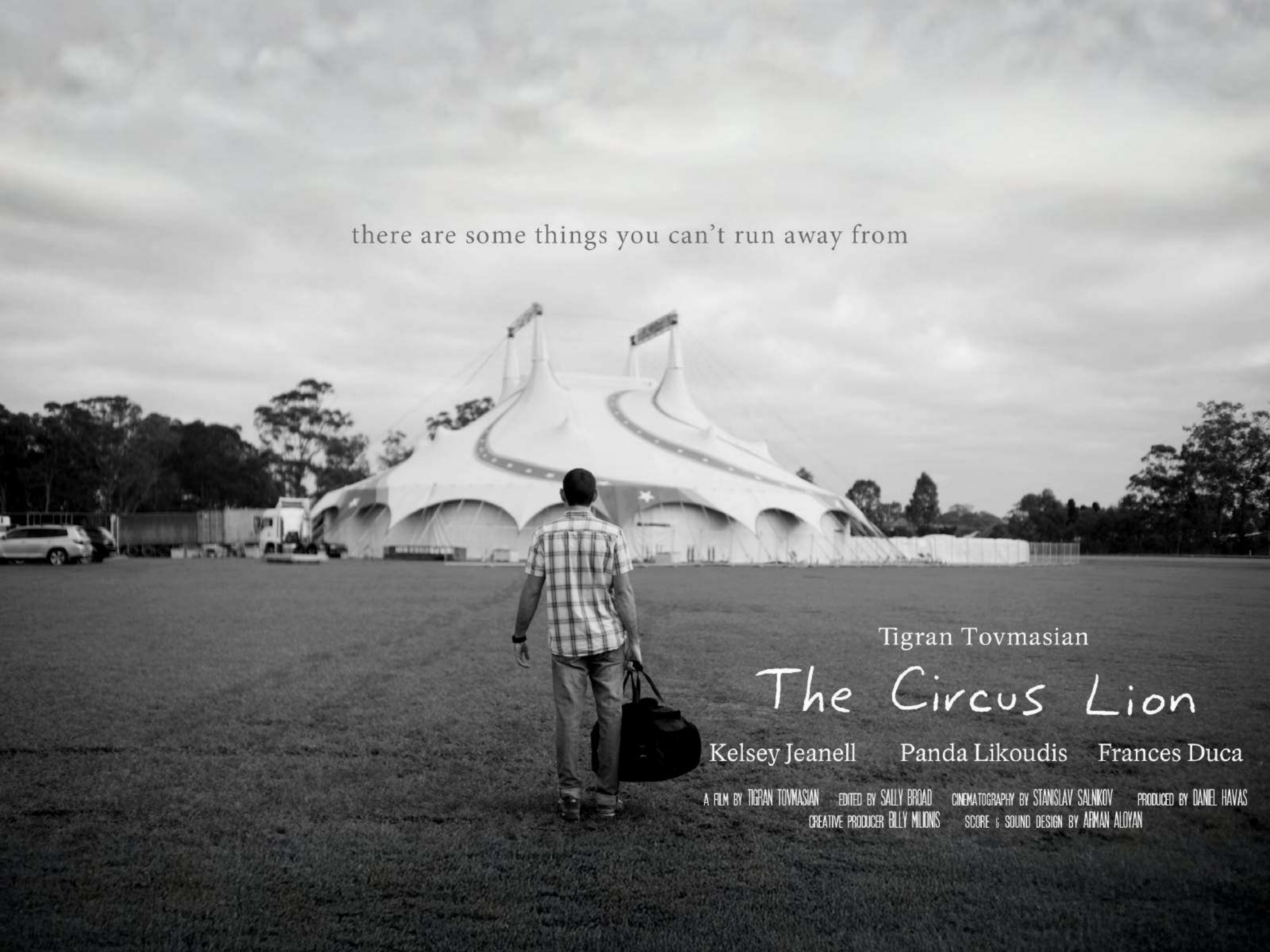


there are some things you can't run away from



Tigran Tovmasian

The Circus Lion

Kelsey Jeanell

Panda Likoudis

Frances Duca

A FILM BY TIGRAN TOVMASIAN

EDITED BY SALLY BROAD

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY STANISLAV SALNKOV

PRODUCED BY DANIEL HAVAS

CREATIVE PRODUCER BILLY MILONIS

SCORE & SOUND DESIGN BY ARMAN ALOYAN

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Synopsis:

A young wrestler's only way out of his dead-end town—and the trauma tied to it—is to fight his way onto the Australian team. But when an unexpected tragedy strikes, his fight to escape turns inward, trapping him alongside the very trauma he cannot outrun.

a lion's den picture

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“Have you ever seen the difference between the eyes of a circus lion vs a lion in the wild?

