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**SIFF AWARDS FILM AND SPECIAL EVENTS WINNERS  
AT 25TH ANNIVERSARY SONOMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL  
Female Filmmakers Take Top Jury Awards in Feature Film Categories**

**Karen Allen, Jacqueline Bisset, Jacques Pépin, Aaron and Adam Nee,  
Jennifer Siebel Newsom, Jean Schulz, Joanne Weir,  
Governor Gavin Newsom and Senator Bill Dodd in Attendance**

Sonoma, CA March 29, 2022—Centered on its slogan—the best in films, food, wine and fun—Sonoma International Film Festival's 25th Anniversary delivered on all counts. Sixteen films and special events honorees took top honors at the 25th Sonoma International Film Festival edition, one of the first large, live events held in Sonoma March 23-27. The organization itself received special recognition from California Senator Bill Dodd for its advancement of arts and culture.

Special attendees included Karen Allen, Jacqueline Bisset, Aaron and Adam Nee, Jacques Pépin and Joanne Weir. Filmmaker Jennifer Siebel Newsom appeared for her World Premiere of FAIR PLAY, with Governor Gavin Newsom in attendance, along with New York Times best-selling author Eve Rodsky, on whose book the documentary is based.

The fun-filled, completely walkable festival in the heart of Sonoma Valley Wine Country, celebrated its milestone with a slate of more than 120 international films, including 69 film premieres, two one-of-a-kind culinary events, special parties, panels, live music from local talent and headliners, and free public events including the Sonoma Valley High School Media Arts Showcase, the UFO Program, a Charlie Chaplin Silent Film, and a Free Saturday Family Screening Event.

"We were proud to bring the best in new cinema, culinary excellence, and industry luminaries from around the world to our Sonoma community in celebration of our 25th anniversary," said Kevin W. McNeely, SIFF Artistic Director. "The visiting filmmakers, invited guests, and our supportive community all experienced the best that Sonoma has to offer in this singular event."

**SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARDS:**

**SIFF | Devour! Chefs & Shorts Dinner Honors Chef Jacques Pépin**

Internationally acclaimed Chef Jacques Pépin received the inaugural SIFF Culinary Excellence Award at the Chefs & Shorts dinner on Thursday, March 24. The SIFF honorarium included a \$10,000 donation to the Jacques Pépin Foundation. Pépin was presented with an art piece specially made for the occasion from Chihuly Studio.

Additionally, Chef Pépin's original artwork of the night's menu was auctioned, raising an additional \$5,000 for his foundation. The winning bidder was Saul Gropman, owner of Cafe La Haye. The piece was signed by Pépin and participating chefs: Ken Frank (La Toque), Michael Howell (Devour!), Roland Passot (Left Bank, La Folie), Seadon

Shouse (Timber Cove Resort), Ari Weiswasser (Glen Ellen Star) and Ensan Wong (Cogir). The event was sponsored by Chihuly Studio and Farm Fresh To You, and featured wines from Anaba, Bee Hunter, Breathless, Chateau St. Jean, and Viansa. Attendees received a glass from Sophienwald.

"I am very much honored to receive the first ever SIFF Culinary Excellence Award," said Chef Pépin. "I also thank SIFF for their generous contribution to the Jacques Pepin Foundation.

**SIFF Cinematic Excellence Awarded to Film Star Jacqueline Bisset:**

Actress Jacqueline Bisset was awarded the SIFF Cinematic Excellence Award for her body of work at the festival's 25th Anniversary edition on Friday, March 25 in conjunction with the screening of her most recent role in the Northern California premiere of LOREN & ROSE directed by Russell Brown. Bisset received an art piece specially made for the occasion from Chihuly Studio; the screening was presented by Chihuly Studio and Fandor.

"I am honored to be the recipient of the SIFF Cinematic Excellence Award," said Jacqueline Bisset. "I am thrilled to be seeing Loren & Rose in this environment after such difficult years of waiting for genuine cinema screens. Thank you to SIFF for this recognition.

**FILM AWARDS:**

**Jury Award | Best English Language Feature Film:**

Kestrin Pantera's PRETTY PROBLEMS (U.S.) California Premiere took home two top awards during the festival. Pantera received the SIFF Bay Area Filmmaker Award, given in recognition to a filmmaker from the Bay Area or whose film showcases the Bay Area, at the first screening on Thursday, March 24. The nod includes a \$10,000 production grant from Cinelease and the award was crafted from a piece of the Golden Gate Bridge from Golden Gate Furniture. She was awarded again on Saturday, March 26 with the Jury Award | Best English Language Feature Film. The film, which also won the SXSW Audience Award, has been purchased by IFC. The film tells the story of a couple who go down the rabbit hole on a Wine Country getaway with affluent strangers. The screening was presented by Cinelease and Film Mare Island.

