



**WOMEN IN FILM ANNOUNCES 30TH ANNUAL
FILM FINISHING FUND RECIPIENTS**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOS ANGELES, CA December 11, 2015... Women In Film Finishing Fund co-chairs Betsy Pollock and Nancy Rae Stone are pleased to announce the recipients of the 30th annual Film Finishing Fund grant program. Over two hundred and fifty feature-length narrative films, documentaries and shorts were submitted from around the world. Past recipients of the Fund have gone on to win Academy, Emmy, Sundance, Berlin Film Festival and Peabody Awards, among other recognitions. Beginning this year, 2015, Tiffany & Co. is presenting a \$25,000 grant to one of the Film Finishing Fund recipients, as part of their commitment to support Women In Film educational programs.

The 2015 Women In Film Finishing Fund winners are:

Narrative Feature Films

AWOL

Directed by Deb Shoal

First Annual \$25,000 Grant supported by Tiffany & Co.

Children of the Mountain

Directed, written, and produced by Priscilla Anany

Godless

Directed by Ralitz Petrova/Produced by Rossitsa Valkanova

Documentary Feature Films

Black Ballerina

Directed and produced by Frances McElroy

A Revolution in Four Seasons

Directed and produced by Jessie Deeter

So Help You God

Directed and produced by Ashley York

The Uncondemned

Directed and produced by Michele Mitchell

Short Films

Lacrimosa

Directed, written, and produced by Tanja Mairitsch

You Can Go

Directed by Christine Turner

The Film Finishing Fund provides cash grants and in-kind production services to complete films that fit the established criteria of being by, for or about women. The works-in-progress are viewed by a special jury of women in the industry who select the winning films. Co-chairs Pollock and Stone are on the Board of Directors of Women In Film. Pollock is an Associate Dean of Production at AFI and Stone is a producer.

2015 WOMEN IN FILM FINISHING FUND WINNERS DETAIL

Narrative Feature Films

AWOL

Directed by Deb Shoval

In a post-industrial town with little economic opportunity, Joey, 18, falls for Rayna, 27, a sexy, married mother of two. Threatened by Rayna's husband and fired from her job at the local dairy, Joey reluctantly joins the Army. Days before deployment overseas and still wildly in love, Joey returns to Pennsylvania, plotting to go *AWOL* with Rayna and her kids.

SNAPSHOT BIO: Deb Shoval was raised by her Israeli father and American mother in a small Pennsylvania coal town, where she now owns Fertile Grounds, a 37-acre certified organic vegetable farm. Shoval's short film *AWOL* premiered at Sundance in 2011, winning the Women In Film Grant from Kodak, Technicolor, and CalmDown Productions. The feature version of *AWOL*, starring Lola Kirke, is currently in post-production. *AWOL* the feature has received grants from the Jerome Foundation and Frameline and was chosen for Film Independent's Fast Track, IFP's Narrative Completion Lab, and US Works in Progress Paris. At the Tribeca Film Festival this spring, Ms. Shoval received the IWC Schaffhausen "For the Love of Cinema" award. Shoval divides her time between Pennsylvania and New York City, where she lives with her wife, educator and playwright Tala Manassah.

Children of the Mountain

Directed, written, and produced by Priscilla Anany

In Accra, the capital city of Ghana, Essuman(33), a yam seller gives birth to a son with a cleft palate. Her first instinct is to run away as the child's father, and her mother-in-law blames her for the child's "imperfection." Essuman makes the attempt, but her conscience brings her back. She struggles to find a cure for her child.

SNAPSHOT BIO: Born in Ghana, West Africa in 1983, Priscilla grew up in a few other African countries including Togo and Nigeria as her father taught sculpture-making at various universities along the West African coast. She moved to the United States in 2003 to continue her education. Priscilla started her Ghana-based production company, i60 Productions, in 2011. At i60. Priscilla works as a producer and fixer for international producers looking to shoot their films, TV commercials, and other media projects in West Africa. Aside from that, Priscilla is focused on making her own films. She shot her first feature film *Children of the Mountain* in

July 2014 and the film is currently in post-production. She is currently developing her second feature film *Green Bird*.

Godless

Directed by Ralitz Petrova/Produced by Rossitsa Valkanova

In a remote Bulgarian town, Gana looks after the elderly with dementia, while trafficking their ID cards on the black market. Once stolen the IDs are passed to Gana's boyfriend Aleko, a car mechanic and runner for a crime group dealing with identity fraud. At home, Gana lives with her jobless mother, for whom she provides, and with whom she hardly speaks. Her bond with Aleko is no shelter for love either -- with sexual attraction vanished, intimacy is reduced to an addiction to morphine. Nothing seems to affect Gana's conscience, even the murder of a patient who threatens to expose the nurse's fraudulent dealings. Things start to shake up when Gana is touched by the music of Yoan, a new patient whose ID card she has trafficked.

