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**Grand Jury and Audience Award Winners Announced  
at the Highest Record Attendance at 26th Sonoma International Film Festival March 26, 2023**

**Stolman Audience Award, Best Feature | JULES starring Ben Kingsley  
A<sup>3</sup> Audience Award, Best Documentary | Karen Carpenter: Starving for Perfection  
The McNeely Audience Award, Best Short Film | Nina & Irena**

**Grand Jury Best Narrative Feature | Burning Days  
Grand Jury Best Documentary Feature | The Grab  
Grand Jury Best Live Action Short Film | The Vacation  
Grand Jury Best Documentary Short Film | Historias de Cultura: Comida  
Grand Jury Best Animated Short Film | Christopher At Sea**

**SIFF Filmmaker Award presented by Cinelease | A Stage of Twilight directed by Sarah T. Schwab**

Sonoma, CA March 26, 2023—Top film and industry veterans converged in Sonoma for the 26th annual Sonoma International Film Festival March 22-26. This year boasted the highest audience attendance on record. Luminaries such as JULES cast Academy Award®-winner Ben Kingsley, Tony Award-Winner Harriet Sansom Harris, Succession star Zoe Winters, and Jade Quon, and special guests Karen Allen (“Raiders of the Lost Ark”), Academy Award®-winning producer David Dinerstein (“Summer of Soul”), Award®-nominated producer and director Marc Turtletaub and more than 150 filmmakers, distinguished press, and industry guests were in attendance.

The five-day festival, curated by newly appointed Artistic Director Carl Spence, along with senior programmers Amanda Salazar and Ken Jacobson, showcased 110 films, including seven films making their US premieres, in addition to multiple award-winning and critically acclaimed films. Thirty-two countries are represented in this year’s lineup of 38 narrative features, 20 documentary features, and 52 short films collectively selected by the curatorial team and led by shorts programmer Oscar Arce Naranjo.

The festival presented many celebrated films including Rodrigo Sorogoyen’s Goya Award-Winning film THE BEASTS; Benjamin Millepied’s CARMEN starring Academy Award® Nominee Paul Mescal; Stephen



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Williams' Chevalier starring Kelvin Harrison Jr.; Francois Ozon's EVERYTHING WENT FINE starring Sophie Marceau and Charlotte Rampling; Michel Hazanavicius' FINAL CUT! starring Bérénice Bejo; Lasse Hallström's HILMA starring Lena Olin; Stephen Frears' THE LOST KING starring Academy Award® nominee Sally Hawkins and Steve Coogan; Paul Schrader's THE MASTER GARDNER starring Joel Edgerton and Sigourney Weaver; Ray Romano's SOMEWHERE IN QUEENS starring Emmy Award Winner Ray Romano and Emmy Award Winner Laurie Metcalf; Sarah T. Schwab's A STAGE OF TWILIGHT starring Karen Allen; Roberto Andò's STRANGENESS starring Toni Servillo; "Everything Everywhere All At Once" Academy Award®-winner Ben Brewer's A FOLDED OCEAN; and Academy Award-® winner Ben Proudfoot's THE BEST CHEF IN THE WORLD.

"The audience wholeheartedly embraced the films we selected from around the world," said Artistic Director Carl Spence. "In our search, we found films we loved, both the awe-inspiring and sublime, as well as entertaining box office hits from other countries; including eight extraordinary films that also made their premieres in Sonoma. We also welcomed many industry veterans from the filmmaking community who served to elevate our festival profile, and film competition levels, and to provide valuable insights and interaction with our visiting filmmakers."

"Our festival-going audience is long been known for its embrace of the festival and for providing astute film opinions on our Audience Awards," said Executive Director Ginny Krieger. "This year's festival exceeded our expectations in the number of pass holders and individual ticket sales, our culinary and party special events, and is a testament to our many years in the Sonoma community and their longtime support."

**Grand Jury Award | Best Narrative Feature:**

**BURNING DAYS** (Emin Alper | Turkey)

Jury Statement from the Narrative Feature Grand Jury: John Cooper (Director Emeritus, Sundance Film Festival), Marcus Hu (Co-President, Strand Releasing), Laura Kim (Executive Vice President, Marketing, Participant Films), Fred Tsui (Founder & CEO, Moebius Entertainment Limited), and Christine Vachon (Co-Founder, Killer Films).

We are so thrilled to have spent the past few days together - with all of you, with Carl and the wonderful staff and volunteers — and we feel lucky to have gotten to spend these days in such beauty with great food and yes, delicious wine. We feel so taken care of and watching these films is just icing on the cake. Thank you for having us.