"Sonoma International Film Festival has been so good to us," said PRETTY PROBLEMS director Kestin Pantera. "It's a huge honor to be awarded with both the Jury Award for Best English Language Feature Film AND the SIFF Bay Area Filmmaker Award. You have our undying loyalty - and the best wine and food. Can't wait to come back with our next film!"

**Jury Award | Best Foreign Language Feature Film:**

Making its North American Premiere, the Jury Award | Best Foreign Language Feature Film went to OPEN SEASON (JAGDZEIT) from Switzerland, directed by Sabine Boss, which shows how a bitter power struggle plays out in the C-suite of a Swiss car parts maker. The screening was presented by the Consulate General of Switzerland | San Francisco and Franklin University Switzerland.

Honorable Mention for Jury Award | Best Foreign Language Feature Film went to coming-of-old-age TAILOR (Greece, Germany, Belgium) by writer/producer Sonia Liza Kenterman. The film was presented by Sonoma Valley Inn.

**Jury Award | Best Documentary Film:**

The Jury Award | Best Documentary Film was served up to Japanese ramen film COME BACK ANYTIME by John Daschbach about ramen master Masamoto Ueda and his 40 years of bringing the Tokyo community together. The film was sponsored by the Japan Foundation | Los Angeles.

Honorable Mention for Jury Award | Best Documentary Film went to Australia's BLIND AMBITION about four Zimbabwean men who form their country's first Wine Tasting Olympics team. It won the 2021 Tribeca Film Festival Audience Award; from directors Robert Coe and Warwick Ross, who were in attendance. The screening was sponsored by Safe Harbor Wine Storage and StaVin.

## Jury Award | Best Short Films:

Animated: LIFE BLOOD (Australia) directed by Nicholas Tory about the displacement of Aboriginal people upon the arrival of Europeans to the continent.

Comedy: The animated SILVERTOP (U.S.) from veteran writer, director, animator, musician Tom J. Stern about architectural theory and one cute dog.

Documentary: Eda Benjakul's U.S. Premiere of HOME RESTAURANT (U.S.), picked up by PBS affiliate KVRC, about the new trend in the food share economy.

Dramatic: Chalking up its ninth win on the international festival circuit, ALL THAT GLITTERS (U.K.) by writer/director/producer Dan Bronzite.

Foreign: With more than 60 awards on the festival circuit, the comedic THE TREATMENT (EL TRATAMIENTO) from Spanish director/writer/actor Álvaro Carmona, shows that treatments promising 100% results sound almost too good to be true—and that's what the side effects are.

The Romanian film 27 CHILDREN from director Daniel Wyland, about the discreet birth control practices in the former Eastern European Communist bloc meant to keep young girls safe, received Honorable Mention | Best Foreign Short.

## Audience Awards | Best Feature and Documentary Films:

The Stolman Audience Award | Best Feature Film went to the heartwarming Irish film RÓISE & FRANK by writers/directors Rachael Moriarty and Peter Murphy, who travelled from Ireland to attend their Northern California Premiere at SIFF. The film is about a widow who is convinced a stray dog is her dead husband's reincarnation. The screening was presented by Aer Lingus and Sweetwater Spectrum.

The A<sup>3</sup> Award | Best Documentary Film nod went to BLIND AMBITION, noted for its Jury Award Honorable Mention for Best Documentary.

The attending industry jurists judging this year's slate of films for awards were:

**Olivier Albou** (Producer and International Distribution | Other Angel Pictures): In addition to producing the SIFF Closing Night film THE BUTCHER'S DAUGHTER, Albou's company has produced and distributed dozens of films worldwide, including THE LAST MERCENARY and SPOILED BRATS, both released worldwide with Netflix last year.

**Nate Bolotin** (Partner | XYZ Films): Bolotin co-founded XYZ Films with Nick Spicer and Aram Tertzakian in 2008. XYZ Films, is an independent studio, fully integrated with production, financing, global sales, talent management and US distribution. XYZ Films' titles include *The Raid* franchise, 2017 Sundance winner *I Don't Feel at Home in This World Anymore* and *cult hit Mandy*. Recent productions from the company include Joe Penna's sci-fi thriller *Stowaway*, starring Anna Kendrick and Toni Collette, and Gareth Evans' action thriller *Havoc*, starring Tom Hardy and Forest Whitaker.

