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10 March 2013

7th Byron Bay International Film Festival announces 2013 award winners at Closing Night gala

At its Closing Night gala event last night, which screened the Australian premiere of **Small Apartments** with an all star cast including **Matt Lucas** and **Billy Crystal**, the 7th Byron Bay International Film Festival presented by The Owners Club at Linnaeus announced its first ever film to win a hat trick of awards. **Otelo Burning** by *Surfing Soweto's Sara Blecher*, is one of the most talked about films out of South Africa and won **The Owners Club at Linnaeus Best Film Award**, the **Byron Bay Coffee Company Best Dramatic Feature Award** and the **Tavarus Best Surf Film Award**.

Screening to a packed house, this powerful and emotionally charged film took audiences into South Africa in 1989, as society teetered on the brink of radical social change with the ending of apartheid. Based on a true story, it is a journey through surfing into a young man's inner search for freedom amid the chaos of racial prejudice.

Blecher was thrilled by the news saying, "We've screened **Otelo Burning** around the world at scores of festivals but we're especially stoked to have the film recognised by Byron Bay International Film Festival. We really tried to capture that feeling of freedom in the film and if the surfers bought it, it means we achieved that".

Festival Director, J'aimee Skippon-Volke is delighted by the success of **Otelo Burning**, explaining, "This is the first time in BBFF's history that a film has taken home three awards. But it makes sense. Apart from being an exceptional film, it's a perfect reflection of BBFF's diversity because it's politically educational, has a lot of heart and in a way it's a surf film".

Australian-Egyptian comedian and Byron local, **Akmal Saleh's**, debut documentary film, **Pharaoh vs The Egyptians**, picked up **The Echo Best Byron Film** award which includes a prize of three nights accommodation at ultra-luxurious private beachfront estate, The Owner's Club at Linnaeus, plus an iPad Mini from Mullum Mac. The blistering documentary about



the Arab Spring received a standing ovation from audiences at its sold out screening last weekend,

Saleh's producer wife, Catie, accepted the award on his behalf saying with a sense of humour to match her husband's that he couldn't be there as he was "out working to pay for the film". She credited Akmal for his bravery in making the documentary. Saleh said from his current comedy tour, "I'm really pleased! Everyone in Byron's been so supportive; it's such a great community to live in".

Brilliant Opening Night film, ***The World Before Her***, directed by Nisha Pahuja won the **Screenzone Byron International Documentary Prize** of \$5,000 cash. A lively, provocative portrait of the world's largest democracy at a critical transitional moment, it provides immense insight into the changing identity of women in India through two opposing groups with a common dream of equality; the modernist finalists of the 2011 Miss India pageant and the traditionalist Hindu fundamentalists of militant camp, Duga Vahini, on the northern border.

American filmmakers Blis and Wayne DeVault, were present to collect their award for **The Byron at Byron Best Environmental Film** for their impassioned documentary, ***Sanctity of Sanctuary: Paul Strauss and the Equinox Farm***. The film, which world premiered at BBFF2013, is an account of one man's love of nature and a call to live a sustainable life, taking us inside the breathtakingly beautiful herbal medicine sanctuary Strauss created and the mining interests that threaten it all.

Guillaume Legrand, travelled all the way from France to screen his film, ***Le Souffle Court (Short of Breath)***, which won the **SAE Institute/Qantm College Best Short Film Award**. The film explores the challenge a carefree young couple faces when they are drawn into human trafficking for a small-time crook.

The **GDC Best Cinematography Award** was the latest in a long list for Director Wim Vanacker for his superb short dramatic film, ***The Naked Leading the Blind***, which he describes as "a dissection of the human condition" as it considers the consequences of one man's epiphany.

Andy Prendergast of Melbourne production house Oh Yeah Wow picked up the **Cheese Please Best Music Video Award** for one of his two fantastic nominated music videos, ***Easy***



Way Out, by three times Grammy-award winning artist, **Gotye**, depicting the monotony of the daily grind.

The title of **Young Australian Filmmaker of the Year** went to a talented rising star from Melbourne, Lucy McKendrick, for her short film and also Best Cinematography nominee, **Toombaworth**, which tells the story of young woman Tayla and her friend Maggie, and the drugs and society that rob them of a childhood.

A gong that many in the Northern Rivers were keen to see awarded, the **Sustain Northern Rivers Sustainable Shorts Award** went to Ira Chute & Angus Cann for **The Garden Pool**, a film about a man living in the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona who turns his backyard swimming pool into an incredible, nearly self-sufficient food production system for his family.

The **Fox Creek Wines Best Experimental Film** went to French Director, Christobal de Oliveria, for **Aalterate** about the experience of extreme inner tension. While **GreenhouseFX Best Animation** went to Eastern European film **Father** about the dialogue between a father and child when the reality of life is turns upside down.