It's pretty F*ing tragic.”**



The Circus Lion is a very personal film—it echoes my own journey growing up in Western Sydney, where dreams seemed out of reach amid hardship and trauma. Like Sam, I ran from my pain until life left me nowhere to flee, forcing me to confront the grief I'd buried. The circus isn't just a backdrop; it's the art and courage I once feared, symbolizing a world that finally saved me. This film is about that reckoning—the choice to stop running and start living your true purpose. I took on every role — writer, director, producer, and actor — because this story was burning inside me, and I needed to express it from every angle I could.

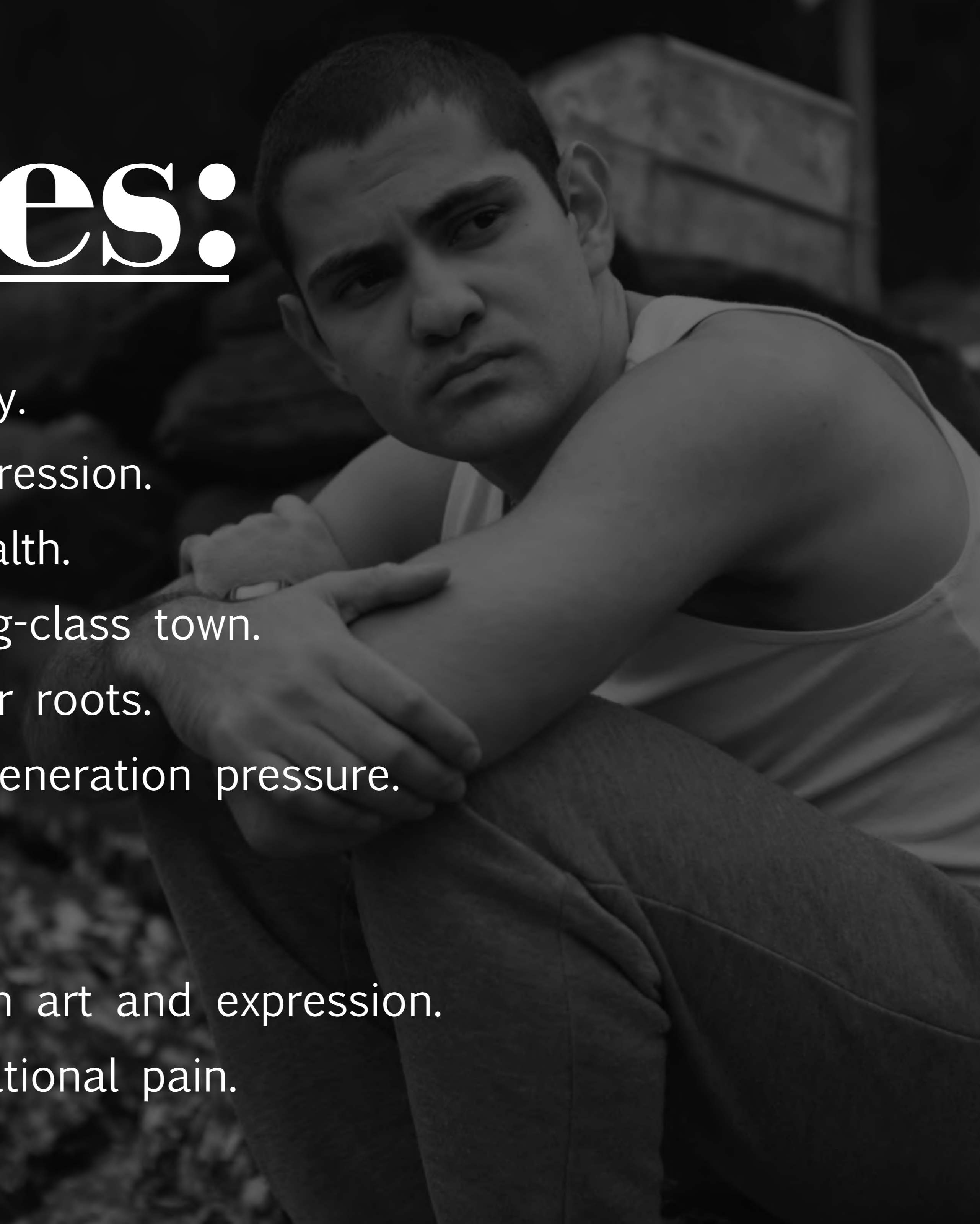
Director's Statement:

The Circus Lion is intentionally shot in stark black and white—a visual metaphor for the town’s dark, gritty, and colourless reality. Its original score, rich with Armenian instruments like the duduk and dhol, grounds the film in cultural authenticity and emotional depth. I wanted it to feel original, I wanted it to feel like the audience was in the town with Sam, living through his daily struggles.

Vision:

Themes:

- Masculinity and vulnerability.
- Trauma and emotional repression.
- Depression and mental health.
- Coming-of-age in a working-class town.
- Escaping vs. accepting your roots.
- Cultural identity and first-generation pressure.
- Belonging and alienation.
- Purpose vs. survival.
- The search for self through art and expression.
- Unspoken grief and generational pain.



Symbolic Motifs:

The Lion

Seen in a dream, the trapped circus lion is a potent image that mirrors Samvel's greatest fear: becoming caged by his environment, his trauma, and his unfulfilled potential. The lion is not just a metaphor—it's a mirror. It shows us a version of Samvel that is silenced and tamed by life. But it also hints at the wild strength within him, waiting to be reclaimed.

The Circus

The circus is not just a location—it's a symbol of purpose, hope, and destiny. In the story, it appears in Samvel's periphery like a calling he's not yet ready to answer. It represents the world of art, creativity, and truth—a world that Samvel, like Tigran in real life, is afraid to step into due to societal expectations around masculinity in Western Sydney. But eventually, it becomes a place of rebirth and redemption.

The Pies

Harry's love for servo pies becomes a subtle metaphor for mediocrity and escapism—the small comforts we cling to when dreams feel out of reach. Later in the film, Samvel eats the same pies at his lowest point, showing how close he's come to giving up. This motif was inspired by a real conversation Tigran had with a friend on their last day of high school. When asked what he'd do next, his friend replied, "Construction work with servo pies on the weekdays, hanging with the lads on the weekends." The quiet emptiness of that answer stuck with Tigran—In a way, it summed up this whole town in one line.

About The Filmmaker:

Tigran Tovmasian is a filmmaker and actor based in Western Sydney. He began his career as an actor, training and working across Australia, the U.S., and Europe. With no formal film school background, he stepped behind the camera driven by a desire to tell personal, emotionally grounded stories. He made his directorial debut with this film *Alongside* his work as an actor and filmmaker, Tigran also teaches acting in Sydney, Australia.



Characters:

Samvel:

Samvel is a sensitive young man growing up in a town that doesn't make space for softness. Surrounded by peers who suppress their pain with bravado, parties, and apathy, Samvel struggles to fit in — always feeling like an outsider, even among his friends. He hasn't quite found his tribe, except for fleeting moments on the wrestling mat or in the quiet comfort of Jasmine's presence.

Beneath the surface, he's deeply focused and driven. Wrestling becomes his ticket out — his one shot at becoming something more than what this town seems to offer. But when grief and pressure begin to spiral, he convinces himself to live like everyone else around him: to party hard and bury his emotions. As he drifts further from himself, Samvel must confront whether escaping the town means losing who he truly is — or if facing his pain is the only way forward.

Jasmine:

Jasmine is Samvel's first love—observant, thoughtful, and emotionally intelligent. She embodies the tenderness and confusion of young love in a tough environment. The character was inspired by Tigran's high school girlfriend and represents the bittersweet complexity of adolescent relationships and the choices we carry into adulthood.

Characters:

John:

John is Samvel's wrestling coach and father figure. Grounded, stern, and quietly compassionate, he represents discipline, sacrifice, and mentorship. The character was based on director Tigran Tovmasian's real-life coach, John Withers, who played a pivotal role in shaping his values as both an athlete and a man. The character was based on Tigran Tovmasian's real-life wrestling coach, John Withers, who had a profound impact on his life both on and off the mat. This film was made as a tribute to John, who has since passed away. His memory lives on through the character.

