

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

SONOMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Lauren Hutton Receives Spotlight Award at The 13th Sonoma International Film Festival

Feature Films from Canada, Venezuela, UK & US Win Top Awards in Juried Competitions

(Sonoma, CA. April 23, 2010) – The 13th Sonoma International Film Festival kicked off its best year ever with the Opening Night world premiere of COALS TO NEWCASTLE: THE NEW MASTERSOUNDS FROM LEEDS TO NEW ORLEANS on Thursday, April 15, followed by an Opening Night Party featuring a roof-raising performance by **The New Mastersounds** – the UK funk sensation profiled in **Marca Hagenstad & Aaron Dunsay**'s documentary film.

In the face of the current economic climate and the untimely demise of film festivals across the country, the Sonoma International Film Festival bucked the trend this year by expanding to include two additional screening venues, three more filmmaker events, and 10 more films than last year's Festival. Joined by over 200 visiting filmmakers, actors, jurors and film industry guests, an estimated audience of nearly 12,000 filmgoers attended 74 screenings of 40 features and 34 short films from 12 countries – with an unprecedented 17 world premieres – which played at six venues surrounding the central Sonoma Plaza.

"I think we hit the ball out of the park," said Festival Director & Board Chair **Kevin McNeely**. "It was apparent that the community embraced us this year as never before, and with the help of presenting sponsors such as **Dolby** we plan on leveraging the success of this year's Festival to give us long-term sustainability. Films and filmmakers came to us from all over the world, and this has put us on the map as a truly international destination film festival."

Actor and supermodel **Lauren Hutton** was celebrated at a sold-out tribute at the historic **Sebastiani Theatre** on Saturday, April 17, in which she was presented with the Spotlight Award in recognition of her four decades as both an international fashion icon and star of the silver screen, including her role in the Closing Night film THE JONESES. Festival Director **Kevin McNeely** and Academy Award® winner **Robin Williams**, who brought the audience to tears with his rapid-fire comedy, presented Hutton with the award, followed by a gala party at the newly-revamped **Ramekins Culinary School, Event Center & Inn** immediately prior to a filmmaker dinner and bash held at **Little Switzerland**.

"The Festival was so amazing this year," said Program Director **Cevin Cathell**. "It seemed that all the elements came together; the finest films and filmmakers, enthusiastic audiences and fabulous events converged in Sonoma this past weekend. This was a true love fest."

After a sold-out Closing Night screening of THE JONESES on Sunday, April 18, at which **Lauren Hutton** and producer **Doug Mankoff** were interviewed onstage by **Cevin Cathell**, the four-day Festival culminated in a rollicking Awards Ceremony & Closing Night Party at which 14 juried prizes and three Audience Choice Awards were presented to films and filmmakers from around the world.

Top prizes went to independent feature films from the US, Canada, Venezuela and the United Kingdom. **Paul Cotter**'s UK/US co-production, the bittersweet comedy BOMBER, took home the Best Feature Film award. "This is great news," said Cotter by e-mail, who was represented at the Festival by producer **George Rush**. "I'm thrilled!"

Charles-Olivier Michaud's riveting war correspondent drama SNOW & ASHES from Quebec won Best International Feature Film, and **Haik Gazarian**'s passionate WWII romance VENEZZIA from Venezuela received a Special Jury Award for Outstanding Historical Feature Film. Filmmakers and actors from two of the three top films were in attendance to receive their awards, including Québécois producer/actor **David-Alexandre Coiteux** and Mexican superstar **Alfonso Herrera**, who drew his own crowds of adoring fans throughout the Festival.

Two other independent feature films were also honored: **Sean Dillon & Curtis Krick**'s interracial mockumentary SOMETHING BLUE received the New Belgium Indie Feature Film Award; and married co-directors **Daniel Beahm & Erika Randall Beahm** received the Showcase Award for the world premiere of their labor of love, the dance-infused LEADING LADIES.

In what may have been the strongest year for documentaries in recent memory, five documentary features stood out and took home top prizes. The Best Documentary Award was shared between **Jim Bigham & Mark Moorman**'s 'handi-capable' music doc FOR ONCE IN MY LIFE and CITY LAX: AN URBAN LACROSSE STORY, the latter featuring lacrosse-playing underprivileged youth who joined director **Gabriela Cowperthwaite** at the film's world premiere screening. "From all of us at For Once In My Life, it is truly is an honor to be recognized at your Festival," said producer **Cathy Bigham**. "We are over the moon," said **Cowperthwaite**. "Thank you for making this such an amazing event for City Lax!"

