

Culture

OUTFEST 2015: YOUR SIX BEST BETS

CraveOnline points you toward the six best of the fest, plus seven more films worth checking out.



by [Ernest Hardy](#) Jul 9th, 2015



Not sure where to go during Outfest? **CraveOnline** runs down your six best bets:

Beautiful Something



Opening credits for Joseph Graham's *Beautiful Something*, set in Philadelphia, are a smoothly edited flow of images set against a mid-tempo rock track - A trio of black teens walking jovially down the street; the doorman at a trendy nightclub selecting lucky patrons from a long line; wide-shots of the city's skyscrapers; bumper-to-bumper taxis on a packed nighttime street; a fight in front of a punk club, bystanders egging it on – that sets the film up with a palpable energy and vitality, providing the layered canvas against which *Something's* queer characters live their lives. As the Altman-esque film unfolds its multiple interwoven stories in a 24 hour period, Graham pulls off a nimble hat-trick, fusing throwback, unapologetic queerness (frank sexuality; a world of tricks, one-night stands, and no moralizing about any of it) and unbridled romanticism.

The cast of characters: Brian, a poet who fears he shot his creative wad with his first book, and whose desperate search for love and connection leads him to a brief spell of madness. Jim, a young struggling actor in a relationship with a renowned older artist, who feels he's just another prop in the artist's life. Drew, the artist, loves Jim with a consuming deepness but lives for his work. Bob, a wealthy, aged, talent agent cruises the streets at night in search of a specific type of young man to pick up. As the plot weaves characters through each other's lives – sometimes just passing on the street, other times in layered, complex ways – the film becomes a meditation on desire, need and madness, the connection between libido and creativity, and shows the rare grownup understanding of the way sex is a currency whose value and meaning shifts with context – and that's fine. Monologues and exchanges of dialogue manage to be beautifully poetic without losing sight of how real people speak under duress, in the heat of a moment, or when they're simply laying everything on the line. The ensemble acting of the multi-racial cast (including for strongly written minor characters) is pitch perfect.

A Gay Girl in Damascus: The Amina Profile



Cultural appropriation is one of the hot topics of pop discourse, and there's no better or more infuriating example than the case of Amina, the openly lesbian blogger from Syria who captured the world's attention during the Arab Uprising of 2011 when she suddenly went missing and was feared to have been captured and tortured by police. Most terrified was Sandra, the Canadian woman with whom Amina had been having an intense online relationship. After activists and media outlets around the world started agitating for her release, it was revealed that Amina had never existed, and was instead the creation of a 40-year-old white American man, Tom MacMaster.

Director Sophie Deraspe's meticulously reported documentary spans from the evolution of Amina and Sandra's relationship to Sandra's teary confrontation with MacMaster, halfway around the world, to ask him why he'd done it. It's a gripping film, even with the knowledge of how it ends. Original interviews, along with text messages and voicemails, outline the romance as reporters, historians and activists (including queer activists from Syria) make clear just how

Incredibly damaging MacMaster's ruse was politically, as the film raises serious questions about identity, responsibility, and ethics in a world where technology and social media platforms have rewritten everything. Unnecessary symbolic sequences of a nude woman being bathed and massaged add nothing to film, and some of the interview subjects are almost caricatures of well-meaning leftists, but none of that seriously mars the film.

In the Grayscale



This smart, artfully shot tale of the sexual awakening of a bisexual man who is married to a woman and falls for a man uses tropes familiar from queer and hetero films alike: an uninhibited, unconventional, pot smoking wild child slowly liberates the uptight, straight-laced, tea-totaling object of affection. Here, the conventional lead character is Bruno, a talented, acclaimed architect whose latest assignment brings him into contact with history teacher and tour guide Fer, an openly gay man with a fondness for weed and a disdain for cheesy pop culture. Of course, both are beautiful.

First-time director Claudio Marcone uses the film's setting of Santiago, Chile as one of the film's characters, not only letting his camera linger as it takes in the cityscape, but using Fer's historical knowledge of the city as a core conversational element – and then gracefully letting those talking points double as philosophical musing on Bruno's shifting interior world and the responsibilities he has to his young son and cripplingly depressed wife. Psychologically complex without being impenetrable, the film is brave enough to show how much of a dick Bruno can be even as it elicits sympathy for him. *In the Grayscale* is powerfully acted, smartly written and directed, and shot so beautifully that some of the visuals seem like lush paintings.

Jason & Shirley



Writer-director Stephen Winter (*Chocolate Babies*) imagines what the behind-the-scenes dynamic might have been during filming of the late Shirley Clarke's iconic 1967 cult documentary *Portrait of Jason*. Jason – a self-described faggot and whore, a brilliant raconteur with dreams of being a cabaret star – is electrifying in the documentary, but part of what makes the film crackle is the thick animosity Clarke, her crew, and her lover, African-American actor Carl Lee, direct toward Jason. Winter's film is as much about giving the trailblazing Clarke (portrayed by author/playwright/social critic Sarah Schulman) her due as an artist as it is dissecting the dynamic of the filming of *Jason*, with a lot of the dialogue being a way to fill the audience in on Clarke's accomplishments, philosophy, and artistic credo.