SNAPSHOT BIO: Rossitsa graduated in 1982 from the National Academy of Theatre and Film, Sofia as a film director. She directed several shorts and documentaries before founding a production company, KLAS Film in 1995. She is a member of national and international film selection committees and juries, and a member of the European Film Academy. Among the titles produced by KLAS Film are *Letter to America* (2001), *Christmas Tree Upside Down* (2006), *Investigation* (2007), *Shelter* (2010), *The Prosecutor, the Defender, the Father and his Son* (2015).

Documentary Feature Films

Black Ballerina

Directed and produced by Frances McElroy

The documentary *Black Ballerina* compels viewers to think about issues of diversity, inclusion and equality in a fresh way. Set in the overwhelmingly white world of classical dance, the documentary tells the stories of several black women from different generations who fell in love with ballet. Six decades ago, while pursuing dreams of dance careers, Joan Myers Brown, Delores Browne and Raven Wilkinson confronted racism, exclusion and unequal opportunity. Today, young black women continue to pursue ballet careers. The film explores the formidable challenges dancers of color still face, what's being done about it and why it matters.

SNAPSHOT BIO: Frances McElroy is Producer/Director of *Black Ballerina*. As a seasoned documentary filmmaker and a 2009 Pew Fellow in the Arts, her mission is two-fold: first is to create issue-driven documentaries and videos for PBS and non-profit organizations; second is to make her work available for use by community, educational, cultural and advocacy organizations to stimulate dialogue about contemporary concerns. Her work's focus is to give voice to the overlooked, raise questions about injustice and demonstrate the transformative power of art and place. Her major films, seen on PBS, include: *Mirror Dance*, *Making Waves*, and *An Angel In The Village*. Frances' current documentary, *Black Ballerina*, is in post-production. In addition to a recent grant from Women In Film, funders include the National Endowment for the Arts, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the Leeway and Montgomery County Foundations.

A Revolution in Four Seasons

Directed and produced by Jessie Deeter

A Revolution in Four Seasons is the story of Emna and Jawhara, and the struggle for democracy in Tunisia, the country that kicked off the Arab Spring revolutions and which has now been honored with the 2015 Nobel

Peace Prize. Standing in contrast to the civil wars of Syria and Yemen and the autocratic retreat that is Egypt, and bordered by the unstable failed-state of Libya, Tunisia perseveres alone in its dogged march towards a more democratic future. Our film tracks secular journalist Emna Ben Jemaa and Islamist Parliament member Jawhara Ettis over the course of Tunisia's critical first four years post-revolution, as both work to steer the country towards their own disparate versions of the perfect democracy.

SNAPSHOT BIO: Jessie has been producing, reporting and directing documentaries for more than a decade. She produced and directed *Spark: A Burning Man Story*, which premiered at the SXSW film festival and aired on Showtime in 2013. She produced *Revenge of the Electric Car*, which had its debut at the Tribeca Film Festival in April 2011 and aired on PBS's Independent Lens in April 2012. She directed and produced *Death by Fire*, a documentary that led PBS's FRONTLINE season in October 2010. She was the Producer of *Who Killed the Electric Car?* which premiered at Sundance and was released by Sony Pictures Classics in 2006. She is currently producing a documentary about artificial intelligence that should debut in 2017. Jessie has a Masters of Journalism from UC Berkeley and recently spent nine months as a Fulbright Scholar in Oman, Morocco and Tunisia.

So Help You God

Directed and produced by Ashley York

The evening of April 6, 1997, news echoed across the globe about a murder in Tennessee's Appalachian Mountains. The story made international headlines and was deemed by the Associated Press as the fifth most popular story of 1997. York was a junior in high school at the time and shared ninth grade homeroom with Natasha Cornett, one of three teenage girls accused of the murder. Several years later and while a graduate student at the University of Southern California, she began traveling to her hometown and various prisons in the state of Tennessee to begin a series of interviews with the kids (now much older), who are serving life prison sentences.

