

RECORD-BREAKING SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL AWARDS TOP PRIZE TO JAFAR PANAHİ

SYDNEY, NSW, AUSTRALIA, June 16, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Following 12 days of over 150 sold-out sessions, packed cinemas and record-breaking box office, the 72nd Sydney Film Festival tonight awarded the prestigious Sydney Film Prize to acclaimed Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi for his reimagined Iranian thriller, *It Was Just an Accident*

The winner of the \$60,000 cash prize for 'audacious, cutting-edge and courageous' film was selected by a prestigious international jury headed by acclaimed Australian director, writer and producer Justin Kurzel.

The announcement was made at the State Theatre ahead of the Australian Premiere screening of Michael Angelo Covino's comedy *Splitsville*, capping off the highest selling Festival in Sydney Film Festival's history.

One of the most celebrated figures in contemporary world cinema, Panahi has spent the past three decades creating boundary-pushing films about the lived realities of people in Iran, since 2010 made in defiance of restrictions and censorship by the Iranian government. As well as screening *It Was Just an Accident* in competition, the 72nd Sydney Film Festival also featured a retrospective of all 10 of Panahi's feature films.

In a rare and significant appearance, Panahi was in Sydney to accept the award in person.

As part of Sydney Film Festival's prestigious awards program, Australian filmmaker Shalom Almond was awarded the Documentary Australia Award's \$20,000 cash prize for *Songs Inside*, a moving portrait of women prisoners who find healing through a unique music program.

The 2025 recipient of the \$40,000 Sustainable Future Award, the largest environmental film prize in the world, is Australian filmmaker Jordan Giusti for *Floodland* a deeply resonant portrait of a flood-affected community in Lismore, Australia's most disaster-prone postcode.

The recipient of the largest cash prize for First Nations filmmaking, the \$35,000 First Nations Award proudly supported by Truant Pictures, is Canadian filmmaker Lisa Jackson for *Wilfred Buck*, which explores the life and teachings of charismatic Cree educator and "star man" Wilfred Buck.

Five short film prizes were awarded for The Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films. The \$7,000 Dendy Live Action Short Award was awarded to Faceless, directed by Fraser Pemberton and William Jaka. The \$7,000 Yoram Gross Animation Award was awarded to The Fling, directed by Jemma Cotter. The \$7,000 Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director was presented to Rory Pearson, director of Mates.

The AFTRS Craft Award for Best Practitioner (a \$7,000 cash prize) went to Josh Peters, music and sound designer of Faceless. The Event Cinemas Rising Talent Award for Screenwriting, with a cash prize of \$7,000 was awarded to Rory Pearson and Marcus Aldred-Traynor, the co-writers of Mates.

The \$10,000 Sydney-UNESCO City of Film Award, bestowed by Screen NSW to a trail-blazing NSW-based screen practitioner, went to the Big Bang Sound Design team Wayne Pashley and Libby Villa.

Sydney Film Festival CEO Frances Wallace said, "This year has been extraordinary. The 2025 Sydney Film Festival is the highest selling Festival in the Festival's history, welcoming over 150,000 attendees – an 11% increase on last year. Across 12 days, we screened 242 films, hosted 448 screenings and events, and saw over 150 sessions sell out. We're so grateful to the audiences, filmmakers, patrons, partners and supporters who made this year such a success."

Minister for the Arts John Graham said, "It's amazing that after 72 years, the Sydney Film Festival is stronger than ever. It's a tribute to the organisers and the tens of thousands of film fans who've turned out. This Festival, its fans and its filmmakers have once again created an absolute highlight in Sydney's events calendar."

Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore AO said, "As the curtain falls on another unforgettable Sydney Film Festival, we look back on and celebrate the bold storytelling, diverse voices and shared cinematic journeys that lit up our screens and sparked our imaginations. Congratulations to all this year's filmmakers, cast and crew, especially the award winners whose exceptional work moved, challenged, and inspired audiences. I look forward to our continued partnership with the Sydney Film Festival and all that it brings to our fine city."

Earlier in the day, the Minns Labor Government announced it is investing \$100 million in a capital fund to begin the hunt for the location of a second film studio for Sydney. The capital fund is part of a \$380 million package in the 2025-26 Budget to support the world-leading NSW Screen and Digital Games sector.

NSW Treasurer Daniel Mookhey said, "The screen and digital games sector generates \$1.2 billion into our state economy and supports over 13,500 jobs."

"By supporting the sector, we are acting to attract investment, stimulate job creation and boost economic growth."

"The \$100 million capital fund secures the future for the NSW screen sector, continuing the Minns Labor Government's plan to build a better NSW."

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