Mercifully, it's never too pedantic (it skirts close a few times) and is often quite funny – as when she gets in digs at Andy Warhol. But the film never really gets at the hostilities lobbed at Jason. Clarke is on [record](#) as saying of the night's 12-hour shoot, "I started out that evening with hatred, and there was part of me that was out to do him in, get back at him, kill him," and the film only gets superficially near why she might have felt so intensely that way. (Namely, Jason's open lust for Carl; which Carl appears to have let Jason indulge.) And rather than explore the ways white liberals/ progressives might be simultaneously down for equality and still harbor fucked racial views, the film funnels all real bigotry into the character of a Hollywood type who comes to the shoot and is ordered away by Clarke. Still, Jack Waters' turn as Jason, Schulman's as Clarke, and Orran Farmer's as Carl Lee are fantastic, and the film captures something of the seedy lo-fi possibilities of the Chelsea Hotel, where the original *Jason* was filmed.

Stuff



Stuff is a deceptively simple film about the fracturing of a lesbian marriage. A seemingly perfect suburban couple, Trish and Deb have fallen into a sexless marriage of simmering resentments and verbal sniping, with only the love for their two young daughters really holding the family together. When the grimly judgmental Deb (a perfectly conceived and acted tight-ass soccer mom) finds herself bafflingly attracted to the tattooed single mom of one daughter's classmate, she's forced to make some hard choices about her life. What makes the film notable are the subtle ways it defies expectation. Without going too far to make Deb simply a misunderstood heroine, writer-director Suzanne Guacci slowly peels back the character's layers to lay bare the unhappiness and sadness beneath her stiff public face. Her slow warming up under the attentive eyes of a potential new love interest is utterly believable.

The film's twist on the tensions that might exist between queer folks and their parents has nothing to do with queerness, but instead is the universal glitch of parents and children unable to comprehend one another because they're simply wired so differently on every level, as is the case with Trish and her widowed, sharp-tongued mother, both still grieving the death of Trish's dad. The cast knocks the script out of the park, but Guacci also deserves kudos for casting Yvonne Jung as Deb. Not only does Jung fantastically navigate the complex emotional life of her character, but her body, while absolutely lovely and likely in better shape than most, also looks like that of a real wife and mom who doesn't have a minute to work out, who has let herself go a bit from both mild depression and exhaustion. It's a body that has lived a real life.

Tab Hunter Confidential



It's nearly impossible for a lot of young queer people to grasp just how much the world has changed on queer issues, even given how bleak things can still be for so many. That especially includes Hollywood's attitudes on the matter. Tab Hunter, an OG Hollywood heartthrob (he's practically the prototype for the ideal Abercrombie & Fitch model) was one of the biggest stars in Hollywood at his peak (Warner Bros. Records was launched by Warner Bros. film studio to capitalize on his recording career), and his "aw shucks" persona endeared him across generations. But his sexuality was eventually used against him when he wouldn't play the game the way he was expected, and he eventually became a punch-line who spent years clawing his way back to the middle.

As handled by director Jeffery Schwarz, Hunter's story – a rough childhood with a single mom, working his ass off to build a career, a complicated love affair with Anthony Perkins, being blackballed in Hollywood, finding true love late in life – is both tantalizing and moving. A who's who of old Hollywood – Clint Eastwood, Connie Francis, Debbie Reynolds, and many more – as well as director John Waters and assorted film historians, flesh out both his story and the larger Hollywood culture. They also illuminate a bygone America far removed the one where an open lesbian hosts daytime's most popular talk show, and stars like Matt Bomer and Neil Patrick Harris talk openly about their husbands and children. The Tab Hunter of today, as shown in the numerous segments where he is interviewed about his life and career, is the epitome of effortless cool, deserving of his hard won respect.

Also recommended:

[The Blue Hour](#)

[Fourth Man Out](#)

[Liz in September](#)

[Naz and Maalik](#)

[Out to Win](#)

[Those People](#)

Click [here](#) for information on tickets and screening locations.

Ernest Hardy is a Sundance Fellow whose music and film criticism have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Village Voice*, *Vibe*, *Rolling Stone*, *LA Times*, and *LA Weekly*. His collection of criticism, *Blood Beats Vol. 1: Demos, Remixes and Extended Versions* (2006) was a recipient of the [2007 PEN / Beyond Margins Award](#).

SHARE

TWEET

[Beautiful Something](#) [In the Grayscale](#) [Jason & Shirley](#) [Outfest Stuff](#) [Tab Hunter Confidential](#)

OTHER STORIES

RELATED ARTICLES



['Wonder Woman' Destroys American Ninja Course](#)

[Video] The supergirl's name is Jessie Graff, and she's possibly the best thing to ever happen to the TV show.



Culture

[Ibrahimovic Manchester United Transfer "Delayed Until Next Month"](#)

The Ibrahimovic Manchester United transfer saga could finally come to an end next month.



Culture
[The Most Inspired Film Promotion of the Summer](#)
The dead girls from 'The Ring' and 'The Grudge' battle it out on a baseball field.



Culture

The Chaser's Top Five Politically-Charged Comedy Songs

They're back tonight at 9pm on ABC

CRAVE

[Contact](#)

[Advertiser Info](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms & Conditions](#)

 [AdChoices](#)

CraveOnline.com is a property of CraveOnline Media, LLC, an [Evolve Media](#), LLC company. © 2016 All Rights Reserved. NOT IN ANY WAY ASSOCIATED WITH CRAVE ENTERTAINMENT, INC. OR CRAVE MAGAZINE ®