



MEDIA RELEASE

WORLD PREMIERE OF LEXUS SHORT FILM SERIES WINNER'S FILM TO BE UNVEILED AT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL 2016

The 63rd Sydney Film Festival today announced that *MESSIAH*, a new short film from Australian actor and filmmaker Damian Walshe-Howling, starring David Gulpilil, will have its world premiere at the State Theatre during the Festival (Tuesday 14 June, 8:25pm).

The film is the result of Walshe-Howling's 2015 win at the **Lexus Short Film Series**, a competition run by **Lexus International** in partnership with **The Weinstein Company**. In November last year, Walshe-Howling was named one of the competition's four winners at the Nappa Valley Film Festival. The well-known actor, together with three other filmmakers from France, South Korea and the USA, beat over four thousand entries including a record 355 from Australia.

MESSIAH, produced by The Weinstein Company, follows the theme of the series "Anticipation", and is about a plump, hapless Irishman and his Parisian girlfriend who get more than they bargained for when they encounter a mischievous stranger in the spectacular Australian wilderness.

As with all Sydney Film Festival short films outside of the Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films, *MESSIAH* will screen before a Festival feature film. Cannes selected *Blood Father*, from French director **Jean-François Richet**, starring Oscar-winning filmmaker and actor **Mel Gibson** (who will present his film), will screen after Walshe-Howling's *MESSIAH*.

Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley says he is particularly delighted to host the world premiere of Walshe-Howling's film at the Festival. "Sydney Film Festival has a proud heritage supporting Australian filmmakers. We were thrilled to hear that Damian had won the Lexus Short Film Series, and of course jumped at the opportunity to premiere his film."

The high volume of entries from Australia was buoyed by the new **Lexus Australia Short Film Fellowship**, the largest short film cash prize in Australia at \$200,000, or \$50,000 for each of four fellowship winners in 2016. Before the screening of *MESSIAH* on Tuesday 14 June, the four fellows will be announced, selected from 21 shortlisted Australian filmmakers by a jury chaired by actress **Judy Davis**.

Once announced, the fellows will commence production of their films, which will premiere at the 64th Sydney Film Festival in 2017. The Fellowship is a partnership between Lexus Australia, The Weinstein Company and Sydney Film Festival.

Adrian Weimers, Corporate Manager, Lexus Australia said, "Lexus is looking forward to announcing the Lexus Australia Short Film Fellowship fellows at the Sydney Film Festival, and helping them embark on the next step in their creative pathway."

MESSIAH will be among 22 short films screened before feature-length films throughout the Festival.

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Films Tuesday 14 June, 8:25pm:

- **MESSIAH** Australia | 2016 | 18 mins | In English | World Premiere
Director, Screenwriter: Damian Walshe-Howling
- **BLOOD FATHER** France | 2016 | 87 mins | In English | Australian Premiere
Director: Jean-François Richet | Screenwriters: Andrea Berloff, Peter Craig | Producers: Chris Briggs, Pascal Caucheteux, Sebastien Lemercier | Cast: Mel Gibson, Erin Moriarty, William H. Macy | Distributor: Icon Film Distribution

Sydney Film Festival runs 8 – 19 June 2016.

Tickets for Sydney Film Festival 2016 are on sale now. Please call 1300 733 733 or visit sff.org.au for more information.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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***Sydney Film Festival Press Pack and Images Available [HERE](#)

ABOUT THE LEXUS AUSTRALIA SHORT FILM FELLOWSHIP

The Lexus Australia Short Film Fellowship is a new \$200,000 investment by Lexus Australia, presented by Sydney Film Festival, to support future generations of emerging filmmakers. The Fellowship is the largest cash fellowship for short film in Australia. Up to four Fellowship winners will receive \$50,000 each to produce their next short film in 2016, to premiere at the 64th Sydney Film Festival in 2017.

ABOUT THE LEXUS AUSTRALIA SHORT FILM FELLOWSHIP JURY

Presiding over the selection process as Jury Chair is renowned Australian actress **Judy Davis**. The other jury members are Sydney Film Festival Director **Nashen Moodley**, Lexus Australia's **Adrian Weimers**, and Australian producers **Jan Chapman AO** and **Darren Dale**.

ABOUT LEXUS SHORT FILMS

In 2013, Lexus Short Films was launched with the goal of supporting and nurturing a new generation of emerging filmmakers. These aspiring directors and writers have received a unique opportunity supported by Lexus to collaborate with acclaimed film studio The Weinstein Company to produce and showcase their work on an international stage. For more information, visit www.lexusshortfilms.com.

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ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

From **Wednesday 8 June** to **Sunday 19 June 2016**, the 63rd Sydney Film Festival offers Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, red-carpet openings, in-depth discussions, international guests and more. Each year the Festival's programming team curates 12 days of cinema sourced from world-famous film festivals, including Cannes, Sundance, Toronto and the Berlinale; as well as Australia's finest productions.

Sydney Film Festival also presents an Official Competition of 12 films that vie for the Sydney Film Prize, a highly respected honour that awards a \$60,000 cash prize based on the decision of a jury of international and Australian filmmakers and industry professionals. Previous Sydney Film Prize winners are: *Arabian Nights* (2015); *Two Days, One Night* (2014); *Only God Forgives* (2013); *Alps* (2012); *A Separation* (2011); *Heartbeats* (2010); *Bronson* (2009); and *Hunger* (2008).

The Festival takes place across greater Sydney: at the State Theatre, Event Cinemas George Street, Dendy Opera Quays, Dendy Newtown, Skyline Drive-In Blacktown, Art Gallery of NSW, Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace Cremorne, Casula Powerhouse, the Festival Hub at Sydney Town Hall and SFF Outdoor Screen.

The Festival is a major event on the New South Wales cultural calendar and is one of the world's longest-running film festivals. For more information visit: www.sff.org.au.

The 63rd Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW and Destination NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia and the City of Sydney. The Festival's Strategic Partner is the NSW Government through Destination NSW.

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