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ACCLAIMED WA FILM PREMIERES AT PERTH FESTIVAL

The Furnace

Lotterywest Films Opening Week, 30 November – 6 December

AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE

'British western is tough as old leather and good as gold.' The Guardian
'The film combines racial sensitivity with good old-fashioned storytelling.' Variety

The Australian premiere of the powerful and wholly Western Australian frontier film ***The Furnace*** will open the **Lotterywest Films** season in spectacular style on 30 November.

Perth Festival is thrilled to present WA writer-director **Roderick Mackay's** remarkable debut feature for the first time, in the State in which it was made – fresh from its triumphant world premiere at the **2020 Venice Film Festival**.



Image: Kaushik Das, Ahmed Malek, Baykali Ganambarr, *The Furnace*, Hoover's Gold Productions, credit Megan Lewis

Featuring rising Egyptian star **Ahmed Malek** and Australian screen legend **David Wenham**, *The Furnace* runs for one week only at the beautiful outdoor venue **UWA Somerville** ahead of its national release on 10 December. It is the perfect film to start the Lotterywest Films program ahead of a uniquely Western Australian Perth Festival in 2021.

Set during WA's 1890s gold rush and filmed in the ruggedly beautiful Yamatji Badimaya country around Mount Magnet in the Mid-West, *The Furnace* received major production investment from Screen Australia and was supported through the **Western Australian Regional Film Fund** through **Royalties for Regions**, **Screenwest** and **Lotterywest**, which also is the **Principal Partner** of Perth Festival.

This unlikely hero's tale navigates greed and the search for identity in a new land. A young Afghan cameleer (**Malek**) falls in with a mysterious bushman (**Wenham**) on the run with two stolen Crown gold bars. Pursued by a zealous police sergeant and his troopers, they must race to a secret furnace where they can reset the bars to remove the mark of the Crown.

Wenham, who is also an Executive Producer of the film, had his gruff gold thief character Mal specifically written for him after meeting Mackay at CinefestOZ and backing the project in 2015.

Informed through extensive research, this fictional drama compellingly illuminates the forgotten history of Australia's 'Ghan' cameleers. Predominantly Muslim and Sikh men from India, Afghanistan and Persia, they moved cargo throughout the vast desert interior and formed special bonds with local Aboriginal people.

English, Pashto, Punjabi, Cantonese and the endangered Aboriginal language, Badimaya, feature in this depiction of the birth of multicultural Australia. The filmmakers worked with the Badimaya community of Mt Magnet to translate the script and teach cast members the language, guided by Badimaya/Wajarri man **Godfrey Simpson** and recordings of deceased Badimaya speakers.

The stellar cast also includes **Baykali Ganambarr** (Australian Film Critics Association Award for Best Male Actor, *The Nightingale*), **Trevor Jamieson** (*Rabbit-Proof Fence*, *Storm Boy*), **Jay Ryan** (*It: Chapter Two*, *Fighting Season*) and **Erik Thomson** (*800 Words*, *Storm Boy*, *Somersault*).

'With *The Furnace*, I wanted to give audiences a gripping tale and compelling journey that spotlights the multitude of peoples who have been largely written out of Australia's history and mythologising of "The Outback",' says writer and director Roderick Mackay.

Film Program Associate Tom Vincent said it was a great pleasure to be launching the season with a film of such quality, made right here in WA's outback. 'It not only highlights the immense talent we have here in Western Australia, but also explores an undiscovered part of our shared history, which creates the perfect platform to launch an incredibly diverse film season and Festival ahead.'

Screenwest CEO Willie Rowe said, 'After such a successful debut at Venice International Film Festival it's fantastic for *The Furnace* to now have its Australian premiere at Perth Festival with a homegrown audience. There is an importance of telling stories from a unique Western Australian perspective, which *The Furnace* beautifully masters by showcasing our incredible regions like the Mid-West and the talent of our skilled local crews. These elements are vital in building a vibrant community which could not be done without the support of Lotterywest, the State Government of WA and the Western Australian Regional Film Fund,' said.

Lotterywest CEO Susan Hunt PSM said she was looking forward to experiencing this compelling WA based production. 'Lotterywest is once again extremely proud to be supporting Perth Festival's Lotterywest Films, which has been made even more special with the premiere of WA feature film, *The Furnace*. This Screenwest film celebrates our local film talent on a world class stage, and showcases the State's history and natural beauty.'

The Furnace runs for one week at UWA Somerville to kick off Perth Festival's Lotterywest Films season, which runs throughout the summer until 28 March. The full Perth Festival 2021 program will be announced on 18 November. Perth Festival runs 5 – 28 February 2021.

WHAT: *The Furnace* (Australian premiere). Watch the trailer [here](#).

WHERE: UWA Somerville

WHEN: Mon 30 Nov – Sun 6 Dec, gates open 6pm and film starts 8pm

HOW MUCH: \$19 (6-Ticket Film Pack \$102 / 12-Ticket Film Pack \$195)

BOOKINGS AND FESTIVAL INFO: perthfestival.com.au

PRINCIPAL PARTNER



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Perth Festival acknowledges the Noongar people who continue to practise their values, language, beliefs and knowledge on their kwobidak boodjar. They remain the spiritual and cultural birdiyangara of this place and we honour and respect their caretakers and custodians and the vital role Noongar people play for our community and our Festival to flourish.

Perth Festival

Founded in 1953 by The University of Western Australia, Perth Festival is the longest running international arts festival in Australia and Western Australia's premier cultural event. The Festival has developed a worldwide reputation for excellence in its international program, the presentation of new works and the highest quality artistic experiences for its audience. For 67 years, the Festival has welcomed to Perth some of the world's greatest living artists and now connects with hundreds of thousands of people each year.

Iain Grandage is the Artistic Director 2020 – 23.