



## NEWS RELEASE

### **THE NEXT GENERATION OF FILMMAKERS GRADUATES FROM THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE CONSERVATORY**

#### **James Earl Jones, Sydney Pollack, Jeanine Basinger and Charles Fries Receive Honorary Degrees**

#### **Graduating Fellows Recognized for Excellence**

**LOS ANGELES, CA, June 7, 2006**—The American Film Institute (AFI) honored the future of film and television today at its commencement ceremony for the AFI Conservatory. AFI Director and CEO Jean Picker Firstenberg, AFI Conservatory Dean Robert Mandel, AFI Executive Vice President Jonathan Estrin and AFI Board of Directors Chairs Jon Avnet and John Cooke participated in congratulating the 115 cinematographers, directors, editors, producers, production designers and screenwriters at the ceremony on AFI's Campus in the hills above Hollywood.

Honorary Degrees were presented to renowned actor James Earl Jones; leading director and producer Sydney Pollack; television pioneer Charles Fries, and esteemed film historian Jeanine Basinger. Other distinguished participants in the ceremony included George Lucas (who presented James Earl Jones with his honorary degree); Sydney Pollack (who was given his honorary degree by Avnet), and writer/producer Joss Whedon (who presented Jeanine Basinger with her honor). Cooke presented Fries with his Honorary Degree.

Previous recipients of AFI Honorary Degrees include Robert Altman, Maya Angelou, Michelangelo Antonioni, Steven Bochco, Roger Corman, Robert Daly, Norah Ephron, Lee Grant, Ray Harryhausen, Chuck Jones, John Lasseter, Karl Malden, Gena Rowlands, Thelma Schoonmaker, Jack Valenti, Haskell Wexler and Alfre Woodard.

Graduating Fellow Zal Batmanglij was chosen by his peers to speak at the ceremony. The day's events were also attended by a delegation visiting from New Orleans, as a continuation of a collaboration between the AFI Conservatory and the University of New Orleans Department of Film, Theatre and Communication Arts (FTCA). The cultural exchange was initiated in late 2005, in response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. AFI faculty members and Fellows traveled to New Orleans to provide a series of lectures for FTCA students over a ten-week period.

**The Franklin J. Schaffner Fellow Award, The Richard P. Rogers Spirit of Excellence Award and The William J. Fadiman Award for Screenwriting Fellows** were given out to three AFI Fellows. These scholarships were established as part of **The Sherrill C. Corwin Scholarship Program** in honor of Sherrill C. Corwin, a founding AFI trustee and exceptional friend and supporter of AFI.

Director Barbara Stepansky was given **The Franklin J. Schaffner Fellow Award** of \$15,000 – which includes a trip to the Sundance Film Festival – for her Thesis production, *THE TROJAN COW*. The honor is presented to an outstanding Directing Fellow as selected by a panel of distinguished jurors from the artistic community. The Franklin J. Schaffner Fellow Award was established in 1991, by Jean Schaffner in honor of her husband Franklin J. Schaffner, a longtime champion of AFI and chair of the AFI Conservatory Advisory Committee.

Director Anthony Leonardi was given **The Richard P. Rogers Spirit of Excellence Award** of \$15,000 for *EXISTENCE*, his Thesis production. Awarded in memory of Richard P. Rogers — filmmaker, teacher, mentor and friend – who died in 2001, at the age of 57, this honor is conferred on a graduating Directing Fellow whose commitment to excellence and whose contribution to the class best exemplifies Rogers' spirit.

Screenwriting Fellow Ian Simpson received **The William J. Fadiman Award for Screenwriting Fellows** of \$15,000 for his screenplay, *MOTHER OF FRANKENSTEIN*. The William J. Fadiman Award for Screenwriting Fellows is given to a Screenwriting Fellow who has shown outstanding achievement in screenwriting. The award is named in honor of William J. Fadiman, a distinguished and longtime story editor at Warner Bros. and MGM, and a member of the AFI faculty from 1974-1982.

This year also saw the inaugural presentation of the \$7,500 narrative short film grant given by Animal Content in Entertainment, a division of The Humane Society of the United States. Awarded to a Thesis film's production team for bringing an engaging and imaginative perspective to an animal issue, this year's grant was conferred on Diana Romero for *NINA QUEBRADA (BROKEN GIRL)*. Exploring the underground world of illegal prostitution rings in the US, the film focuses on the exploitation of a young Mexican girl juxtaposed with the cruelty of the multi-million dollar cockfighting industry.

Established in 1969, the AFI Conservatory is dedicated to identifying and nurturing future leaders of the moving image arts and profession through its five-semester, fully-accredited, Master of Fine Arts degree program that trains talented aspiring filmmakers using a hands-on curriculum focusing on narrative storytelling.

**About the American Film Institute**

**AFI is a national institute providing leadership in screen education and the recognition and celebration of excellence in the art of film, television and digital media.** AFI trains the next generation of filmmakers at its world-renowned Conservatory, maintains America's film heritage through the *AFI Catalog of Feature Films* and explores new digital technologies in entertainment and education through the AFI Digital Content Lab and K-12 Screen Education Center. As the largest nonprofit exhibitor in the US, AFI ON SCREEN encompasses the annual AFI FEST presented by Audi: AFI Los Angeles International Film Festival—as well as year-round programming at ArcLight Hollywood and the AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center in Silver Spring, Maryland, including SILVERDOCS: AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Festival. AFI AWARDS, the annual almanac for the 21st century, honors the most outstanding motion pictures and television programs of the year, while **AFI's 100 Years . . .** series has ignited extraordinary public interest in classic American movies. And, during the past 33 years, AFI's Life Achievement Award has become the highest honor for a career in film. Additional information about AFI is available at [AFI.com](http://AFI.com).

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**Contact:**

Allison Ravenscroft, 323.449.5030, [aravenscroft@sbcglobal.net](mailto:aravenscroft@sbcglobal.net)

Alison Deknatel, AFI, 323.856.7896, [adeknatel@AFI.com](mailto:adeknatel@AFI.com)