

CIFF takes place on unceded Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country, and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and gather.

Introduction

This year's CIFF explores the work of two contrasting filmmakers: Mitchell Leisen, the maestro of high energy 1930s Hollywood comedy, and Australian filmmaker, Kathryn Millard, presenting two of her recently remastered documentary classics.

Mitchell Leisen: After designing sets and costumes for Cecil B. DeMille and others, he emerged in the 1930s as a director in major studios. We have selected three of Leisen's key films that are some of the best Depression-era comedies to come from Hollywood. In them, we find Leisen returning repeatedly to stories of spirited and independent women who are driven by job insecurity, fear of homelessness and hunger, and determined to make the most of any lucky break to survive. The films depict a daily working life where one has to live by one's wits. Much of the comedy derives from the extreme gaps between the frivolous and extravagant lifestyle of the ultra-wealthy and the daily concerns of the working class. Leisen's work belies the standard trope that Hollywood ignored the Depression and offered only light diversionary entertainment to its audiences.

Kathryn Millard has been described as "one of the most intellectual and artistically rigorous filmmakers in the region" (*The Monthly*). Her dramas include *Parklands* (1996) with Cate Blanchett in her first film, and the feature *Travelling Light* (2003), both of which screened widely in festivals and won awards. Her documentaries (two of which are included in our festival) have also been internationally recognised and much awarded. Social history and resilience, the arts and psychology are recurring topics in Kathryn's films. She is currently Emeritus Professor of Screen and Creative Arts at Macquarie University. She lives and works on unceded Gadigal land in Sydney's inner west.

OPENING NIGHT
Friday 20 OCTOBER at 7.30pm

REMEMBER THE NIGHT

Director: Mitchell Leisen **Screenplay:** Preston Sturges
1940 | 94 mins | Classification: PG

With Barbara Stanwyck and Fred McMurray

Remember the Night is a wonderful comedy classic (rated a rare 100% on Rotten Tomatoes!), but too rarely seen today. Stanwyck plays a woman driven by poverty to shoplifting, for which she is arrested. Her attorney pays her bail and takes her to her home in the mid-west to re-unite with her mother - a woman living in grim Dickensian poverty. The attorney then takes her to his own family home for Christmas, a move that changes Stanwyck's life. A *Time Out* (London) critic described it as "a winning romantic comedy-drama ... a movie of warmth and immense style." A Melbourne Cinematheque program note concluded that it is "a luminous film conveying the sentimental gleam of new-found love ... goes well beyond the hide-bound conventions of romantic comedy. ... surprisingly complex and unexpectedly moving".



Saturday 21 OCTOBER at 1.30pm

EASY LIVING

Director: Mitchell Leisen **Screenplay:** Preston Sturges
1937 | 88 mins | Classification: PG

With Jean Arthur and Ray Milland

Part social satire laced with lively physical comedy, *Easy Living* ranks as one of the great American screwball comedies from the 1930s, rating 100% on the Rotten Tomatoes platform. The film follows the fate of a poorly paid and poorly treated stenographer, anxious about keeping her job and finding enough money to pay her rent and to eat. Good fortune literally falls on her head in the form of a mink coat thrown out of the window of a high-rise penthouse during a spat between a mega-wealthy businessman and his spendthrift wife. In unforeseen ways, the incident cascades into a life-changing event for the stenographer. A critic in *Time Out* (London) described it as "an irresistible screwball comedy with a dash of Wall Street satire ... it is a delight".



Saturday 21 OCTOBER at 4.15pm

LIGHT YEARS

Director: Kathryn Millard
1990 | 47 mins | Classification: G

Newly restored from the original film negative, *Light Years* is an invaluable and delightful portrait of the life and work of the celebrated Australian photographer, Olive Cotton. The film is built around rare and insightful conversations with Olive Cotton, and recounts her early career in the 1930s and 40s working with Max Dupain in a ground-breaking photographic studio in Sydney. At the end of the war, Cotton moved to Koorawatha in central New South Wales where she and her husband struggled to gain a living from the land and raise a family. Living for many years without running water or electricity, she continued to take photographs although she was unable to print them. The negatives were carefully stored in an old sea trunk until the 1960s. Eventually friends and family built a darkroom in Cowra, and in the early 1980s Olive resumed exhibiting her work to critical and public acclaim. **With discussion after the screening with filmmaker Kathryn Millard and Shaune Lakin, Senior Curator of Photography at the National Gallery of Australia.**



