

AUSTRALIAN FILM INSTITUTE - PRESS RELEASE

Australian Academy new 'stamp of success' for screen leaders

Media can download footage from tonight's launch event from 11.30pm EDST at:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/AustFilmInstitute>

International interest in Australia's best film and television productions and practitioners is expected to increase, following the launch tonight of the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts (AACTA).

Launched by the Australian Film Institute (AFI), AACTA is a dynamic new peak peer assembly for leading Australian screen practitioners. AACTA's primary role is to recognise, encourage, award and celebrate screen excellence in Australia, in particular through the Academy's annual awards.

Geoffrey Rush has been named as AACTA's Founding President, a move which is expected to add international weight to the organisation and its awards from an industry and public perspective.

Geoffrey Rush said:

'I am honoured to represent our industry as President of the newly-formed Australian Academy. Over half a century ago the AFI was founded and since that time our film and television industries have developed beyond our wildest imaginings. Through the timely creation of AACTA we have a unique opportunity to galvanise the craft and talent this country endlessly produces.

'Now is the time to celebrate at home and abroad the brilliance and originality of our seasoned screen professionals, and establish AACTA as a stamp of success - a measure which is recognised around the world as the mark of excellence it represents.'

Speaking of Rush's appointment, AFI Chairman, Alan Finney, said:

'We are delighted to announce Geoffrey Rush as the Founding President of our Academy. A multi AFI Award winner, and a recipient of the AFI Raymond Longford Award, the highest honour we bestow on an individual, Geoffrey has also won an Oscar, an Emmy, a BAFTA and a Tony.

'He has been awarded at the highest levels by the industry here and internationally, and is celebrated by audiences around the world for his excellence within the arts – an incredible feat with few comparisons.

'We are delighted that Geoffrey will be leading AACTA at such an important time for our organisation and for the industry as a whole.'

Also unveiled by Geoffrey Rush at the Academy launch was the new gold-cast AACTA Award statuette, which will make its debut at the inaugural Samsung AACTA Awards presented in Sydney in January 2012.

According to Damian Trehwella, AFI/AACTA CEO, the statuette, designed by acclaimed sculptor Ron Gomboc, tells a uniquely Australian story through its carefully considered design, deliberately chosen materials, iconography and symbolism.

‘The statuette sits on a solid base of individually cut and polished tiger iron, which captures not just the strength, but the incredible colours and raw nature of the Australian land. In this, it symbolises the raw and diverse nature of our home grown talent.

‘The body of the statuette, representing effort and excellence in human endeavour, silhouettes the triumphal human form and captures the timelessness of the Southern Cross, a constellation that has provided a guiding light and cultural significance to Australians for millennia.

‘The statuette, and the story it tells, is something we want all Australians to be proud of as it becomes the Australian Academy’s international symbol of screen arts excellence.’

The inaugural Samsung AACTA Awards will be held in Sydney in January 2012 at the Sydney Opera House – an internationally iconic landmark, which will assist in positioning the Awards ceremony as the global event it deserves to be. The gala red carpet Awards night will be televised on the Nine Network for the 7th consecutive year.

With the AFI Awards having been held in Melbourne for the last 10 years, the move to Sydney follows a landmark three-year commitment from the NSW Government that further demonstrates its commitment to film and television and the staging of major Australian events.

The inaugural Samsung AACTA Awards will see a fresh new production for television as well as the establishment of Sydney offices to deliver a new benchmark for awards in Australia.

The inaugural Samsung AACTA Awards will take place in January, therefore integrating with the international awards season, which will also assist in positioning the Awards ceremony as a global event.

Trehwella said the establishment of the Academy came following a 12-month organisational review, which included consultation with key individuals and organisations. During this time, an industry-wide survey showed support for an Academy model, which included key changes such as new memberships, a new Feature Film voting model and a new governance structure.

‘Through our industry consultations, we identified a role which we can play in uniting the screen industry. AACTA provides the perfect platform for this. Key industry sectors and practitioners come together under 15 chapters based on their crafts and expertise - from actors to screenwriters, and from distributors and exhibitors, to television networks and screen culture organisations.

‘Chapters are overseen by the President and an appointed Honorary Council, a group of individuals recognised as leaders and luminaries within their fields, who lead the Academy’s pursuit of excellence and assist with policy directions which augment this.’

Honorary Councillors appointed to date include **Jack Thompson, Abbie Cornish, Fred Schepisi, Jan Chapman AO, Claudia Karvan, Adam Elliot, Emile Scherman**, Peter James ACS ASC, **Deborah Mailman, Jessica Hobbs, Jan Sardi, Stuart Beattie, Rolf de Heer, Cippi Ireland, Tony Murtagh, David Hirschfelder, Aphrodite Kondos, Antony Partos, Elizabeth Drake, Ian Gracie, Jonathan Chissick and Andrew Mason.**

Screen guild and professional association nominees include **Tony Ginanne** (former President of SPAA), **Jacqueline Woodman** (Executive Director, Australian Writers Guild), **Ray Argall** (President, Australian Directors Guild) **Simon Whipp** (Director, Equity Section, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance), **Ron Johanson ACS** (President, Australian Cinematographers Guild), **Jason Ballantine ASE** (President, Australian Screen Editors), **Trevor Harrison** (President, Australian Screen Sound Guild), **George Liddle** (Secretary, Australian Production Design Guild), and **Jo Smith** (Executive Director, Australian Guild of Screen Composers).

Industry figureheads so far appointed include **Mike Baard** (Managing Director Universal Pictures Australia, also AFI Director), **Mike Selwyn** (Managing Director and Vice President Australia/New Zealand, Paramount Pictures), **David Seargeant** (Managing Director, Amalgamated Holdings Ltd),

Christopher Mapp (Managing Director, Omnilab Media), **Bob Campbell** (Executive Director, Screentime), **Greg Coote** (Chairman, Latitude Entertainment), **Natalie Miller** (Cinema Nova/Sharmill Films), **Chris Puplick** (Chair, NFSA), **Tony Forrest** (Chief Executive Officer, Movie Network Channels) and **Stuart O'Brien** (CEO, Ogilvy & Mather Sydney).

The Academy also draws on international best practice voting models, and will adopt a two-step voting model for Feature Films, which sees AACTA members short list nominees based on their area of specialisation, with the short list then voted on by the wider AACTA membership.

Trewhella said that despite the establishment of the Academy, the AFI will remain, will retain its name, and will continue its important remit of connecting audiences with Australian screen culture and content, particularly through its general membership.

Trewhella said that by establishing an Academy, Australia is providing more opportunities for its talented screen professionals.

'Ultimately, through the Samsung AACTA Awards, we are sharing and celebrating Australian stories, and showing that we have some of the most talented people in the world bringing these stories to life via the screen.'

Samsung will become the naming rights sponsor of the inaugural Samsung AACTA Awards.

'Samsung has proudly supported the Australian Film Institute for the past five years through its mobile business, including its role as naming rights sponsor for the last two 'Samsung Mobile AFI Awards,' said Lambro Skropidis, Head of Marketing, Samsung Electronics Australia.

'We are delighted to continue our association with these highly regarded awards and support the direction the AFI has taken in the establishment of AACTA. Given the relevancy of film and TV content for many of our products beyond just mobiles, this year we are excited to be broadening our association to all of Samsung's products and are looking forward to the inaugural Samsung AACTA Awards.'

For further information, please see the new AACTA website: www.aacta.org

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