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Filmfest DC Celebrates 40th Anniversary with Dynamic Lineup of Global Cinema

Washington, DC's longest-running film festival returns April 16–26 with timely storytelling, international voices, and audience favorites

WASHINGTON, DC (March 27, 2026) — Filmfest DC returns for its milestone 40th anniversary from April 16 through April 26, 2026, bringing an expansive and engaging slate of films to audiences across the nation's capital. Blending urgent, socially relevant storytelling with moments of humor and escapism, this year's festival offers something for every filmgoer.

Since its founding in 1986, Filmfest DC has presented more than 3,600 films from 144 countries. The 40th edition continues that legacy with 10 days of screenings spanning a wide range of genres and themes, all designed to foster cultural connection and thoughtful dialogue.

Most screenings will take place at Regal Gallery Place in downtown Washington, DC, with additional venues including the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, The Wharf, and the National Gallery of Art.

“For forty years, Filmfest DC has had a profound impact on this city,” said festival director and founder Tony Gittens. “When you consider the thousands of artists, audiences, and stories that have come together over four decades, it's truly extraordinary.”

Opening Night and Special Events

Opening Night kicks off on April 16 at the Embassy of France with *Colours of Time* (France/Belgium), a sweeping drama about cousins who inherit a home in rural Normandy and uncover the lives of their 19th-century ancestors. The screening will be followed by a special festival kick-off celebration. NBC Anchor Eun Yang will be guest host for the evening.

Closing Night programming on April 26 will be announced in the coming weeks.

Festival Highlights

This year's programming showcases a diverse mix of international storytelling:

- **Cinema Bellissimo! (Italy Focus)**
A spotlight on contemporary Italian cinema includes *The Negotiator*, a gripping thriller inspired by the real-life kidnapping of journalist Sonia Bergamasco, and *Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't*, a warm comedy-drama about a retired professor whose quiet life is disrupted by unexpected family ties.
- **Worldview**
Highlights include *Risa and the Wind Phone* (Argentina), an imaginative story from two-time Cannes Grand Prix winner Juan Cabral, and *Sundays* (Spain), a breakout hit that won the top prize at the San Sebastián International Film Festival.

Additional selections include *The Altar Boys* (Poland), a bold comedy-drama about four teens who secretly record confessions to expose wrongdoing, and *How to Divorce During the War* (Lithuania/Czech Republic/Luxembourg/Ireland), directed by Andrius Blaževičius, winner of the Best Director award at the 2026 Sundance Film Festival. The film follows a couple attempting to separate on the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Also featured is *The Residence* (France/Belgium), a psychological drama examining the tension between artificial intelligence and human creativity. On a lighter note, *Spices and Lies* (France) stars acclaimed actress Hiam Abbass in a warm comedy about a young chef struggling to open a restaurant with his French girlfriend while navigating life with his long-suffering mother.

- **Local Spotlight**
The Essence of Eva (Ireland), directed by Alex Fegan and Malcolm Willis, offers an intimate portrait of Bowie, Maryland native Eva Cassidy, a star we get to know

through archival footage and interviews, including appearances by Sting and Mick Fleetwood.

- **Justice Matters**

This timely series includes *Baristas vs. Billionaires* (USA), an Oscar-nominated documentary by Mark Mori chronicling Starbucks workers' unionization efforts in Buffalo, NY, and *Everybody to Kenmure Street* (Scotland), a Sundance award-winning film about grassroots resistance to an immigration raid in Glasgow.

- **Arabian Sights Film Festival**

This compelling series includes *El Sett* (Egypt), a sweeping portrait of the legendary Umm Kulthum, the iconic singer whose voice defined a nation. Her influence stretches globally, inspiring legends like Bob Dylan, Shakira, Beyoncé, and Maria Callas. *Once Upon a Time in Gaza* (Palestine), made by twin filmmakers Tarzan and Arab Nasser, offers a dark comedy and satirical take on life in Gaza.

Beyond the Screen

Filmfest DC continues its commitment to community engagement through programs across the city. These include *Movies Under the Stars* at The Wharf and the *Impact Project*, which brings filmmakers into DC public schools. The festival also partners with students at George Mason University, who produce official festival trailers each year.

Throughout the festival, many filmmakers and special guests will participate in post-screening discussions, panels, and events.

Tickets and Information

The full festival lineup will be available beginning April 1st at www.filmfestdc.org. Tickets will be available for sale on Friday, April 3. The festival catalog will be distributed through The Washington Post on Friday, April 10. Film images for press are available at www.filmfestdc.org.

About Filmfest DC

Filmfest DC is made possible through the support of its Board of Directors, sponsors, staff, and hundreds of dedicated volunteers. For 40 years, the festival has championed the belief that great films can inspire connection, understanding, and a better world.