From among half a dozen food-themed documentaries, **Roger Sherman**'s portrait of New York culinary icon **Danny Meyer**, THE RESTAURATEUR, was named Best Food Doc. Another food-related film, the world premiere of **Joe Cross & Kurt Engfehr**'s FAT, SICK & NEARLY DEAD, was awarded the Turning Point Award for its life-changing impact on both audiences and the film's subjects, two of whom each lost 200 pounds through juice-fasting and received standing ovations at the screening.

A Special Jury Award for Outstanding Historical Documentary was given to **Duane Boughman & Johnny O'Hara**'s BHUTTO, which chronicles the trailblazing life and shocking death of twice-elected Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. **Mark Milton**, co-host of KSVY's Sports Zone, was on hand to present the Best Sports Doc Award to local filmmaker **Colin Blackshear** for his extreme skateboarding film SECOND NATURE, edited by Sonoma resident and Festival regular **Brodie Giles**.

So many excellent short films were screened this year that the Shorts Jurors felt compelled to increase the number of award categories. THE HIROSAKI PLAYERS earned director **Jeff Sousa** Best Dramatic Short for his film about a Japanese father-son theater duo. “We enjoyed our guests immensely,” said hosts **Alex & Sally Fernandez** on Monday, who housed Sousa and HIROSAKI editor **Michael Hill**, “and the whole festival was a blast to say the least. They won for their category so we had a nice champagne celebration with them last night.”

Best Comedy Short Film went to **Peter Calloway**’s hilarious date movie THINK TANK. “I just wanted to say thank you very much for everything at the festival this weekend,” said THINK TANK producer **Jon Deiner**, who attended with Calloway. “It was a fantastic set-up and everything ran so smoothly. You guys have a great festival, which I’m sure will continue to get better and better each year!”

Best International Short Film was awarded to Palestinian director **Bassam Jarbawi**’s clever CHICKEN HEADS (original-language title: *ROOS DJAJ*), the DVD screener of which was originally handed to Program Director Cevin Cathell on a bus at the Sundance Film Festival. The environmentally-conscious THE INCIDENT AT TOWER 37 earned director **Chris Perry** the award for Best Animated Short Film.

Three Audience Choice Awards were presented following the tabulation of ballots collected throughout the Festival. **John Jeffcoat**’s crowd-pleasing, cross-cultural romantic comedy OUTSOURCED was chosen as the audience favorite feature film. CITY LAX: AN URBAN LACROSSE STORY and FAT, SICK & NEARLY DEAD tied for audience favorite documentary. **Barton Landsman**’s humorous rough & tumble BANANA BREAD and **Greg Helvey**’s Oscar®-nominated KAVI tied for audience favorite short film, with an honorable mention to **Mark Kirkland**’s Battle of the Bulge drama A LETTER FROM HOME, starring Sonoma Valley High School graduate **Brendan Fleming**.

The Sonoma Plaza was the place to be during the Festival, surrounded by the eye-catching Festival banners designed by **Michael Wilde & colleagues of ICA**, who designed all of year’s Festival marketing materials, including the new logo, poster and Festival trailer. “I think the poster is gorgeous,” said award-winning LEADING LADIES co-director **Daniel Beahm**, “I love the film/vineyard theme and I think it’s very tastefully done.”

For the first time the City of Sonoma granted the Film Festival permission to set up the **Comcast** Backlot Big White Tent on the north side of City Hall: an ultra-lux living room lounge featuring great food and wine of Sonoma Valley. The Backlot became the central meeting place for filmmakers and film-goers throughout the Festival. Epicurean Director **Kathleen Hill** coordinated food purveyors while wines were coordinated by the **Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Alliance**. Festival sponsors **Jelly Belly** and **popchips** provided samples to the crowds. All furnishings in The Backlot were provided by **Wine Country Party & Events**. “Our company has such a variety of products, I was glad to see the most elegant furnishings we have featured in The Backlot,” said Wine Country president **Marshall Bauer**. “We were glad we could turn it up a notch for the film crowd.”