Over the past few days, we had the opportunity to watch the warm, naturalistic performances in the human drama Ajoomma, the political intrigue and institutionalized homophobia of the taut Burning Days, the universal examination of parenthood in Fathers and Mothers, in Last Dance we felt the profound discovery of expressing love in the face of loss. We explored contemporary themes of identity in Magnificat, enjoyed the stunning production and ambition of Strangeness, were enthralled by the social thriller, and keenly

observed gender study in *Until Tomorrow* and finally, the humanistic look at people displaced and searching for home in *Vasil*.

The jury could not resist highlighting the performances of **Sadaf Asgari** and **Ghazal Shojaei** in the feature film *UNTIL TOMORROW* with a Special Jury Award.

Our unanimous choice for the Grand Jury Prize for Narrative Feature goes to **BURNING DAYS**, directed by Emin Alper.

**Grand Jury Award | Best Documentary Feature:**

**THE GRAB** (Gabriela Cowperthwaite | USA)

Jury Statement from the Narrative Documentary Grand Jury: Amit Dey (Executive Vice President, Non-Fiction, MRC Entertainment), Megan Gelstein (Senior Program Director, Catapult Film Fund), and Michael Lumpkin (Documentary Film Consultant).

THE GRAB is an astonishing exposé about one of the great issues facing our planet — food scarcity and the global war being fought through covert land grabs. The Center for Investigative Reporting's work on the subject is as urgent as it is eye-opening, and Gabriela Cowperthwaite's direction and economy of storytelling create an undeniably entertaining and important audience experience.

**Grand Jury Award | Best Short Films and Jury Statements**

The Best Short Film Grand Jury included Jo Addy (Global Film & Entertainment Director, Soho House), Bianca Beyrouiti (Associate Producer, Actual Films), and Claudia Puig (President, LA Film Critics).

**Best Live Action Short:**

We would like to award this universally relatable film for its comic sensibility and deft writing, led by a terrific cast that made us all ponder our circumstances and possibilities. The Grand Jury Prize for Live Action Short goes to Jarreau Carrillo for **THE VACATION**.

**Best Documentary Short:**

For a film that honors the dignity of the women of Oaxaca who are keeping their culture alive through food. It was a mouthwatering window into their culinary traditions. The Grand Jury Prize for Documentary Short goes to Megan Martinez Goltz's **HISTORIAS DE CULTURA: COMIDA**.

**Best Animated Short:**

This film sensitively and artfully captures a young man's queer longing using a painterly style that contracts the natural and industrial. The Grand Jury Prize for Animation goes to Tom Brown's **CHRISTOPHER AT SEA**.

Special Jury Prize:

For the standout cast that brought this darkly clever concept to life, the Jury would like to give a Special Jury Prize to the cast in Daniel Sinclair's **THE BREAKTHROUGH: Greta Lee, Ben Sinclair, and Kristin Slaysman.**

SIFF Filmmaker Award presented by Cinelease:

The SIFF Filmmaker Award, presented by Cinelease, went to Sarah T. Schwab for her poignant drama **A STAGE OF TWILIGHT** starring Karen Allen, who also attended the festival in support of the film, and William Sadler. In addition to the recognition, Cinelease provides a \$10,000 production grant to Schwab for her next project.

"There are so many deserving filmmakers out there," said director Sarah T. Schwab. "I feel honored to be chosen. I greatly appreciate SIFF and Cinelease for supporting independent films. It's incredibly difficult to get indie scripts to screen – this award will absolutely be put to good use on my upcoming project."

SIFF Audience Awards:

The Stolman Audience Award for Best Feature, named after festival co-founder Carolyn Stolman, went to **JULES** by director Marc Turtletaub. The World Premiere of Jules screening at SIFF 2023 Opening Night. The top 5 runner-up films include **MAGNIFICAT** (France), **A STAGE OF TWILIGHT** (USA), **TWO MANY CHEFS** (France), **MAX, MIN & MEOWZAKI** (India), and **AJOOMA** (Singapore).

The audience's favorite documentary, the A<sup>3</sup> Award, named for longtime esteemed board member Armar A. Archbold, went to **KAREN CARPENTER: STARVING FOR PERFECTION** (USA) by Randy Martin. The top 5 runner-up films include **THE ART OF EATING: THE LIFE OF M.F.K. FISHER** (USA), **JUDY BLUME FOREVER** (USA), **FULL CIRCLE** (USA), **RADICAL LANDSCAPES** (Switzerland/Italy), and **LITTLE RICHARD: I AM EVERYTHING** (USA).

A new audience award, the McNeely Award for Best Short Film, in honor of SIFF Director Emeritus Kevin W. McNeely, went to **NINA & IRENA** (USA) from director Daniel Lombroso. The Top 5 runner-up films include **Free to Care** (USA), **The Best Chef in the World** (USA), **Wok Hei** (Canada), **Human** (Ukraine), and **Congratulations** (USA).

