zealand 1985, Dir Stewart Main, 28 min

14-year-old Steve has enough on his plate – spots, nagging parents – and his realisation that he likes boys doesn't make life any easier in this funny, horribly relatable coming-of-age comedy.

***The Farewell* (15*) + introduction by Mekella Broomberg**

Sweden-Finland 1982, Dir Tuija-Maija Niskanen, 90 min

Sun 9 Jun, 6pm

Cinema 2

In this beautiful, poignant Swedish-language drama by Finnish director Tuija-Maija Niskanen, a gay woman, Valerie (Pirkko Nurmi) struggles to cope in the repressive home of her haute bourgeois father on the eve of WWII in Helsinki. We witness key moments in her

childhood and life as a young adult with her cruel father and passive mother, as she determines to follow her heart.

Niskanen's film is infused with the spirit of Ingmar Bergman's period dramas and features many of his regular collaborators, including actors Gunnar Björnstrand and Stina Ekblad. Sweden and Finland paved the way to greater LGBTQ+ equality in the 1980s – the repressive society depicted in *The Farewell* shows just how far they had come.

Radical Defiance: Queer Brazilian Super-8 Shorts 1982-3 (18*) + introduction

Wed 12 Jun, 6.30pm

Cinema 2

From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, a wave of radical short films, shot on Super-8 by queer filmmakers, emerged in northeastern Brazil as part of a movement termed 'Cinema Guei'. These films denounced conservatism and religious oppression that continued to prevail under the military rule and celebrated gay lives at a time of intense, machismo-fuelled prejudice.

This selection includes ***Closes***, a punchy film that blends documentary and a fictional romance between two men, a screening of which was shut down by the military police.

Baltazar da Lomba imagines the first historical record of the repression of homosexuality in the state of Paraíba during the colonial period while ***Era Vermelho Seu Batom*** considers the prejudice that can come from within gay communities as a Carnival romance ends in tears.

Programme:

Closes

Brazil 1982, Dir Pedro Nunes, 32 min

Romantic and erotic scenes between a young gay couple are interspersed with drag performance and vox pops considering contemporary attitudes, some positive, some homophobic, towards gay lives in Paraíba.

Baltazar da Lomba

Brazil 1982, Dir Henrique Magalhães, 20 min

An unapologetically queer imagining of the tale of a man convicted of sodomy by the Inquisition in colonial Brazil.

Era Vermelho Seu Batom (*Your Lipstick was Red*)

Brazil 1983, Dir Henrique Magalhães, 12 min

Passion, internalised homophobia and heartbreak arise during Carnival.

***Tongues Untied* (18*) + introduction by Rikki Beadle-Blair and live poetry**

US 1989, Dir Marlon Riggs, 55 min

Thu 13 Jun, 6.20pm

Cinema 2

Marlon Riggs blends archive footage into his unique, experimental film, to, in his own words, "shatter the nation's brutalising silence on matters of sexual and racial difference". The film shows homophobia (including a notorious routine from Eddie Murphy's stand-up), racism in the gay community (sexualisation of the Black male body by white men) and the devastation of the AIDS crisis.

Conservative politician Pat Buchanan held the film up as an example of how its funding "glorified homosexuality" and used it to criticise President George W. Bush for 'allowing taxpayers' money to fund 'pornographic art.'

Showing with:

Affirmations

US 1990, Dir Marlon Riggs, 10 min

Marlon Riggs expresses the hopes, dreams, and desires of gay Black men in this ode to queer African American empowerment.

***Ashik Kerib* (PG) + introduction by Michael Brooke**

Soviet Union 1988, Dir Dodo Abashidze, Sergei Parajanov 73 min

Tue 16 Jun, 6.30pm

Cinema 3

Based on a tale by Armenian director Sergei Parajanov's favourite Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov, *Ashik Kerib* is a gorgeous fable about a minstrel compelled to travel the Caucasus to earn riches and win the hand of a rich merchant's daughter. On his travels he is nearly thwarted by a wicked pasha and a cruel sultan (to whom some critics have drawn parallels with Brezhnev and Stalin).