The Festival further celebrated food and wine with several special events. Presentations included a pairing of **Ellen Frankenstein**’s documentary EATING ALASKA with a short film from **The Alaska Wilderness League**, at which wild Alaskan salmon by **Taku River Reds** was served. Director Frankenstein was particularly impressed with the quality of the sound provided by **Dolby** in conjunction with **Meyer Sound**. “We have screened this film at crazy events with bear stew and fuzzy faced homesteaders as well as lower 48 film festivals,” said Frankenstein, “and it has never sounded so great.”

Jamie Kutch was on hand to share Kutch wine with the audience for **Stefan Sargent**’s locally produced documentary PINOT: SONOMA DREAMS, which follows Kutch’s journey from Wall Street to wine-maker. In celebration of Sonoma’s own **Fred MacMurray**, a special screening of the 1944 film DOUBLE INDEMNITY was introduced by his daughter **Kate MacMurray**, who was on-hand to share anecdotes about her famous father and to invite the audience to sample **MacMurray Ranch** wines and to join the newly formed MacMurray Ranch Wine Club. The **New Belgium Indie Lounge**, housed at the **Sonoma Community Center**, featured food & beer pairings by **Catherine Driggers** of **Olive & Vine**.

After **Lauren Hutton** joined the filmmakers for an afternoon Industry Mixer at **Sebastiani Winery** on Friday, April 16, the 17 world premieres were celebrated at a boisterous “**Cheers to World Premieres**” party hosted by **The Valley Wine Shack**. This year’s Festival also featured a special screening of a film program within a film program, LUNAFEST 2010, which showcased a collection of 10 short films celebrating the talents and stories of women, sponsored by **Luna Bars** and preceded by a reception at the **Sonoma Valley Museum of Art** on Friday, April 16.

To complement the films, a series of panel discussions was held at the **Sonoma Community Center**, including the informative “**From Script to Screen**” and the ever-popular “**Pitch Panel**,” at which aspiring filmmakers were given two minutes to present their film ideas to a panel of Hollywood producers, including **David Garber** from Lantern Lane Entertainment and **Derek Power & Ilene Kahn Power** from Kahn Power Pictures. New this year was an “Ask the Expert” session with **John Loose** of **Dolby Laboratories** and “**Yoga for Filmmakers**” at **En-er-gy Fitness Studio** with yoga instructor & filmmaker **Elise Lorimer**.

Complimentary accommodations were provided to visiting filmmakers, jurors, media guests and sponsors by nearly 50 partner hotels, hospitality partners and host families throughout the Sonoma Valley. Complimentary ground transportation from Bay Area airports and between Festival events was provided by **Kovacs Motors**, which loaned the Festival a variety of sleek luxury vehicles, and the **Native Sons of the Golden West**, whose dedicated volunteer drivers kept in touch via cell phones provided by **AT&T** to make sure that Festival guests got to their screenings and Lauren Hutton got back to her suite at the **Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa**.

“Many thanks for a strong festival,” said returning filmmaker **Peter Burns**, director of the short film *QUAND TU VEUX* (WHENEVER, WHATEVER), who perhaps deserves the final word. “The films we watched were all very good and the shorts in my section were excellent. We all had a fabulous time. I know how hard you worked to pull it off in this tough economic climate. I was honored to be a part of it all. I hope to submit again for SIFF 2011. Lights. Camera. SIFF. Action! Forever!!!”

AWARDS

The Sonoma International Film Festival is pleased to announce the winners of its 14 juried competitions and three Audience Choice awards for feature films, documentaries and short films. Awards were presented to:

1. Best Feature Film

BOMBER (UK/USA | 2009 | 84 min. | **Director: Paul Cotter**)

2. Best International Feature Film

SNOW & ASHES (Quebec, Canada | 2010 | 110 min. | **Director: Charles-Olivier Michaud**)

3. Special Jury Award for Outstanding Historical Feature Film

VENEZZIA (Venezuela | 2009 | 106 min. | **Director: Haik Gazarian**)

4. New Belgium Indie Feature Film Award

SOMETHING BLUE (USA | 2009 | 85 min. | **Directors: Sean Dillon & Curtis Krick**)

5. Sonoma International Film Festival Showcase Award

LEADING LADIES (USA | 2010 | 106 min. | **Directors: Daniel Beahm & Erika Randall Beahm**)

6. Best Documentary

Shared between:

CITY LAX: AN URBAN LACROSSE STORY (USA | 2010 | 83 min. | **Director: Gabriela Cowperthwaite**)