**Ferne Cassel** (Principal | Ferne Cassel Casting): Cassel's credits include more than 50 films such as DIE HARD 1 and 2, MONSTER, TAKEN, ANOTHER 48 HRS, RED HEAT, DICK TRACY, NATIONAL LAMPOON'S LOADED WEAPON, MAJOR LEAGUE 2, ACE VENTURA: WHEN NATURE CALLS. PREDATOR 2, BODY SNATCHERS, RICOCHET and DEMOLITION MAN. She has also cast award winning shorts and TV projects for HBO, Comedy Central, Showtime, TNT and Lifetime Television. In 2004 Cassel was the recipient of the Artios Award presented by CSA (Casting Society of America) for Outstanding Achievement in Casting for MONSTER, for which Charlize Theron received an Academy Award.

**Nancy Collet** (Principal | Cinema Collet): A 30-year industry veteran, she founded Cinema Collet in 2007 and offers strategic consulting services to independent filmmakers, film festivals, conferences, educators, distributors and art house theaters around the world. Services include festival and sales strategy for independent films, film festival start-up, programming, large-scale event management, production and marketing and film acquisitions.

**Elisabeth Costa DeBeauregard** (Co-Founder | Storyboard Entertainment): Storyboard Media is a production, finance and global sales company. The company has been involved in films such as 20th Century Fox's German horror film, HEILSTATTEN, which did close to \$10 million in global markets and is working on a sequel. Storyboard went on to produce ARKANSAS, starring Liam Hemsworth, Vince Vaughn, John Malkovich and Michael Kenneth Williams; and sold and produced the large budget film, THE COMEBACK TRAIL, starring Robert De Niro, Morgan Freeman, Zach Braff and Tommy Lee Jones. Currently, Storyboard is in post-production on MARLOWE, a Raymond Chandler inspired character and world directed by Neil Jordan and starring Liam Neeson, Jessica Lange and Diane Kruger.

**Miles Fineberg** (Director of Acquisitions | Samuel Goldwyn): Fineberg oversees the acquisitions department which has acquired titles such as Oscar winner ANOTHER ROUND and Oscar nominee THE MAN WHO SOLD HIS SKIN. Prior to joining Samuel Goldwyn Films, he was at Terror Films; and began his career with independent production company Sunrise Pictures.

**Nick Ogiony** (Agent | CAA): Since joining CAA in 2009, Ogiony has packaged and arranged financing and distribution for such films as GOOD LUCK TO YOU, LEO GRANDE; THE ICE ROAD; WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS; SEARCH; GAGA: FIVE FOOT TWO; THE GUEST; IMPERIAL DREAMS; INSIDIOUS; KODACHROME; THE WIFE; FIRST REFORMED; and BOSS LEVEL, among others. Prior to CAA, Ogiony was in the independent feature division of William Morris Agency (WMA). He began his career in entertainment at HBO Films.

**MJ Peckos** (President | Dada Films): Dada is a full-service distribution, marketing and publicity agency specializing in quality narrative and documentary films for the U.S. marketplace. Recent releases include the award-winning documentaries *Torn*, *The Last Forest*, and *Old Henry* starring Tim Blake Nelson, *Confetti* starring Amy Irving, *Language Lessons* starring Marc Duplass and the Nathalie Morales documentaries *Picture of His Life*, *For the Birds*, narrative features *The Cuban and Raven*.

**Jennifer Siebel Newsom** (Documentary Filmmaker | Activist): Siebel Newsom is a filmmaker, advocate, thought leader, and the First Partner of California. She wrote, directed, and produced the 2011 award-winning documentary *Miss Representation*. As a result, she launched The Representation Project, a nonprofit organization that uses film and media as a catalyst for cultural transformation. Her second film as a director, *The Mask You Live In*, explores how America's narrow definition of masculinity is harming boys, men, and society at large. And, her third film in the trilogy, *The Great American Lie*, unveils the underlying cultural causes of inequality in America. She also executive produced the Emmy Award-winning and Academy Award-nominated documentary *The Invisible War* and was an executive producer on the Emmy Award-winning documentary *The Hunting Ground*. She lives in Sacramento, California with her husband, California Governor Gavin Newsom, and their four young children.

## **Festival Highlights:**

### **SVHS Media Arts Showcase | Wednesday, March 23**

Actor/director Karen Allen kicked the 25th festival off by speaking with the filmmaking students at the first of two Sonoma Valley High School Media Arts Program Showcases on Wednesday, March 23 at 9 AM at Sebastiani Theatre. Started more than 20 years ago, SIFF's signature program inspires student filmmakers and provides ongoing financial support totaling more than \$725,000 to date. SVHS Media Arts filmmaking student Bella Quilici moderated the talk with Allen. The showcase was sponsored by Poppy Bank.