Saturday 21 OCTOBER at 7.30pm

MIDNIGHT

Director: Mitchell Leisen
Screenplay: Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett
1939, Australia | 94 mins | Classification: PG

With Claudette Colbert, Don Ameche, John Barrymore, Mary Astor

Midnight is essential Leisen: a zany comedy notionally set in Paris, but with a universal story delving into the gap between the amoral ultra-rich on one hand, and the compassion of the working class poor on the other hand. With total conviction and impeccable style, Claudette Colbert plays a woman who, for complicated reasons, is stranded on a rainy night in Paris, penniless and hungry, with one asset: the lamé evening dress she is wearing.

Derek Adams in *Time Out* (London) wrote: "An enchanting comedy ... with a superbly malicious script, gorgeous sets and camerawork, and a matchless cast. All in all, probably Mitchell Leisen's best film."



Sunday 22 OCTOBER
at 1.30pm

THE BOOT CAKE

Director: Kathryn Millard
2009 | 74 mins | Classification: G

Newly re-mastered, *The Boot Cake* celebrates the universal power of silent cinema to engage audiences, young and old, free of language barriers, whenever and wherever it has the opportunity. The film was largely shot in India and observes the way in which Charlie Chaplin's "Tramp" character is remembered in the provincial town of Adipur in Western India. There, everyone, from toddlers to the frail aged, dresses in Chaplin costumes and parades in honour of Chaplin's birthday. The local doctor who initiated the annual festivities, routinely prescribes Chaplin's comedies as a tonic for well-being and mental health. The filmmaker herself participates in the ceremony by bringing the all-important birthday cake, designed in the shape of the boot that the starving Chaplin eats in *The Gold Rush*.

"An astonishing testament to the far-reaching influence of silent film."

- David Robinson, film critic and Chaplin's biographer.

With discussion after the screening with Kathryn Millard and film archivist Dr Ray Edmondson, President of the Friends of the National Film and Sound Archive.



Sunday 22 OCTOBER
at 4pm

SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS

Written & Directed by: Preston Sturges
1941 | 90 mins | Classification: PG

With: Joel McCrea and Veronica Lake

Sullivan's Travels is one of the most celebrated of American comedy-dramas from the Depression years (rated the rare 100% on the Rotten Tomatoes platform). To quote *Time Out* (London): "An irresistible tale of a Hollywood director, tired of making comedies and bent on branching out with an arthouse epic called *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, who sets out to research the meaning of poverty. Suitably costumed as a hobo, he becomes to all intents and purposes a stateless person. ... *Sullivan's Travels* is a gem, an almost serious comedy not taken entirely seriously, with wonderful dialogue, eccentric characterisations, and superlative performances throughout". An homage, using the same title as Sullivan's film-within-the-film, was made by the Coen Brothers in 2000. Bosley Crowther in the *New York Times* in 1942 ranked *Sullivan's Travels* as one of the year's 10 best films and described it as "a beautifully trenchant satire ... A truly brilliant serio-comedy ... it crackles with extraordinary humor."



CANBERRA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Friday to Sunday
20 - 22 OCTOBER 2023

at the ARC Cinema
National Film and Sound Archive
McCoy Circuit, Acton, ACT
www.ciff.com.au



BOOKINGS NOW OPEN ON THE FESTIVAL WEBSITE

<https://ciff.com.au/> and at Reception, NFSA

For enquiries and booking assistance, contact NFSA (10am to 4pm daily, or late during the Festival) on

02 6248 2000 or CIFF at admin@ciff.com.au

The Festival is presented in association with the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, and with the kind support of the Friends of the NFSA and the Motion Picture Association



CANBERRA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

20 - 22 OCTOBER 2023



OLIVE COTTON, LIGHT YEARS • A FILM BY KATHRYN MILLARD
PHOTO CREDIT: SANDY EDWARDS

at the National Film and Sound Archive, McCoy Circuit, Acton, ACT

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