

Still from *Dorft Blame Jack* (UK, 29 mins) Dir. Dale John Allen.

Taking New Direction

BOYS ON FILM

Boys on Film returns with a pulsating and thought-provoking array of queer stories told by a host of extraordinarily talented filmmakers from all over the world, celebrating one of the longest running strands of short film programmes. The innovative collection, which launched in 2009 with the *Hard Love* edition, celebrates young gay voices at their finest, and returns for its 20th programme – entitled *Heaven Can Wait* – under flagship distributor Peccadillo Pictures.

These are short form interpretations of topical issues, which includes a sombre yet beautiful animation about finding love within conservative Tunisian community, a tender take on what a modern queer family looks like and a steady observation of closeted identities in suburban England. Much like *Boys on Film's* previous programmes, these films offer a prism of contemporary gay culture. One shining example is *Isha* – an intimate love story about Romanian immigrant Rahmi by Christopher Manning. The filmmaker drew on people that he observed whilst teaching in Paris, which following Rahmi's struggle to maintain appearances around his Muslim father as he comes to terms with sexuality.

When asked what he hopes people will take away from *Isha* – especially during this time of self-reflection – Manning's wish is for empathy towards the character, and for Rahmi to serve as a gateway. "I want people to relate to him despite living a different life to him. I hope audiences will consider

that we all desire, want and need the same validation that the main character does, and finally that for some people – those who are more vulnerable, less advantaged and marginalised – are at times alienated from the rest of society and struggle greatly to accept themselves in ways that most do not."

In *Mankind* – Layke Anderson's capsule film about a young man's decision to sacrifice his relationship and embark on a journey into space – the focus falls less on the expansive ambition of the mission and more on the complicated relationship between the central characters. "Initially I came across an article about a one-way mission to Mars that sought volunteers. The idea grew from there," explains Anderson.

"I began writing it with a heterosexual couple in mind. In later drafts, I realised that the dynamic was more interesting and perhaps more appropriate for two men, given the subtext of Mars as a metaphor for masculinity." Anderson also draws inspiration from Luc Besson's love story *The Big Blue* for the piece: "Jean-Marc Barr's character swims so deep that it's more than likely he'll never return to the surface. Rosanna Arquette's character fights for him, but she has to let him go."

With the promise that *Boys on Film* is only getting started, the programme continues to provide a beacon for gay filmmaking, that, in turn, offers new, diverse perspectives and showcases an emerging wave of talented new storytellers. This is a truly exciting roster of directors to watch.

"These are short form interpretations of topical issues, which includes a sombre yet beautiful animation about finding love within a conservative Tunisian community and a steady observation of closeted identities in suburban England."

Words

Beth Webb

—

peccapics.com