**Festival Overview:**

The World Premiere opening night film on Wednesday, March 22 of Marc Turtletaub's **Jules**, starring Oscar®-winner Ben Kingsley, is a delightful comedy about an elderly man whose life is upended when he

receives an unexpected visitor. Stars Ben Kingsley, Harriet Sansom Harris, Zoe Winters, and Jade Quon, along with director Turtletaub, were in attendance.

Making its West Coast premiere, the Centerpiece film was Benjamin Millepied's *Carmen* starring Oscar®-nominated Paul Mescal, Melissa Barrera, and Rossy de Palma. The two Closing Night films were *Chevalier* (USA) starring Kelvin Harrison Jr. and directed by Stephen Williams; and *The Eight Mountains* (Italy/Belgium), the winner of the grand jury prize at the 2022 Cannes Film Festival, from Oscar®-nominated Belgian director Felix Van Groeningen and Charlotte Vandermeersch.

Programming spotlights included films from France, Spain, and LGBTQ+ films. Cinema focused on the arts and artists, culinary, music, black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and social justice themes was woven throughout the festival.

In addition to the robust lineup of films and spotlights, SIFF 2023 hosted two culinary events featuring celebrated chefs Martin Yan and Joanne Weir. The four themed parties during the festival align with special tentpole film selections including Opening Night with the film *JULES* (Wednesday, March 22), *GAY-LA* Disco Party with three films *Joyland*, *Pornomelancholia*, and *Blue Jean* (Thursday, March 23), *¡Viva España!* Party with the film *Two Many Chefs* (Friday, March 24), and Centerpiece Party with the film *Carmen* (Saturday, March 25).

A panel for filmmakers and interested attendees, "Film Veterans Tell All," held Friday, March 24, featured established industry guests including the new director of the Sundance Film Festival, Eugene Hernandez; Christine Vachon (Killer Films); John Cooper (Director Emeritus, Sundance Film Festival); Laura Kim (Participant Films); Marcus Hu (Strand Releasing); and Fred Tsui (Moebius Entertainment Limited).

On Saturday, March 25, San Francisco food and film critic Meredith Brody moderated "A Conversation about Food and Cinema" with attending culinary filmmakers. Two free film events, one for UFO enthusiasts, and the other to experience hands-on family engagement enhanced the festival's offerings.

### **Premieres**

**Jules - USA** (World Premiere) | SIFF Opening Night

*Actors Ben Kingsley, Harriet Sansom Harris, Zoe Winters, Jade Quon, and director Marc Turtletaub were in attendance.*

When an elderly man in a small town receives an unexpected visitor, his life and the lives of two women in his community are upended completely in this delightful comedic drama directed by Marc Turtletaub (Puzzle). Starring Ben Kingsley, Harriet Sansom Harris, Jane Curtin, Zoe Winters, and Jade Quon (USA/90 min)

**Big Giant Wave - Canada** (US Premiere)

*Director Marie-Julie Dallaire was in attendance.*

Like a cinematic wave, this stunning documentary executive produced by the late Jean-Marc Vallée (Dallas Buyers Club, Big Little Lies, Wild) rolls across Canada to Italy via Sweden, Mexico, and the West Coast to encounter cutting-edge scientists and innovative artists who illustrate our essential connection with rhythm, music, the planet, and each other. (87 min)

**Bottle Conditioned - USA** (US Premiere)

*Directed by Jerry Franck*

What's lambic beer, and why is it suddenly a phenomenon? Academy Award®-nominated director Jerry Franck's insider's tour of the small Belgian community that produces one of the world's oldest, rarest beers will entrance you — and make you very, very thirsty. (121 min)

**Last Dance - Switzerland** (US Premiere)

*Director was Delphine Lehericoy was in attendance*

When Germain's wife passes away suddenly, he decides - unbeknownst to his family - that he will stand in for her performance, expanding what he thought he was capable of while honoring her last dance in this gentle comedy. Winner, Audience Award, Locarno Film Festival. (84 min)

**Magnificat - France** (US Premiere)

*Director Virginie Sauveur was in attendance*

Virginie Sauveur's directorial debut is a thriller starring Karin Viard as the head of the Paris Diocese of the Catholic Church, who is called to a priest's deathbed and finds the shocking revelation: the priest was, in fact, a woman. Based on the novel by Anne-Isabelle Lacassange. (89 min)

**Pornomelancholia - Argentina** (US Premiere)

*Directed by Manuel Abramovich*

A tale about a melancholy porn star, who has succeeded as a sex influencer but when the cameras are not on, finds himself alone and struggling with loneliness. A poignant examination of social media, capitalism, and the desire to connect. (98 min)

