

SUNDANCE INSTITUTE

- FILM FESTIVAL
- FEATURE FILM
- DOCUMENTARY
- FILM MUSIC
- THEATRE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 13, 2010

For More Information Contact:
Amy McGee
Amy_mcgee@sundance.org/310-360-1981

SUNDANCE INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES A WEEK OF CREATIVE FILM PRODUCING INITIATIVES CULMINATING IN THE SECOND ANNUAL CREATIVE PRODUCING SUMMIT

Netflix Founder and CEO Reed Hastings to Give Keynote at Creative Producing Summit

Creative Producing Labs Held for Feature Film and Documentary Fellows Prior to the Summit

LOS ANGELES, CA – Sundance Institute today announced a series of initiatives designed to support independent producers in feature film and documentary. Activities include the Creative Producing Labs, Fellowships and the annual Creative Producing Summit all combining to help emerging independent filmmakers navigate the newest trends in the business of creating and distributing independent film.

Nine projects have been selected to participate in the **Sundance Institute Creative Producing Labs and Fellowships** (August 16-20). The Fellows represent five films from the **Feature Film Program** and four films from the **Documentary Film Program**. The Creative Producing initiatives are designed to nurture independent producers with project-specific support through Labs, grants, and long-term advisor relationships, as well as reinvigorating dialogue within the independent producing community. The Fellows receive ongoing creative and strategic support throughout the year from industry mentors and the Feature Film and Documentary Program staffs, as well as direct granting designed to further development and production of film projects.

Immediately following the Creative Producing Labs, a wider group of Sundance Institute-supported projects are invited to join the Creative Producing Lab Fellows for the **Creative Producing Summit** (August 20-22). This group will also include four Stories of Change Fellows working on films about leading social entrepreneurs as part of the 'Stories of Change' partnership with the Skoll Foundation.

The Creative Producing Summit is a three-day invitation-only gathering that connects 40 independent filmmakers with 20 top film industry professionals, producers, distributors and directors. This year, Netflix Founder and CEO Reed Hastings will give the keynote address. Other panelists include Michael Barker (Sony Pictures Classics), Arianna Bocco (IFC), Meredith Blake (Cause & Affect); Peter Broderick (Paradigm Consulting), Craig Emanuel (Loeb & Loeb LLP), Marian Koltai-Levine (PMK/BNC), Charlotte Mickie (E1 Entertainment), Ted Mundorff (Landmark Theaters), Josh Radnor (on behalf of SAGIndie), filmmakers Jennifer Arnold and Heather Rae, John Sloss (Cinetic Media), and Graham Taylor (William Morris Endeavor). For a full list of panelists visit www.sundance.org.

“As with all the artists we support, independent producers are in critical need of resources, mentoring and an environment to brainstorm creatively in order to navigate the changing currents of the film industry,” said Keri Putnam, Executive Director, Sundance Institute. “We are grateful to the veteran leaders and trailblazers alike who are lending their time and expertise to the next group of talented independent producers.”

Details of the initiatives include:

The **Feature Film Creative Producing Lab**, a five-day Lab for narrative feature film producers, which takes place at Sundance Resort, Utah. The Lab is designed to develop a producer's creative instincts in all stages of film production and to evolve his/her communication and problem-solving skills.

The Fellows and projects selected for the **Feature Film Creative Producing Fellowship** are:

- **AMERICANO/Amy Lo**
- **BLUEBIRD/Kyle Martin**
- **ELLA WALKS THE BEACH/Adele Romanski**
- **NOBODY WALKS/Alicia Van Couvering**
- **THE WEST MEMPHIS THREE/Jennifer Cochis**

AMERICANO (Producing Fellow: Amy Lo; Writer/Director: Jesus Beltran) — When a rebellious 'wetback' gets involved with an older white woman, his new life begins to fall short of the American dream he's been chasing for more than a decade.

Amy Lo produced the critically acclaimed *Planet B-boy*, which was one of the top-grossing documentaries of 2008 and broke ground as an independent film securing innovative sponsorship deals with Samsung and Southpole, and engaging audiences across different platforms including mobile phone content, live contests, and a 24-hour takeover of the YouTube.com homepage. In addition, she associate produced the UK film *On a Clear Day*, which had its world premiere at Sundance in the international competition and was acquired by Focus Features for distribution. She was the sole U.S. producer selected to take part in the Berlinale Co-Production Market 2009 and previously worked in development and production on a range of films including *Inside Man*, *Munich*, and *El Cantante*.

