

Gay Film Fest This Weekend in St. Pete

By [Sergei Chernov](#)

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The fest will feature films about Finnish author and painter Tove Jansson.

ST. PETERSBURG — Side by Side, an annual LGBT film festival, will open in St. Petersburg on Thursday despite pressure on LGBT activists.

Headlined last year by Gus Van Sant, who came to present his film "Milk," the seventh edition of the festival will welcome 15 foreign guests this year.

Finnish director Kanerva Cederström will present a collection of films about Finnish author and painter Tove Jansson and her artist partner Tuulikki Pietilä to celebrate Jansson's 100th birthday on Friday.

"It was not so long ago that homosexuality was also regarded as a crime and disease in Finland, and Tove and Tuulikki lived most of their adulthood through these times in our country," Cederström wrote in her statement for the festival.

"They were artists dedicated fully to their work, but they enjoyed parties with their friends

and a lively social life. But traveling away from the intolerant atmosphere of Finland or living during the summers on their small island in the Finnish Gulf gave them the freedom to be themselves, together."

According to Cederström, the films — "Traveling With Tove," "Haru, Island of the Solitary" and "Tove and Tooti in Europe" — the last two made in collaboration with Riikka Tanner — use materials culled from the dozens of hours of the 8-mm films shot by Pietilä, in close cooperation with her and Jansson.

The screening will be accompanied by a lecture by Katrina Rosavaara, Finnish artist and vice chair of Finland's leading LGBT organization SETA, about Jansson's life and work.

Transgender rights will be discussed on Tuesday with Maria Anholm, who served until last month as minister for gender equality of Sweden, and Anna Serner, CEO of the Swedish Film Institute, following the screening of "52 Tuesdays," a feature film by Australian director Sophie Hyde about issues that transgender families face.

Those issues will also be touched on in "Julia," German director Johanna Jackie Baier's 2013 documentary detailing 10 years in the life of a female transsexual prostitute from Klaipeda, Lithuania, now living in Berlin.

From the field of activism, Americans Judy and Dennis Shepard will come to share their experiences in advocating LGBT rights. The parents of Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old student at the University of Wyoming who was murdered in October 1998 for reportedly being gay, became activists and established the Matthew Shepard Foundation 10 years after his death.

The organization's best-known achievement is the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which expands the 1969 U.S. federal hate-crime law to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability. The legislation was passed by U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama in Oct. 2009.

On Nov. 24, Judy and Dennis Shepard and director Michele Josue will be at the screening of "Matt Shepard Is a Friend of Mine," Josue's film recreating the life of the murdered young man through family photos, vacation videos and his diary entries. That film will also be shown at the Sakharov Center on Nov. 25.

Side by Side Festival runs Thursday to Saturday. See bok-o-bok.ru for events and venues.

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