Annahit:

Annahit is Samvel's mother and primary caregiver. She is wise, firm, and fiercely loving. Her strength is quiet but unshakable. The character is a tribute to Tigran's own grandmother, who raised him and his brothers. Annahit's presence in the film reflects the generational resilience and nurturing force of Armenian matriarchs.

We're aiming for a 2025 world premiere in competition at one of the major international festivals followed by a premiere on home soil in Sydney. We also hope to screen the film in Armenia, a deeply personal goal for writer-director Tigran Tovmasian, who wishes to honor his heritage and connect with Armenian audiences.

Throughout its festival run, we aim to leverage industry recognition and awards momentum to help secure financing and distribution for Tigran's first feature film, *Papik* — a personal odyssey about his journey across Armenia during the recent Artsakh war to find his grandfather. We also plan to shoot *The Mountain Men*, a bold, atmospheric horror-thriller exploring masculinity, trauma, and transformation in a remote wilderness "manhood" camp.

Festival Strategy:

Tech Specs:



- Monochrome.
- Filmed on a black magic.
- 4:3 Aspect are ratio.
- 20 minute runtime.
- Entirely self-funded by writer, director, and lead actor Tigran Tovmasian.
- Language(s): English, Armenian.

Behind The Curtains: Stories From Set.

Filming with Sharks

While capturing footage in a local lake, the crew was startled to see fishermen pull a 1-meter-long bull shark from the water just 25 meters away. Locals rushed over to warn the team — but halfway through the shoot and determined to finish, they kept filming... just with a bit more urgency.

The Weigh-In Fast

For the weigh-in scene, Tigran decided to do a real weight cut, fasting for days to achieve the physical look of a struggling wrestler. When his students — who also played the other wrestlers — found out, they joined him in solidarity, cutting and fasting alongside him so he wouldn't do it alone.

Training to Wrestle — For Real

None of the boys who played wrestlers had any experience before the film. Tigran, passionate about the sport that shaped his own life, trained them all for six months before cameras rolled. All of them still wrestle to this day — hooked by the discipline and spirit of it.

Behind The Curtains: Stories From Set.

Drowning in Winter = Pneumonia

The underwater scenes were filmed in an unheated outdoor pool during the dead of winter. Hours in the freezing water took their toll, with several cast and crew (including Tigran) walking away with pneumonia — but also the footage they needed.

All Extras Were Students

Every extra in the party and tournament scenes were students of writer, director, and lead actor Tigran Tovmasian. Many were stepping onto a film set for the first time.

Poem To Wrestling:

(Originally written as a line for Coach John)

Wrestling — it has no glory, no finish line.

It's brutal, dirty.

Some of us finish with broken ears,

some with broken limbs.

But if you stay in this game too long,

you'll finish with a broken spirit.

You're done.

Whatever you do now,

you'll do it well — because you've wrestled.

You're a wrestler in life,

which is far more valuable

than being a wrestler on the mat.

Poem To Blacktown:

To my home that I hate and that I love,

Where the sunsets are the best in the world, but once the sun's set the
streets become the worst in the world.

Where struggle is our normality, but that same struggle gives us humility.

We don't have money, but we have a view of the mountains.

We have less, but we have no resentment.

Where there's more skin colours than jobs, but we are welcome regardless.

I hated my home for so long.

So I made this film — a love letter to my home, a love letter to a place I
will never forget.

And I hope one day, this place never forgets me.

Blacktown, Blacktown, Blacktown.

Blacktown and Acknowledgment to Country

Blacktown is located on the traditional lands of the Darug people, who have lived in the area for tens of thousands of years. It is one of the most historically significant Aboriginal sites in Australia and home to the first officially sanctioned land grant to Aboriginal people — granted to Colebee and Nurragingy in 1816. The area now known as Blacktown was named after the Native Institution, a school for Aboriginal children established in the early 19th century. Today, Blacktown remains one of the most culturally diverse regions in Australia, rich in resilience, history, and community spirit.

We acknowledge the Darug people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this film was made, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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Thank you.

Please get in touch.