

Fringe! Queer Film Fest: pushing boundaries and celebrating queer history

We check out a screening of *The Misandrists* at the film festival, which is on across East London until Sunday

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It started with a kiss: a still from *The Misandrists*. d. Bruce LaBruce

“Noone will be leaving tonight without having been offended at least once,” announced Muffin Hix, programmer for [Fringe! Queer Film & Arts Fest](#), addressing a packed out [Genesis Cinema](#) on Mile End Road on Wednesday night.

Hix was introducing the festival’s screening of *The Misandrists*, the 2017 film by cult director Bruce LaBruce. Set in nineties Germany – or Ger(wo)many according to the opening titles – the film tells the story of a radical group of separatist lesbian feminists, living together in a cult disguised as a school for wayward girls.

The film follows the exploits of the girls as they prepare for the forthcoming revolution in which men are to become redundant. One of the girls secretly takes in a wounded male revolutionary she found out in the fields. Two of the girls attempt to fund the revolution by producing low-budget feminist pornography. And all of the girls engage in frequent, polyamorous lesbian activity under the watchful eye of head of house, Big Mother.

LaBruce’s satirical look into feminism and gender essentialism is as often troubling as it is entertaining. Comical wordplay and campy nun costumes aren’t always able to distract from the director’s clear lack of comfort with certain subject matters, while the *St. Trinian* aesthetics and gratuitous pillow fight scenes make it impossible to forget the filmmaker’s gender throughout.



‘St. Trinian aesthetics’: *The Misandrists*. d. Bruce LaBruce

Having already been rejected by several other LGBTIAQ+ film festivals, *The Misandrists* was a controversial choice for the programmers at Fringe!. According to Hix, the film split the selection committee but was eventually chosen due to its ability to provoke debate.

“Bruce LaBruce likes to make controversial movies and push the boundaries, and so do we.” said Anna Wates, programmer and marketing coordinator for the film.

The film was followed by a short discussion led by Hix, alongside Fringe! programmer Kai Fiain and academic Mijke Drift. While the debate definitely suffered from the absence of anyone involved in the making of the film, the trio started an interesting conversation that was no doubt continued by the film’s largely female audience over some after-show drinks.

Of course, *The Misandrists* is just one in a series of films that the Fringe! festival will be screening across East London over the coming few days. Organised loosely, although not exclusively, around the theme of forgotten queer icons, this year’s festival looks set to tell the tragic, funny and sexy stories of those too often forgotten by the mainstream.

Chavela, the story of the Costa Rican-born queer icon known for her renditions of Mexican *rancheras*, is promised to be a highlight. Those looking for something a little bit weirder can check out Sunday’s screening of *Fluidø* an ‘an immersive, visceral and vividly experiential cyberpunk feature oozing with delights’. Alternatively, tonight’s late night interactive screening of cult nineties film *Romy and Michele’s High School Reunion* will certainly bring the laughs.

Picking straight up from where last year’s festival left off, Fringe!’s eclectic programming aims to showcase the entire spectrum of the queer experience. While the festival has taken on the serious job of telling the stories that remain absent from our mainstream history, they have proved that they can do this while still being able to push some boundaries and have some laughs.

[Fringe! Queer Film & Arts](#) runs until this Sunday 19 November at various venues. For the full programme and tickets, [click here](#)

