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#CINEMAFORTHESENSES

Byron Bay Film Festival 6 - 15 October 2017

Australian drama wins Festival's Best Film Award

The Australian-made drama **One Less God** took the **Best Film Award** at the 11th Byron Bay Film Festival Closing Gala on Saturday night. Telling the personal stories of Taj Mahal Palace hotel guests and staff caught up in the terrorist attack in 2008 – and of two of the Islamist attackers – the film held capacity audiences spellbound during two screenings at the festival, both at the Byron Community Centre and at Brunswick Picture House.

Director, co-producer and writer, Central Coast-based **Liam Worthington**, who is taking the film to Mumbai this week, noted the “incredible value” of such an award on the international scene.

Co-producer **Maren Smith** said: “The packed houses and the audience buzz at Byron really bodes well for our upcoming theatrical release, so we can’t wait to share it with a wide audience.”

The film, though gruelling, had been an “absolute hit” with audiences, “sparking debate, passionate commentary and heartfelt appreciation”, said Festival Director **J’aimee Skippon-Volke**.

Other nominations for Best Film included **An American in Texas**, **City of Joy**, **Loving Vincent**, and the Closing Gala feature **Rumble: the Indians Who Rocked the World**.

Winner of the **Best Dramatic Feature Award** was **Jungle**, featuring Harry Potter actor **Daniel Radcliffe** as Mullumbimby-based Israeli Yossi Ghinsberg, and rising Australian star **Joel Jackson**. **Wolf Creek** director **Greg McLean** made the edge-of-your-seat drama, which recounts the real-life ordeal that Ghinsberg experienced when he was lost for two weeks in the Amazonian rainforest.

An American in Texas, the David Wenham-directed romantic comedy **Ellipsis**, German psycho-drama **Freddy/Eddy** and **One Less God** were other nominations in the category. **An American in Texas** received an honourable mention.

City of Joy was the winner of the **Best Documentary Award**. The grim record of the plight of women caught up in the war-zone of Eastern Congo, where they are routinely raped and tortured by soldiers and militias seeking to terrorise the populace, offered some hope of recovery for them in the sanctuary City, and a life beyond their horrific experiences.

Also nominated were **Heavy Water**, **Roller Dreams**, **Rumble: The Indians Who Rocked the World** and the Opening Night film **The Freedom to Marry**, an account of the battle for marriage equality in the US, which was won in an historic Supreme Court ruling.

In the highly competitive category of **Best Surfing Film**, the feature documentary **Heavy Water** by acclaimed surf filmmaker **Michael Oblowitz** won the day. The story of surfing legend Nathan Fletcher and his “acid drop” from a helicopter onto a massive wave played to full houses at several screenings throughout the festival.

Other candidates for the top surfing gong were **Lumiere** and the Australian works **The Church of the Open Sky**, and **Maurice Cole: The First Wave**.

The Church of the Open Sky, from Nathan Oldfield, won the **Best Byron Bay Film Award** – fulfilling lauded Australian novelist Tim Winton’s description of him as “a filmmaker who wants a surf movie to say something important, to move us and make us grateful for the sea around us and the life within us”.

The Argentinian film **Uncanny Valley** took out the **Best Short Film Award**, with **Backstory**, while Australian films **Found**, **The Kindness of Strangers** (featuring **Martin Sacks** and **Miranda Tapsell**) and **Serving Joy** were also nominated.

Honourable mentions went to two very different Australian shorts, **Soop** and **Sengatan**.

The extraordinary work **Loving Vincent** – made entirely from 65,000 painted frames showing the late-blooming artistry of Vincent Van Gogh, and telling his tragic life-story – won the **Best Animated Film Award** from a worthy international field, which included **Keiro**, **Portrait of a Wind-Up Maker**, **Schirkoa** and **Ztripes**.

Loving Vincent showed to capacity audiences throughout the Festival, filling Pighouse Flicks on five separate occasions.

The Iranian work **A Dragon Arrives** won **Best Experimental Film**, with **Bionic Girl**, **Growth**, **Long Yearning** and **Melanie** also in contention.

The **Best Cinematography Award** went to the quirky **Radio Dreams**, with **Backstory**, **8.1 Degrees of Guilt**, **Frontera Invisible** and **A Dragon Arrives** also nominated.

The **Best Environmental Film Award** was picked up by director **Karina Holden** and her co-producer **Sarah Beard** at an earlier screening of their documentary **Blue**. The shocking revelation about the state of the planet's oceans screened five times throughout the festival, each time to a packed house. **Frontera Invisible**, **Grey Space**, **Long Yearning** and **Suzy and the Simple Man** were other nominees.

The annual award for **Best Young Australian Filmmaker** was collected by **Nina Buxton**, whose short film **M'wah** proved highly topical, examining as it does the terrifying experience of young women dealing with unwanted attention from predatory men.

There were two new award categories created this year: **Best Music Documentary** and the **Byron Bay International Film Festival Screenplay Prize**.

Best Music Documentary was awarded to **Rumble**, which revealed and celebrated the huge contribution made by Native Americans to the popular “Western” musical forms of blues, rock and jazz, and the rhythms we hear around us every day. **Amplify Her**, **The Go-Betweens: Right Here**, and **Westwind: Djalu’s Legacy** were also in the running.

The US\$2500 Screenplay Prize went to Byron Shire resident **Clare Sladden** for her feature drama **Broken Head**, who said she was thrilled to be the winner of the inaugural competition.

“My winning screenplay follows two estranged siblings, a determined fiancée, and a tag-along backpacker on a laugh-out-loud road trip up the East Coast of Australia in a quest to recover lost memories in time for a wedding. I’m so grateful that the judges connected to a story with such a complex, flawed female protagonist, that, at its core, is about the universal experiences of forgiveness and self-forgiveness.”

Clare’s short film **Consent** screened at the Festival – a dark imagining of where an internet date could go when a woman allows a virtual stranger into her home to fulfil an unusual agreement.

Canada’s Felix and Paul took home the Festival’s **Best CinematicVR Experience Award** for **Miyubi** – a long-form comedic Virtual Reality piece made in conjunction with Funny or Die and starring Jeff Goldblum. Nicole McDonald’s sensitive and beautiful animated experience **Hue** received the **Best Interactive VR Experience Award**.

BBFF’s Festival Director J’aimee Skippon-Volke said “There was an exceptionally high standard of entries to our 2017 Festival which made the selection and nomination process a real challenge to our team and the judges”.

The 12th Byron Bay Film Festival will run from the 12th to the 21st of October 2018.