### **Opening Night Film | Wednesday, March 23**

Paramount Pictures THE LOST CITY opened the festival with a preview of the blockbuster two days before it released to the general public. Brothers Aaron and Adam Nee, who directed and are credited writers of the film, were in attendance supporting the Sandra Bullock, Channing Tatum, Daniel Radcliffe, Brad Pitt vehicle about a reclusive romance novelist on a book tour with her cover model who gets swept up in a kidnapping attempt that lands them both in a cutthroat jungle adventure. Its general public release on March 25 grossed the #1 film \$11.5MM. Opening Night was presented by SIFF Official Domestic Carrier Avelo Airlines.

### **Chef Duskie Estes at The Kitchenistas Screenings | Thursday, March 24**

TV chef, farmer, restaurateur and activist Chef Duskie Estes was at both screenings of the documentaries THE CERES COMMUNITY PROJECT paired with THE KITCHENISTAS to talk about her nonprofit Farm To Table organization, which gleans Sonoma County farms to provide food to underserved communities. Her appearance and the screenings were sponsored by Sonoma Index-Tribune and Sonoma Magazine.

### **Joanne Weir's Plates & Places Lunch | Friday, March 25**

Joanne Weir, the James Beard Award winning chef, showcased a new culinary event at the 25th edition--"Joanne Weir's Plates & Places" lunch, which featured selected segments from her award-winning television series, paired with a three-course meal she has curated representing those places. SIFF Artistic Director Kevin W. McNeely presented Weir with the SIFF Appreciation Award at the start of the event—a unique piece of the Golden Gate Bridge made by Golden Gate Furniture. The event was sponsored by Northern California Public Media, MacArthur Place Hotel and Marin Magazine. On Thursday afternoon, Chef Weir signed cookbooks for attending guests at MacArthur Place Hotel.

"Going to the Sonoma International Film Festival has been on my bucket list for years," said Chef Joanne Weir. "Needless to say, I was ecstatic when I was invited to attend. And I loved every moment from the opening reception until the closing night's film rolled its credits. The bi-line for the festival is film, food, wine and fun and it certainly ticked every box. It went far beyond all expectations. I will be back for sure!"

### **Free Family Screening Event | Saturday, March 26**

The animated short ANDY from director James Wheless, and produced by Jean Schulz, were in attendance to discuss the film and their collaboration with Sonoma County nonprofit Canine Companions. The feature film A DOG NAMED PALMA, was introduced by sponsor Pets Lifeline Executive Director Nancy King.

### **SIFF Wine Awards | Saturday, March 26**

SIFF, noted for the best in film, food, wine and fun singled out the following varietals during the 2022 festival as judged by wine industry veterans Christopher Sawyer (lead judge), Mari Wells Coyle (One Hope Winery), Pat Henderson (winemaker), Todd Joly (sommelier), Jennifer Kelly (sommelier), Erin Kirshmann (industry editor), Katie Madigan (St. Francis Winery), Mike Short (wine educator). The SIFF Wine Awards were presented by Safe Harbor Wine Storage, San Francisco Magazine and StaVin.

Best Sparkling: Gloria Ferrer 2018 Blanc de Blancs, Carneros

Best Chardonnay: Chateau St. Jean 2019 Chardonnay, Gap's Crown Vineyard, Petaluma Gap

Best Sauvignon Blanc: Ledson 2020 Sauvignon Blanc, Little Horse Vineyard, Sonoma Valley

Best Pinot Gris/Grigio: Meadowcroft 2021 Pinot Gris, Nelson Ranch, Mendocino County

Best Aromatic White: Meadowcroft 2021 Roussanne, Wyldvin Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley

Best Pink Wine: Anaba 2021 'Turbine' Rose of Grenache, Sonoma Valley

Best Pinot Noir: Chateau St Jean 2019 Pinot Noir, Gap's Crown Vineyard, Petaluma Gap

Best Rhone: Idell Family 2015 "Oskar" Syrah, Sonoma Valley

Best Red Rhone Blend: Enkidu 2019 "Humbaba" Red Blend, Sonoma & Lake County

Best Zinfandel: Rockpile Vineyard 2019 Zinfandel, Botticelli Vineyard, Rockpile

Best Cabernet Sauvignon: Caddis 2018 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma Valley