A very special part of the awards program, the **BBFF Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Northern Rivers**, this year honoured highly respected Northern Rivers film pioneers and documentary makers, couple **Paul Tait** and **Jeni Kendall**. The pair met during their careers with ABC TV in 1971, moved to Nimbin to become avocado farmers, then instead happened upon long and distinguished film careers documenting some of the most contentious socio-political issues of our time, As a sign of the integrity and empathy for which they are renowned, Tait and Kendall are currently being entrusted by indigenous communities to archive the stories of the stolen generation.

Tait and Kendall were completely surprised by the award, Kendall saying "It's a totally overwhelming honour". Reflecting on her career, Kendall says Tait calls documentary making "the university of life", adding, "We've been in many jungles around the world, worked with many indigenous peoples, monks, princesses. We couldn't have had much more of a charmed life." Tait explained, "We do this as heart work, not for fame or anything. It's stuff that we feel needs to be done and we've gained trust at many levels of the community. It's a great privilege to be able to do this work".

Asked about their secret to a loving and professional relationship that's lasted decades, Tait says, "It's a privilege that we're still able to be together and work together. We're very lucky to have the kind of relationship that can survive being together 24-7. We think creatively and environmentally and our heart politics are the same". Kendall adds, "We



have mutual respect. We worked together first before we had a relationship and in a way we're used to working together. Maybe if it was the other way round the work wouldn't have been so easy". Tait is quick to laugh and add, "It would have worked either way".

When asked about the current momentum of the Northern Rivers film industry, Kendall describes it as "very exciting". She says, "We saw the Young Australian Filmmakers session today and were blown away by the quality, standard and complexity of their films. There seems to be no end of talent".

Tait and Kendall join a distinguished list of past recipients including two times Oscar nominee David Bradbury, TV and Film Producer Lois Randall, and acclaimed Director Cathy Henkel, whose film *Show Me The Magic* about Don McAlpine showed at BBFF2013 and just won her best Woman Cinematographer at the World of Women's Cinema Film Festival.

Finally, two honourable mentions were also given to Dutch short film, *I Am a Girl!* and paddle-boarding documentary *H2IndO*.

Festival Director, J'aimee Skippon-Volke says in summary of the 7th International Byron Bay Film Festival, filmmakers have visited from as far as the USA & Canada, France, the United Kingdom. She adds, "It's been terrific to see such a great turnout this year. Many sessions completely sold out including the screenings of our major award winner, **Otelo Burning**. Also Burning Man documentary, **As The Dust Settles**, Cathy Henkel's film about the life of cinematography legend Don McAlpine, **Show Me The Magic**, and Akmal Saleh's **Pharaoh vs The Egyptians**".

When asked if she's detected any changes in the 2013 festival, Skippon-Volke notes, "Things are changing in a really good way. Filmmakers of an extremely high standard are now coming to us. **Tough Bond** is a great example, that came straight from Berlin Film Festival and its directors were passionate about being included in BBFF2013's official selection because of our ethos and our growing reputation on the international film festival circuit. It's heartening to know that they see what we see and together we can deliver such a strong program for our audiences, reflected in the fact that attendance continues to climb".

In their ongoing commitment to support great creative talent, BBFF2013 and its presenting rights partner, The Owners Club at Linnaeus have teamed up to give everyone with a



dream the chance to bring it into reality. For your chance to win an uber-luxurious creative getaway valued at \$2,500, simply go to the www.bbff.com.au homepage before 28 March and tell BBFF in 25 words or less, "Why you would like to win a week at The Owners Club at Linnaeus, Byron Bay to conceptualise your next creative project?"

The beautiful Owners Club at Linnaeus is situated on and preserves 300 acres of stunning sub-tropical coastal land, providing a space for artists, filmmakers and musicians to escape into naturally beautiful surrounds and develop creative projects. Otherwise shared between no more than 72 owners for their exclusive use throughout the year, the luxury property includes a 25m infinity pool, tennis court and gymnasium and organic market garden.

BBFF2013 concludes this year's program of over 220 cutting edge independent films including 13 world premieres and a record 122 additional Australian premieres with the FREE community event, the Sunset Cinema, under the next full moon on either 26 or 27 March on the lawn next to the Byron Bay Surf Club at dusk. The date will be confirmed in the coming week.

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For further media information or images, please contact:

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Summary of BBFF2013 Awards:

The Owners Club at Linnaeus Best Film, Byron Bay Coffee Company Best Dramatic Feature & Tavarus Best Surf Film

Title: Otelo Burning

Director: Sara Blecher

www.oteloburning.com

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gek4b3x0TTQ>

Acceptance speech video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfN_m_JBKl



The Echo Best Byron Film

Title: Pharaoh vs The Egyptians

Director: Akmal Saleh

Trailer: <http://youtu.be/zVrfx6AL3Q4>.