BLUEBIRD (Producing Fellow: Kyle Martin; Writer/Director Lance Edmands) — In the frozen woods of an isolated Maine logging town, one woman's tragic mistake shatters the balance of the community, resulting in profound and unexpected consequences. Told through fragmented and intersecting story lines, *Bluebird* examines the struggles of regret and redemption at the frontier of modern America.

Kyle Martin is a Brooklyn based independent film producer. His previous works include the SXSW 2010 Jury Prize winner *Tiny Furniture*, the Rose D'or nominated *NY Export: Opus Jazz*, *Brock Enright: Good Times Will Never Be The Same*, and *Wild Combination: A Portrait of Arthur Russell*. **(Mark Silverman Honoree)**

ELLA WALKS THE BEACH (Producing Fellow: Adele Romanski; Writer/Director David Robert Mitchell) — A young woman breaks up with her boyfriend and runs away, spending a night and a day traveling along an iconic California beach, meeting interesting people, playing music, having adventures, and testing the waters of 'being single'.

Adele Romanski's producing credits include David Robert Mitchell's first feature, *The Myth of the American Sleepover*, which premiered at the 2010 SXSW Film Festival and subsequently played at Cannes' Critics' Week. Adele also produced Katie Aselton's debut feature, *The Freebie*, which premiered in the inaugural NEXT category at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival and will be released theatrically this fall. Originally from Florida, Adele now lives in Los Angeles.

NOBODY WALKS (Producing Fellow: Alicia Van Couvering; Co-Writers Lena Dunham and Ry Russo-Young; Director Ry Russo-Young) — A driven young artist is a guest at the home of a Hollywood sound designer and his family as he helps her finish her first film. Their professional connection triggers a sexual and emotional entanglement that lays bare the needs, narcissism and questionable morality of everyone involved.

Alicia Van Couvering is a New York City native who began working in independent film at age 16, as an associate producer on Barbara Kopple's *My Generation*. Her production credits include Todd Solondz's *Palindromes* and *Life During Wartime*, *Junebug*, *Choke*, *Precious*, *Twelve*, *Sleep Dealer*, as well as numerous art installations and music videos. Her first film as a producer, *Tiny Furniture*, won the Narrative Jury Prize at SXSW 2010 and will be released by IFC Films in the Fall. She is a contributing editor to *Filmmaker Magazine*. **(Steve Bing Fellow)**

THE WEST MEMPHIS THREE (Producing Fellow: Jennifer Cochis; Writer/Director Lee Toland Krieger) — In 1993, the tragic murders of three 8-year old boys in West Memphis, Arkansas launched a modern day witch hunt that led to the arrests and convictions of three local teenagers. Based on a true story.

Jennifer Cochis is a film and music video producer; in 2009 she co-produced the feature film *Douchebag*. *Douchebag* had its world premiere in Dramatic Competition at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival and will be theatrically released in October of this year. In addition to film, she has produced numerous music videos working

with some of the most exciting directors and musicians in Los Angeles. Currently, Jennifer is collaborating with other producers in developing several multi-genre feature film projects. **(Shelia C. Johnson Fellow)**

During the Lab, the Fellows work with an accomplished group of Creative Advisors, including producers **Mary Jane Skalski** (*The Visitor, The Station Agent*), **Lynette Howell** (*Blue Valentine, Phoebe in Wonderland*), **Tim Perell** (*World's Greatest Dad, The Myth of Fingerprints*) and **Jay Van Hoy** (*Treeless Mountain, Old Joy*); and filmmakers **Gregg Araki** (*Mysterious Skin, The Doom Generation*) and **Bart Freundlich** (*The Myth of Fingerprints*).

The **Documentary Film Creative Producing Lab**, a four-day Lab for documentary feature film producers, takes place at Sundance Resort, Utah. Invited producers are chosen from a pool of Sundance Documentary Film Program grantees and will participate in one-on-one consultations, and presentations aimed at honing the craft of creative documentary producing. The Lab is designed to develop a producer's creative instincts in all stages of documentary film production and to evolve his/her communication and problem-solving skills. Producers **Jennifer Arnold** (Director, *A Small Act*), **Meredith Blake** (*Cause & Affect*) and sales agent **Josh Braun** (Submarine Entertainment), will serve as Creative Advisors to the Documentary Creative Producing Lab.

The Fellows and projects selected for the **Documentary Film Creative Producing Lab** are:

- **25 to LIFE/Michael L. Brown (U.S.)**
- **DEAR MANDELA/Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza (U.S./South Africa)**
- **GREEN SHALL OVERCOME/Megan Gelstein (U.S.)**
- **SEMPER FI: ALWAYS FAITHFUL/Rachel Libert and Tony Hardmon (U.S.)**

25 to LIFE (Director/Producer: Michael L. Brown) — William Brawner was infected with HIV before he turned two and kept it a secret for over twenty years. Now he confronts his promiscuous past and embarks on a new phase of life with his pregnant wife, who is HIV-negative.