SNAPSHOT BIO: Ashley York is a mediamaker and film producer who is interested in documentaries, socially conscious media, and emerging modes of storytelling. She has worked on Academy Award®-winning teams and as a producer on projects that have premiered at the Sundance, Berlin, and SXSW film festivals as well as on Netflix, Oprah Winfrey's Network, A&E, IFC, HBO, Discovery International, and the Sundance Channel. She co-directed and produced *Tig*, a Netflix Original documentary and Official Selection of the 2015 Sundance Film Festival, Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Film Festival, Outfest, and IDFA. Ashley was one of nine women debuting a feature film at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival.

The Uncondemned

Directed and produced by Michele Mitchell

The Uncondemned tells the gripping and world-changing story of a group of international lawyers and activists who fought for the first-ever conviction of rape as a crime of war, and the four Rwandan women who came forward to testify for justice where there had been none.

SNAPSHOT BIO: Michele Mitchell is the producer/writer/co-director of *The Uncondemned*. She produced, directed and wrote her first documentary, *Haiti: Where Did the Money Go?* (PBS) which won the 2013 national Edward R. Murrow award for Best TV Documentary, a Gracie Award for Best Investigative Program, CINE Special Jury Award for Best Investigative Documentary and a CINE Golden Eagle, among many others. A former award-winning investigative reporter for "NOW with Bill Moyers" (PBS) and political anchor for CNN HLN, Michele is the author of three books and has reported extensively from the Middle East, Southeast Asia,

East Africa, Haiti and most of the 50 United States. She began her career on Capitol Hill. *The Uncondemned* is her first feature documentary.

Short Films

Lacrimosa

Directed, written, and produced by Tanja Mairitsch

Mila wakes up in an unknown world full of mysteries. On her journey through ever changing surreal landscapes she meets her lost lover Theo. Mila has to learn that love also means letting go. *Lacrimosa* is a story about loss and hope.

SNAPSHOT BIO: Tanja was born in Austria. She moved to Los Angeles to study Film and TV Directing at the American Film Institute (AFI), where she was awarded with the prestigious Mary Pickford Scholarship for Outstanding Achievements in film directing and the AFI Richard P. Rogers Spirit of Excellence Award. Her thesis film *Fueling the Fire* won the Directors Guild of America (DGA) Student Film Award. The film went on to win 16 “Best Short Film” or “Best Director” awards and screened at over 30 international film festivals. *Fueling the Fire* received an exclusive broadcast deal with HBO/CINEMAX. Tanja decided to explore the uncharted territory of underwater cinematography in her latest project, the short film *Lacrimosa*.

You Can Go

Directed by Christine Turner

A high school administrator talks down a troubled student.

SNAPSHOT BIO: Christine Turner is a filmmaker and documentary television producer based in New York. Her feature directorial debut, *Homegoings*, about a renowned funeral director in Harlem, premiered at Documentary Fortnight at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), NY and opened the 26th season of the acclaimed PBS series, POV. Previously Christine’s fiction short, *Rubber Soles*, screened at the Tribeca Film Festival, San Francisco International Film Festival and aired on “Reel New York” on PBS. She received her BFA in Film & Television from New York University.

HISTORY OF THE FILM FINISHING FUND

The Women In Film Finishing Fund (FFF) has been identifying and awarding funds to deserving filmmakers for 30 years. The juries have consistently singled out films for finishing that went on to earn critical acclaim and major awards, including:

American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs 2014 Peabody Award Winner, American Documentary; director: Grace Lee

Regarding Susan Sontag, 2014 Best Documentary Feature, Tribeca Film Festival; director: Nancy Kates

Grace Paley: Collected Shorts - 2010 Palm Springs International Film Festival finalist - Best in Festival; director: Lilly Rivlin

Circumstance 2010 Sundance US Dramatic Competition Winner, Audience Award Winner; director: Maryam Keshavarz

Freeheld 2008 Academy Award®-winner, Best Documentary; director: Cynthia Wade

A Walk Into The Sea: Danny Williams And The Warhol Factory 2007 Berlinale Teddy® Award, Best Documentary; director: Esther Robinson

American Blackout 2006 Sundance Special Jury Prize, Best Documentary; producer: Anastasia King

Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision 1994 Academy Award®-winner, Best Documentary; director: Freida Lee Mock

About Women In Film

Women in Film is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting equal opportunities for women, encouraging creative projects by women, and expanding and enhancing portrayals of women in all forms of global media. Given that women comprise fifty percent of the population, WIF's ultimate goal is to see the same gender parity reflected on and off screen. Founded in 1973, WIF focuses on advocacy and education, provides scholarships, grants and film finishing funds and works to preserve the legacies of all women working in the entertainment community. For more information visit www.wif.org.

For more information, contact: Catherine Olim / PMK*BNC

Catherine.olim@pmkbnc.com or 310-967-7242