Best Bordeaux: En Garde 2019 Cabernet Franc, Knights Valley

Best Bordeaux Blend: La Prenda 2018 Red Wine, Pickberry Vineyard, Sonoma Mountain

Best of Class Proprietary Blend: Idell Family 2017 "Oskar" Mixed Black Red Wine, Sonoma Valley

Best Dessert: Anaba 2016 Aeroport White Port Wine Sonoma Valley

### **World Premieres Throughout Festival:**

Children Of The Vine | Documentary | Director Brian Lilla

*A global nightmare is unfolding as Monsanto continues to mislead the public on the safety of Roundup. Children Of The Vine peels back the curtain on how the most widely used herbicide in the world wreaks havoc on public health while non-toxic farming methods prove we don't need Roundup to feed the world.* Presented by Dysfunctional Family Wines.

Fair Play | Documentary | Director Jennifer Siebel Newsom

*Fair Play takes a deep look at domestic inequity, making visible the invisible care work historically held by women. The film aims to inspire a more balanced and equitable future.* Presented by Manitou Fund.

Mixtape Trilogy: Stories Of The Power Of Music | Documentary | Director Kathleen Ermitage

*An entertaining and impactful documentary that examines the relationship between music artists and their fans, featuring Indigo Girls, Vijay Iyer, and Talib Kweli.* Presented by Wine Country Radio.

Sonomawood | Documentary | Directors Pio Valenzuela, Austin Aviles, Adrian Hernandez  
*An overview of what it takes to organize and launch a film festival. From SIFF supported SVHS Media Arts Program alums at Revel.*

The Cheaters | Feature | Director Louis Godbout  
*A friendly game of golf is disrupted by the arrival of a stranger.*

### **Official Sponsors:**

More than 150 sponsors and donors have signed on to support Sonoma International Film Festival. New Premiere sponsors for the 25th edition include:

**Avelo Airlines:** Named the Official Domestic Airline of SIFF, Avelo Airlines was integral in providing air transportation for attending filmmakers and talent scheduled to appear. They also sponsored the SIFF Plaza Banners, Friday night SIFF Funk It Up Party and additional films and events throughout the festival.

**Cogir Senior Living:** The SIFF Backlot Tent, the festival's hub, transformed into the Cogir Hospitality Tent. Cogir is a senior independent, assisted living and respite care facility in Sonoma and Rohnert Park. Cogir Executive Chef Ensan Wong lent his culinary skills at the SIFF | Devour! Chefs & Shorts dinner, and SIFF's Wednesday, Friday and Saturday parties. Classically trained in Paris, Wong worked at the French Laundry and was the Executive Chef at Porsche's headquarters prior to his role at Cogir.

**Northern California Public Media:** Sonoma Valley's local PBS television, radio and digital station was the Presenting Sponsor of Joanne Weir's Plates & Places Lunch on Friday, March 25, in addition to providing broadcast coverage promoting the 25th edition festival.

**Sonoma Raceway:** The Sonoma Raceway VIP Lounge, located inside the Cogir Hospitality Tent, was named after the prominent motor sports race course and dragstrip. Hopmonk provided complimentary food for the lounge, and the Hopmonk food truck was on site throughout the festival.

These sponsors joined longtime Premiere sponsors Dolby, The Manitou Fund, San Francisco Chronicle, Sonoma Magazine and Spritz. Star sponsors include Cinelease, Devour!, Fandor, Farm Fresh To You, Film Mare Island, Shiftboard and Tito's Handmade Vodka.

The 25th Festival was supported by more than 100 volunteers—the backbone of the festival experience. The SIFF Volunteer Program is sponsored by Christine Curry Design, Landers Curry Inc. and Shiftboard. All sponsors and donors can be found [here](https://sonomafilmfest.org/sponsorship/#our-sponsors). (sonomafilmfest.org/sponsorship/#our-sponsors).

### **About Sonoma International Film Festival**

The Sonoma International Film Festival is a 501(c)3 corporation dedicated to promoting independent film, supporting filmmakers around the world, and inspiring film lovers. Blending a program of international film, food, wine and fun, SIFF hosts its annual live festival each March, as well as year-round live and virtual events including the SIFF Best Of Fest Virtual Festival slated for April 23-30 featuring top films from the live March festival, SIFF Summerfest live August 4-6, and SIFF Saturdays, monthly virtual films screened on the last Saturday of every month.

SIFF's signature initiative--the Media Arts Program started at Sonoma Valley High School in 2002--introduces students to the process of storytelling and provides the resources for them to create films. SIFF has granted more than \$725,000 to the program since its inception.

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