

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 8:30pm SUNDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2021**

## **SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED AT CLOSING NIGHT GALA**

---

The 68<sup>th</sup> Sydney Film Festival tonight awarded *There Is No Evil*, by Iranian filmmaker **Mohammad Rasoulof**, the prestigious **Sydney Film Prize**. The work was selected from 12 Official Competition films by a prestigious jury headed by **David Michôd**, who also awarded a Special Mention to *Limbo* directed by Ben Sharrock.

The \$60,000 cash prize for 'audacious, cutting-edge and courageous' film was awarded to Rasoulof at the Festival's Closing Night Gala awards ceremony at the State Theatre, ahead of the Australian Premiere screening of **Wes Anderson's** comedy-drama *The French Dispatch*.

Accepting the award virtually from Tehran, Mohammad Rasoulof said, "I want to thank the jury. I am really happy there is something more than a simple appreciation in this prize. Being heard and understood is what keeps hope alive. Thank you Sydney Film Festival."

Filmmaker **Matthew Walker** was awarded the [Documentary Australia Foundation Award for Australian Documentary's](#) \$10,000 cash prize for *I'm Wanita*, a no-holds-barred introduction to Tamworth's renegade 'Queen of Honky Tonk' which follows her journey to Nashville to record an album. With a Highly Recommended going to *Television Event* from Jeff Daniels.

The [Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films](#) saw the \$7,000 cash prize for the Dendy Live Action Short Award presented to *Peeps* directed by **Sophie Somerville**. The \$7,000 Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director, going to **Taylor Ferguson** for *tough*. The \$5,000 Yoram Gross Animation Award went to **Olivia Martin-McGuire's** *Freedom Swimmer*.

The \$10,000 Sydney-UNESCO City of Film Award, bestowed by Create NSW to a trail-blazing NSW-based screen practitioner, went to AACTA Award winning producer and director **Karina Holden**.

Filmmaker **Darlene Johnson** was awarded the 2021 [Deutsche Bank Fellowship for First Nations Film Creatives](#). The Fellowship provides a \$20,000 grant to an Australian First Nations film creative to further develop their skills through international placement or other professional development.

The first ever recipient of the \$10,000 Sustainable Future Award, made possible by a syndicate of passionate climate activists led by Award sponsor, Amanda Maple-Brown, was Australian documentary *Burning* directed by **Eva Orner**.

Audiences are able to stream SFF award winners including Sydney Film Prize winner *There Is No Evil*, *I'm Wanita*, *Peeps*, *tough* and *Freedom Swimmer* nationally until **November 21** as part of **SFF On Demand**.

**Minister for the Arts Don Harwin** said, "Congratulations to all the award winners. The Sydney Film Festival is one of the leading international Film Festivals and each award is significant."

# SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

NOV 03–21 2021

“The NSW Government is a proud supporter of the Festival investing \$5 million over four years to 2024. Over the last 12 days we have also supported 16 titles screening, from Opening Night’s *Here Out West*, Leah Purcell’s *The Drover’s Wife* *Legend of Molly Johnston*, through to the Screenability short films.”

“As NSW roars back into action, Sydney Film Festival will deliver the best of its program to regional centres via the Travelling Film Festival. 13 NSW locations, including Ulladulla, Wagga Wagga and Tamworth will enjoy Festival highlights as part of the tour through to March 2022,” he said.

**Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore** said: “What a welcome, breath-of-fresh-air the Sydney Film Festival has been this year, with a really terrific selection of international and Australian productions drawing crowds back into our theatres and the city as we re-open post-lockdown.”

“There has truly been a film for everyone this year, from the opening night offering *Here Out West* - a wonderful celebration of Australia’s rich multicultural heartland from young local filmmakers - to the highly anticipated closing film *The French Dispatch* by extraordinary auteur Wes Anderson.”

“A hearty congratulations to all this year’s winners, and to the festival for breathing life back into the city.” she said.

**Sydney Film Festival CEO Leigh Small** said, “after segueing to a June 2020 67th Virtual Edition and delaying the festival twice this year, SFF finally made it into cinemas two weeks after the lifting of COVID restrictions. With COVID capacity restrictions and a smaller program, we were thrilled to see cinemas over 55% full and 52 sessions sold out.”

**Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley** said, “This year, despite delays and challenges, the Festival presented one of its most impressive programs on record and became the first major Festival to return to cinemas in Sydney. Our juries have been blown away by cutting-edge works from visionary Australian filmmakers and international auteurs like 2021 Sydney Film Prize winner Mohammad Rasoulof who delivered a rousing virtual acceptance speech tonight.”

“It was incredibly rewarding to witness elated audiences entering theatres, engaging in inspired post-screening discussions and completely immersed in powerful stories from acclaimed and emerging filmmakers from across the globe. This infectious enthusiasm extended to filmmakers and actors, including director Granaz Moussavi who got the chance to see her Oscar submitted film *When Pomegranates Howl* on the big screen for the first time and the many international filmmakers who provided captivating virtual pre-screening introductions,” he said.



# SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL NOV 03–21 2021

## THE SYDNEY FILM PRIZE

On awarding the Sydney Film Prize to Iranian filmmaker **Mohammad Rasoulof's** *There Is No Evil*, Jury President David Michôd said:

“Picking a winner from a collection of films as diverse as this one is never easy, but pick one we did for its moving, multi-angled exploration of a singular theme, about the ways in which an entire culture can carry the burden of institutional cruelty. It's a movie adventurous with form and genre, beautifully performed and realised with a deft touch for simple, elegant filmmaking craft. We award the 2021 Sydney Film Prize to Mohammad Rasoulof for *There is No Evil*.”

Banned from making films in Iran, Mohammad Rasoulof won the 2020 Berlinale Golden Bear for *There Is No Evil*, a powerful take on the death penalty and its impact on Iranian society.

The Festival jury was comprised of Australian writer and director **David Michôd** (Jury President); Australian actor **Simon Baker** (*High Ground*, SFF Summer Season 2021); NITV Head of Commissioning & Programming **Kyas Hepworth**; director and producer **Maya Newell** (*Gayby Baby*, SFF 2015); and Australian filmmaker **Clara Law** (*Drifting Petals*, SFF 2021).

Previous winners are: *Parasite* (2019), *The Heiresses* (2018), *On Body and Soul* (2017), *Aquarius* (2016), *Arabian Nights* (2015); *Two Days, One Night* (2014); *Only God Forgives* (2013); *Alps* (2012); *A Separation* (2011); *Heartbeats* (2010); *Bronson* (2009); and *Hunger* (2008).

The competition is endorsed by FIAPF, the regulating body for international film festivals, and is judged by a jury of five international and Australian filmmakers and industry professionals.

The selection of films in Competition for the 2021 Sydney Film Prize are listed [HERE](#).

## THE DOCUMENTARY AUSTRALIA FOUNDATION AWARD FOR AUSTRALIAN DOCUMENTARY

The **Documentary Australia Foundation Award for Australian Documentary** was awarded to *I'm Wanita* directed by **Matthew Walker**. The Jury comprising **Michael Cordell**, **Cornel Ozies** (*Our Law*, SFF 2021) and **Catherine Scott** in a joint statement said:

“As a compelling portrayal of a complex character *I'm Wanita* illustrates observational documentary at its finest. Made with great empathy, respect and intimacy it takes the audience inside Wanita's world and her last-ditch effort to follow her dream to become the Queen of Honky Tonk on the world stage. At times she teeters on the edge and must overcome challenges, many of her own making, but this big-hearted film doesn't shy away from difficult issues. The triumphant ending challenges expectations and stereotypes that an audience might bring to this story.”

“We also highly recommended *Television Event*, a documentary that revisits a dramatic story at the height of the nuclear arms race and shows that films really can change the world. It's an object lesson in the vision, tenacity and risk-taking often required by great storytellers tackling confronting stories. An inspiring untold history that couldn't be more relevant for today,” they said.



# SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

NOV 03–21 2021

2021 marks the twelfth year of the competition and the eighth year the prize has been supported by the Foundation. The winning film is **Academy Award-eligible**.

Previous winners are: *Descent* (2020), *She Who Must Be Loved* (2019), *Ghosthunter* (2018), *The Pink House* (2017), *In the Shadow of the Hill* (2016); *Only the Dead* (2015); *35 Letters* (2014); *Buckskin* (2013); *Killing Anna* (2012); *Life in Movement* (2011); and *The Snowman* (2010). In 2009 the inaugural prize was shared between *Contact* and *A Good Man*, and each film received a \$10,000 cash prize.