**Strangeness - Italy** (US Premiere)

*Directed by Roberto Andò*

Derailed on a trip by a funeral, Nobel-prize-winning playwright Luigi Pirandello (Toni Servillo) finds unexpected inspiration and wild fantasy from two gravediggers who also have an amateur theatre troupe. A box-office smash in Italy directed by Roberto Andò. (104 min)

**Vasil - Spain** (US Premiere)

*Directed by Avelina Prat*

In this gentle comedy exploring social differences and connections alike, a charismatic Bulgarian immigrant, extremely proficient in bridge and chess, brings new life to people he meets in the upper echelons of society. Starring Karra Elejalde (*Two Many Chefs*). (93 min)

**Centerpiece Film**

**Carmen** (West Coast Premiere)

Academy Award®-nominated Paul Mescal, Melissa Barrera, and Rossy de Palma are dazzling in Benjamin Millepied's modern-day reimagining of the famous operatic romance. The story is transposed to the present-day Sonoran desert as two star-crossed lovers make a break for the US border. (Australia, France, USA/116 min)

**Closing Night Films**

**Chevalier**

Inspired by the incredible true story of celebrated but forgotten composer, violinist, and fencer Joseph Bologne Chevalier de Saint-Georges. He improbably rose through the ranks of the 18th-century court of Marie Antoinette but both society and his love affairs got in his way. From director Stephen Williams, starring Kevlin Harrison Jr., Samara Weaving, Lucy Boynton, Minnie Driver, Marton Csokas, and Sian Clifford. (USA/107 min)

**The Eight Mountains**

This Cannes jury prize-winning film is an epic exploration of the lifelong friendship of two very different men against the backdrop of a remote valley in Italy. Adapted from Paolo Cognetti's novel by Oscar®-nominated Belgian director Felix van Groeningen and Charlotte Vandermeersch. (Italy, Belgium/147 min)

**Competitions and Awards**

**Narrative Feature Competition Jury | Eight Competition Films**

Jury: Christine Vachon (*Killer Films*); John Cooper (Director Emeritus, Sundance Film Festival); Laura Kim (*Participant Films*); Marcus Hu (*Strand Releasing*); and Fred Tsui (*Moebius Entertainment Limited*).

**Ajoomma** (Shuming He | Singapore)

**Burning Days** (Emin Alper | Turkey)

**Fathers and Mothers** (Paprika Steen | Denmark)

**Last Dance** (Delphine Lehericay | Switzerland)

**Magnificat** (Virginie Sauveur | France)

**Strangeness** (Roberto Andò | Italy)

**Until Tomorrow** (Ali Asgari | Iran)

**Vasil** (Avelina Prat | Spain)

**Documentary Feature Competition Jury | Eight Competition Films**

Jury: Amit Dey (MRC Entertainment), Megan Gelstein (Catapult Film Fund); Michael Lumpkin (Producer/Former Executive Director AFI Fest, AFI Docs, IDA, and Frameline; Documentary Film Consultant).

**Big Giant Wave** (Marie-Julie Dallaire | Canada)

**Bottle Conditioned** (Jerry Franck | USA)

**Deep Rising** (Matthieu Rytz | USA)

**El Equipo** (Bernardo Ruiz | USA)

**Full Circle** (Josh Berman | USA)

**The Grab** (Gabriela Cowperthwaite | USA)

**Karen Carpenter: Starving for Perfection** (Randy Martin | USA)

**Radical Landscapes** (Elettra Fiumi | Switzerland, Italy)

**Shorts Competition Jury | 44 Competition Films**

Jury: Jo Addy (Soho House); Claudia Puig (President LA Film Critics/NPR KPCC); Awards categories include Best Live Action Short, Best Animated Short, and Best Documentary Short for 44 films in competition.

**About Sonoma International Film Festival**

The Sonoma International Film Festival is a 501(c)3 corporation dedicated to promoting independent film, supporting filmmakers worldwide, and inspiring film lovers. Blending a program of international film, food, wine, and fun, SIFF hosts its annual festival each March, as well as year-round events and special screenings. Ginny Krieger is the Executive Director and Carl Spence is the Artistic Director.

SIFF's signature initiative--the Media Arts Program started at Sonoma Valley High School in 2002--introduces students to film, providing the resources for them to explore their creative pursuits. SIFF has granted more than \$725,000 to the program since its inception, with hundreds of students to date graduating through the program.

Organization Sustaining Sponsors are Manitou Fund and Delta Air Lines. The 2023 Festival Presenting Sponsor is Cogir Senior Living.

**SIFF 2023 Press Kit Materials**

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