The Byron at Byron Best Environmental Film

Title: Sanctity of Sanctuary: Paul Strauss and the Equinox Farm

Director: Blis DeVault

www.sanctityofsanctuary.com

Trailer: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sanctity-of-Sanctuary-Paul-Strauss-and-the-Equinox-Farm/299498726740179>

SAE Institute/Qantm College Best Short Film

Title: Le Souffle Court

Director: Guillaume Legrand

Trailer: <http://vimeo.com/52840889>

Screenzone Byron International Documentary Prize (\$5,000 cash)

Title: The World Before Her

Director: Nisha Pahuja

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j21b1r13hbE>

GDC Best Cinematography

Title: The Naked Leading the Blind

Director: Wim Vanacker

Trailer: <http://vimeo.com/49502334>

Cheese Please Best Music Video Award

Title: Easy Way Out (by Gotye)

Director: Andy Predergast from production company Oh Yeah Wow

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEpfyBOdKxU>

Sustain Northern Rivers Sustainable Shorts

Title: The Garden Pool

Directors: Ira Chute & Angus Cann

www.gardenpool.org

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddVULB9j4Qc>



Fox Creek Wines Best Experimental Film

Title: Aalterate

Director: Christobal de Oliveria

Young Australian Filmmaker of the Year

Title: Toombaworth

Director: Lucy McKendrick

GreenhouseFX Best Animation

Title: Father

Directors: Ivan Bogdanov, Veljko Popovic, Moritz Mayerhofer, Asparuh Petrov, Dmitry Yagodin, Rositsa Raleva

BBFF Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Northern Rivers

Filmmakers Paul Tait & Jeni Kendall

See separate attachment for filmography

Honourable Mentions

Title: I Am A Girl

Director: Susan Koenen

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXpViPHnT3U>

Title: H2IndO

Director: Brent Deal

Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHNbozjzZdU>

Other Film Trailers:

- Small Apartments: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghRG5TENSCE>
- Show Me the Magic: <http://youtu.be/p3inSZ1yYxY>

Notes to Editors:

About the Byron Bay International Film Festival

The 7th Byron Bay International Film Festival (BBFF2013) runs 1-10 March and is an independent celebration of the world's best cutting-edge films that symbolise diversity, inclusion, authenticity and evolution. Entertaining, inspiring and thought provoking, BBFF showcases and supports the unique cultural melting pot that is Byron Bay and its avid film



community, which is home to the greatest concentration of film makers in Australia outside metropolitan areas.

Screening over 10 days in beautiful sub-tropical Byron Bay, BBFF's relaxed, open-minded and progressive vibe attracts local and international filmmakers and industry heavyweights, including film buyers, directors, producers, actors and musicians, that come to soak up the action alongside thousands of cultural tourists and local film lovers.

About Festival Director, J'aimee Skippon-Volke

Born in Australia, J'aimee Skippon-Volke has a truly international perspective, spending much of her upbringing travelling the globe. Her father worked in television and moved the family from Australia to New Zealand and then to Thatcherite Britain, where the curtains opened on J'aimee's love of underground cinema. As a teen growing up in Covent Garden in central London, she discovered the cinematic offerings at the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) a hub of raw talent for contemporary arthouse film. Her appetite for film was fuelled further by the infamous Scala Cinema in Kings Cross and their all-night movie marathons of cult classics.

J'aimee went on to work with Producers and Executive Producers in the TV industry and after a stint in the USA, she settled in Byron Bay, Australia, to raise her family where she became actively involved in the community. Starting out behind the scenes of BBFF, she stepped up to the role of Festival Director and expanded it to international status to match Byron Bay's international community in 2007. With early adoption of social media, she has led BBFF from strength to strength. Community values remain close to J'aimee's heart and she also works on the board of Screenworks, an organisation fostering a vibrant innovative screen industry in the NSW Northern Rivers region, the Byron Visitors Centre and she is currently President of the Byron Bay Community Association.

About The Owners Club at Linnaeus

This private beachfront estate with 300 acres of rainforest, coastal dunes and bushland is bounded by state reserves and a marine national park, fronts a 1.5 kilometre strip of Seven Mile Beach, and is a stone's throw from Byron Bay. Shared between no more than 72 owners for their exclusive use throughout the year, the luxury property includes a 25m infinity pool, tennis court, gymnasium, organic market garden and a clubhouse that houses a commercial kitchen, dining rooms, library, wine cellar and intimate performance spaces. For more information visit www.theownersclub.com.au