The 12 finalists for the 2021 Documentary Australia Foundation Award for Australian Documentary are listed [HERE](#).

## **THE DENDY AWARDS FOR AUSTRALIAN SHORT FILMS**

The **Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films** were awarded to **Sophie Somerville** for *Peeps* (Dendy Live Action Short Award), **Taylor Ferguson** for *tough* (Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director), and **Olivia Martin-McGuire** for *Freedom Swimmer* (Yoram Gross Animation Award).

The Jury comprising producer **Emile Sherman**, producer-director **Sheila Jayadev** and 2020 Dendy Award winner **Alex Wu** in a joint statement said:

“In a year which showcased an extraordinary breath of visions, cultures, tones and genres, we were unanimous in choosing three highly original and beautifully realised films.”

“*Peeps*, our winner of the Dendy Live Action Award, is a soaring, operatic and highly original opus about a group of teenage girls flittering around a suburban mall.”

“*Freedom Swimmer*, our Yoram Gross Animation Award winner, is a meticulous, powerful and poetic ode to the yearning for political freedom and the necessity of story to preserve the legacy of the past.”

“And *tough*, winner of the Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director, draws us in with subtlety, surprise and heart to the life of a young rural tween. All the films showcase the great talent of Australian storytelling and the visual power of cinema,” they said.

The Festival’s short-film competition celebrates its 52<sup>nd</sup> year in 2021; and has been sponsored by **Dendy Cinemas** since 1989. Winners of the Dendy Live Action Short Film award and the Yoram Gross Animation award, sponsored by Yoram Gross Films, are **Academy Award-eligible**, opening new pathways for many Australian filmmakers.

These ground-breaking awards have kick-started the careers of many prominent filmmakers, with past competitors Warwick Thornton, Ariel Kleiman, Cate Shortland, Jane Campion, Phillip Noyce and Ivan Sen among Dendy Awards alumni.

The 10 finalists for the 2021 Dendy Award for Australian Short Film are listed [HERE](#).



# SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

NOV 03–21 2021

## DEUTSCHE BANK FELLOWSHIP FOR FIRST NATIONS FILM CREATIVES

Established in 2021, the first Deutsche Bank Fellowship recipient is **Darlene Johnson**. The Fellowship is an important investment in developing and nurturing the talents of local creatives and enhancing global awareness of Australia's vibrant First Nations filmmaking talent.

## The UNESCO Sydney City Of Film Award

The \$10,000 Sydney-UNESCO City of Film Award, bestowed by Create NSW to a trail-blazing NSW-based screen practitioner, went to AACTA Award winning producer and director **Karina Holden**.

## SUSTAINABLE FUTURE AWARD

The inaugural Sustainable Future Award was presented to the Australian Documentary **Burning**, directed by Oscar-winning filmmaker **Eva Orner**.

**Burning** takes an unflinching look at Australia's catastrophic 'Black Summer' bushfires – as well as our nation's woeful record on climate change action.

SFF's prestigious jury of filmmakers and climate advocates comprised: school student and Strike4Climate activist **Natasha Abhayawickrama**; documentary filmmaker **Bettina Dalton**; Deputy-Vice Chancellor Research Office and Climate Council Member Professor **Leslie Hughes**; actress and philanthropist **Amanda Maple-Brown**, and documentary filmmaker **Tom Zubrycki**.

---

## MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

**Amber Forrest-Bisley, Publicity Manager**

E: [amber@originalspin.com.au](mailto:amber@originalspin.com.au) P: 02 8065 7363 M: 0405 363 817

**Alex Clampett, Communications Advisor**

E: [alex@originalspin.com.au](mailto:alex@originalspin.com.au) M: 0411 046 734

\*\*\*Sydney Film Festival Press Pack and Images Available [HERE](#) and live Festival photography [HERE](#)

## EDITOR'S NOTES

---

## ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

From Wednesday 3 November to Sunday 14 November 2021, the 68th Sydney Film Festival offers Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, in-depth discussions with film guests, and now a virtual offering with **SFF On Demand** streaming nationally from 12-21 November.

Sydney Film Festival is a major event on the New South Wales cultural calendar and is one of the world's longest-running film festivals. For more information, visit [sff.org.au](http://sff.org.au).

The 68th Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia and the City of Sydney.