FOR ONCE IN MY LIFE (USA | 2009 | 94 min. | **Directors: Jim Bigham & Mark Moorman**)

7. Special Jury Award for Outstanding Historical Documentary

BHUTTO (USA | 2010 | 115 min. | **Directors: Duane Baughman & Johnny O'Hara**)

8. Turning Point Award

FAT, SICK & NEARLY DEAD (USA/Australia | 2010 | 98 min. | **Directors: Joe Cross & Kurt Engfehr**)

9. Best Food Doc

THE RESTAURATEUR (USA | 2010 | 60 min. | **Director: Roger Sherman**)

10. Best Sports Doc

SECOND NATURE (USA | 2009 | 17 min. | **Director: Colin Blackshear**)

11. Best Comedy Short Film

THINK TANK (USA | 2009 | 11 min. | **Director: Peter Calloway**)

12. Best Dramatic Short Film

THE HIROSAKI PLAYERS (USA | 2009 | 19 min. | **Director: Jeff Sousa**)

13. Best International Short Film

CHICKEN HEADS [Original language title: *ROOS DJAJ*] (Palestine | 2009 | 15 min. | **Director: Bassam Jarbawi**)

14. Best Animated Short Film

THE INCIDENT AT TOWER 37 (USA | 2009 | 11 min. | **Director: Chris Perry**)

15. Audience Choice Award - Short Film

Shared between:

BANANA BREAD (USA | 2010 | 9 min. | **Director: Barton Landsman**)

KAVI (USA | 2009 | 19 min. | **Director: Greg Helvey**)

Honorable Mention to:

A LETTER FROM HOME (USA | 2010 | 10 min. | **Director: Mark Kirkland**)

16. Audience Choice Award - Documentary

Shared between:

CITY LAX: AN URBAN LACROSSE STORY (USA | 2010 | 83 min. | **Director: Gabriela Cowperthwaite**)

FAT, SICK & NEARLY DEAD (USA/Australia | 2010 | 98 min. | **Directors: Joe Cross & Kurt Engfehr**)

17. Audience Choice Award - Feature Film

OUTSOURCED (USA | 2006 | 103 min. | **Director: John Jeffcoat**)

WORLD PREMIERES

An unprecedented 17 World Premieres were featured at this year's Sonoma International Film Festival:

1. BEACH MUMMY (USA | 2010 | 10 min. **Director: Chris Merrill**)
2. CITY LAX: AN URBAN LACROSSE STORY (USA | 2010 | 83 min. | **Director: Gabriela Cowperthwaite**)
3. COALS TO NEWCASTLE (USA/UK | 2010 | 86 min. **Directors: Aaron Dunsay & Marca Hagenstad**)
4. FAT, SICK & NEARLY DEAD (USA/Australia | 2010 | 98 min. | **Directors: Joe Cross & Kurt Engfehr**)
5. GIRLBAND "TALK IN ESPANOL" (USA | 2010 | 4 min. | **Director: 'burpo'**)
6. HISTORICAL FICTION (USA | 2010 | 86 min. | **Director: Patrick Foster**)
7. I JUST DON'T CARE (USA | 2010 | 4 min. | **Director: Howard Egger-Bovet**)
8. LEADING LADIES (USA | 2010 | 106 min. | **Directors: Daniel Beahm & Erika Randall Beahm**)
9. A LETTER FROM HOME (USA | 2010 | 10 min. | **Director: Mark Kirkland**)
10. LIFE OF MAKING (USA | 2010 | 10 min. | **Director: Daedalus Howell**)
11. THE MAKING OF A RIVER OF SKULLS (USA | 2010 | 17 min. | **Director: Trent Anderson**)
12. PINOT: SONOMA DREAMS (USA | 2010 | 75 min. | **Director: Stefan Sargent**)
13. *QUAND TU VEUX* (WHATEVER, WHENEVER) (USA | 2010 | 7 min. | **Director: Peter Burns**)
14. THE RESTAURATEUR (USA | 2010 | 60 min. | **Director: Roger Sherman**)
15. SUCKER PUNCH (USA | 2010 | 19 min. | **Director: Ryan Gould**)
16. THINK TANK (USA | 2010 | 11 min. | **Director: Peter Calloway**)
17. WHERE THE WIND BLOWS (USA | 2010 | 40 min. | **Director: Ari Marcopoulos**)

COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

Films from a dozen countries were screened at this year's Festival:

1. Australia
2. Canada (Quebec)
3. Czech Republic
4. Germany
5. Ireland
6. Palestine
7. Poland
8. Russia
9. United Kingdom
10. USA
11. Uzbekistan
12. Venezuela

JURORS

A distinguished and diverse panel of jurists selected the winning films in this year's Festival:

1. **Alan Berger**Screenwriter
2. **Leslie Carlson**.....SIFF Sponsor Chair
3. **David Garber**President/CEO, Lantern Lane Entertainment
4. **Kathy Gori**.....Screenwriter
5. **Derek Power**Chair, Kahn Power Pictures
6. **Ilene Power**Executive Producer/President, Kahn Power Pictures
7. **Catherine Ryan**Documentary Filmmaker, Luna Productions
8. **Gary Weimberg**Documentary Filmmaker, Luna Productions

SPONSORS, PARTNERS & PROVIDERS

The Sonoma International Film Festival gratefully acknowledges its sponsors. “Sponsorship we received locally and nationally contributed greatly to our success,” says Festival Director & Board Chair Kevin McNeely. “Kovacs Motors provided Festival transportation, and Comcast sponsored the popular Backlot. Vode Lighting, Infineon Raceway, popchips, Jelly Belly, Sonoma Valley Bank, New Belgium Beers, and of course Dolby were amongst our generous sponsors that supported our festival. Many thanks!”

- **Presenting Sponsor:** Dolby Laboratories.
- **Premier Sponsors:** AT&T – The Real Yellow Pages, Comcast, Infineon Raceway, New Belgium Brewery, Trilogy, Vode Lighting.
- **Major Sponsors:** Alaska Wilderness League, Jelly Belly, Luna Bars, MacMurray Ranch, popchips, Sonoma Valley Bank.
- **Marketing Partner:** ICA.
- **Festival Transportation:** Kovacs Motors.
- **Media Sponsors:** Sonoma Magazine, Sonoma Valley Sun, Telekenex, Vom.com, Word Mice.
- **Partners & Providers:** Ad On Products, Camelbak, CMS, Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards, HelloCello Limoncello di Sonoma, MacArthur Place Inn & Spa, Meyer Sound, Pinnacle Vodka, Safari West, Sonoma Market, Sting Ray Sound, Stornetta Farms, Taku River Reds, US Pure Water, Whole Foods Market, Wine Country Party & Events.
- **Hotel & Hospitality Partners:** The Cottage Inn and Spa, El Dorado Hotel, El Pueblo Inn, Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa, Gaige House, Kenwood Inn & Spa, The Lodge at Sonoma Resort & Spa, MacArthur Place Inn & Spa, Victorian Garden Inn, Belle Moons Vacation Homes, Betsy's Cottage, Caroline's Cottage, Casa Chiquita, Nicholson Ranch, Villas Sobre Vista, Stay Sonoma, Wine Country Vista, Julie Atwood, Sally Stone.

SONOMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Set amidst the unparalleled beauty of the Sonoma Valley wine country, the 13th Annual Sonoma International Film Festival welcomes filmmakers and film lovers to an intimate and luxurious extended weekend, pairing great food, fine wine and over 70 new independent films from around the world. The Sonoma International Film Festival, which IFC News acclaimed as a "sun-drenched, wine-soaked cinematic magic carpet ride," invites guests to enjoy some of the year's best new independent films, specialty events, luxurious parties, wine and food pairings – and casual mingling with top independent filmmakers and celebrities.

SONOMA INTERNATIONAL FILM SOCIETY

The Sonoma International Film Society presents year-round events and programs which celebrate the senses – the best in film, food, wine, music and art, center stage in Sonoma Valley.

Since 2002, the Sonoma International Film Society and its members have supported the Video Arts Program at the Sonoma Valley High School. This student program opens doorways to creativity in the digital arts through filmmaking classes, animation, scriptwriting, film theory and – most of all – storytelling. The partnership also allows these future filmmakers to showcase their work at the festival. Now in its ninth year, The Student Works Program had 20 original short films showcased.

The Sonoma International Film Festival is a 501 (c) 3 organization. For more information about becoming a Film Society member, please visit www.sonomafilmfest.org or call **707-933-2600**.

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