Some may draw parallels between the minstrel and Parajanov himself – both are persecuted for forbidden love (Parajanov was jailed for 'homosexual acts') and free themselves through art. Shot in Azerbaijan, *Ashik Kerib* is a glorious tribute to Azeri culture, filled with music, poetry and joy. Although any queerness is necessarily kept at a subtextual level, the film is a feast for the senses and stands as a fitting swan song for a brilliant, unique director.

***Law of Desire* (18) + introduction**

Spain 1987, dir Pedro Almodóvar 102 min

Thu 20 Jun, 6.20pm

Cinema 1

A deeply twisted gay romance is at the heart of Pedro Almodóvar first truly great film, a sexy, dangerous thriller with superb performances from Antonio Banderas and Carmen Maura.

Law of Desire opens with an unashamedly erotic scene of gay sexual desire and keeps the passion up until the end credits in his marvellous noir-tinged tale that puts an obsessive stalker (Antonio Banderas), a lovelorn gay porn director (Eusebio Poncela) and his caring trans sister (Carmen Maura) at the centre of a heady dark thriller.

The Movida movement, the cultural explosion that took place in Spain following the death of Franco, was well under way when Almodóvar made his groundbreaking seventh film. His cunning gender play – he casts cisgender actor Maura as a trans character and trans actor Bibiana Fernández as her cisgender niece – is as playful as ever and it deservedly won the first ever Teddy Award, awarding the best queer cinema, at the Berlin Film Festival.

***Quest for Love* (15*) + introduction by Tara Brown**

South Africa 1988, Dir Helena Nogueira, 94 min

Sat 22 Jun, 6.20pm

Cinema 3

Alexandra (Jana Cilliers), a political journalist, is released from a South African prison after accusing the government of plotting military intervention in the neighbouring country of Mozania (a thinly-disguised Mozambique). As she waits to reunite with her lover, marine biologist Dorothy (Sandra Prinsloo), she reflects on the last few years, including her relationship and her political awakening.

Banned in its home country for its anti-Apartheid stance and the lesbian romance at its centre, *Quest for Love* is fiercely critical of South Africa's intervention in Angola and Mozambique. While elements of its story have dated, its clear rage against racist government policy is remarkable for a film made in the last years of Apartheid.

***Coming Out* (15*) + ScreenTalk with actor Dirk Kummer, hosted by Timothy Phillips.**

East Germany 1989, Dir Heiner Carow, 113 min

Wed 26 Jun, 6.30pm

Cinema 1

High school teacher Philipp (Matthias Freihof) starts a whirlwind relationship with a female

colleague. However, an encounter with a man from his past triggers a journey of self-discovery, and a fateful night in a gay bar changes his life, leading to a romance with another man (Dirk Kummer).

Heiner Carow, an established filmmaker in East Germany, directed this powerful story of gay love and self-acceptance, released in 1989, just as Germany, and, indeed, Europe were about to change, forever. It was one of the last films released by DEFA (the East German film studio) and premiered on 9 November 1989, the same night the Berlin Wall fell. The film features wonderful scenes in East Berlin's gay hangouts, the legendary Zum Burgfrieden and Schoppenstube bars.

ENDS

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Standard ticket price: £13/ Members: £10.40/ Concessions: £11

Under 18s: £6, Young Barbican: £5

Barbican press room

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About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), and a London base of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other associates and partners including the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), the [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Britten Sinfonia](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), [Darbar Festival](#), [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [Drum Works](#), [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), [Serious](#), and [Trafalgar Entertainment](#).

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About Barbican Cinema

We connect audiences with a curated programme of international cinema; from celebrated filmmakers to ground-breaking and under-heard voices from past and present.

Our programmes are presented in Cinemas 1 in the main centre and Cinemas 2&3 on Beech Street. Our programme ranges from thematic seasons that respond to today's world, to new releases, ScreenTalks, cross-artform collaborations, family events, access screenings and event cinema that presents the performing arts on screen.

We showcase the work of emerging filmmakers, as well as less familiar work of exceptional filmmakers from the UK and around the world. We champion the work of Barbican Young Programmers and give stage to emerging musicians in our ongoing film & live music series which includes our flagship collaboration with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

As part of a cross-arts centre, our cinemas are a cultural space for people to share the viewing experience. We strive to be inclusive in everything we do; providing platforms for the widest possible range of filmmakers and ensuring we are an open, welcoming and accessible venue for all our audiences.