Michael L. Brown is a graduate of NYU's Graduate Film School. He has directed a several short films including *Riot in the Dark*, and *Heart Swallowed Whole*, his NYU thesis stars Julito McCullum (*The Wire*). For the past three years, Brown has also worked as the personal videographer to Sean "Diddy" Combs where he helped shoot Combs' fashion documentary, *If I Were King*.

DEAR MANDELA (Co-Directors/Producers: Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza) — As South Africa hosts the 2010 Soccer World Cup, the government aims to 'eradicate the slums' by evicting families from their homes at gunpoint. *Dear Mandela* chronicles the rise of three young leaders from the chaos on the streets to the highest court in the land as a new generation puts Nelson Mandela's promise of a 'better life for all' to the test.

Dara Kell is a South African filmmaker and editor, and is the recipient of Participant Media's 'Outstanding Filmmaker' award, representing Africa. Her editing credits include *The Reckoning*, *Jesus Camp*, *Courting Justice* and *Mercurial Son: The Blues of Lurrie Bell*. She facilitates filmmaking workshops with grassroots organizations both in the U.S. and South Africa to empower communities to tell their own stories. *Dear Mandela* is her first feature-length documentary.

Christopher Nizza is a New York City born, bred and based filmmaker and editor. His Emmy Award-winning work includes documentaries and television shows ('Hollywood DC', 'Ironman Triathlon', 'Dakar Rally', 'Iditarod') as well as video game commercials and music videos. A former high school basketball player-turned-journalist, he has edited programming for most of the major networks and cable channels. *Dear Mandela* is his first feature-length documentary.

GREEN SHALL OVERCOME (Director/Producer: Megan Gelstein) — Van Jones' dream for America is social justice through green jobs. Handpicked by the Obama Administration to help create the nation's "green" energy policy, this controversial environmentalist gets more than he bargained for when partisan politics collide. Can his revolution of black and green ultimately succeed?

Megan Gelstein is a San Francisco-based documentary filmmaker who produced and directed *They Made America* for the acclaimed history series *America Experience*. She is an Emmy-award winning producer whose work has been broadcast nationally on The History Channel, ITV Network of London, and The Discovery

Channel. Megan is originally from Brooklyn, NY, and is a graduate of Oberlin College. Gelstein is also a Stories of Change Fellow.

SEMPER FI: ALWAYS FAITHFUL (Co-Directors/Producers: Rachel Libert and Tony Hardmon) —

A retired Marine fights for justice on behalf of U.S. soldiers and their families exposed to toxic drinking water.

Rachel Libert is the co-founder of Tied to the Tracks Films, a production company dedicated to the creation of films that raise awareness and effect social change. Her most recent film, *Beyond Conviction*, premiered at LA Film Festival, was broadcast as a special on MSNBC and was featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show and the TODAY Show.

Tony Hardmon is a veteran documentary cinematographer who has worked with numerous acclaimed directors such as Michael Moore, Stacey Peralta, Joe Berlinger, Bruce Sinofsky, Liz Garbus, Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady. *Semper Fi: Always Faithful* is his directorial debut.

Stories of Change Projects and Fellows:

- **BAREFOOT COLLEGE (working title)/Jehane Noujaim**
- **GREEN SHALL OVERCOME/Megan Gelstein (also a Documentary Film Creative Producing Lab Fellow)**
- **CONNECTED/Jonathan Stack and Mara-Michelle Batlin**
- **UNTITLED PARTNERS IN HEALTH DOCUMENTARY/Kief Davidson and Cori Shepherd Stern**

BAREFOOT COLLEGE (working title) (Director: Jehane Noujaim) — An intimate observational documentary that follows five women/grandmothers with limited formal education as they take a life-changing journey to India from their home villages in Africa, the Middle East and South America to become educated in solar engineering, and then return home to provide their villages with electricity.

Jehane Noujaim is a filmmaker (*Control Room*, *Startup.com*) and the founder of *Pangea Day*. Noujaim was raised in Cairo, Egypt where she began her career as a photographer. Following a BA in Film and Philosophy at Harvard, she was awarded the Gardiner fellowship under which she directed *Mokattam* (1998). Noujaim went on to produce and direct *Startup.com* in association with Pennebaker Hegedus Films. She has since worked in both the Middle East and the U.S. as a co-director: *Egypt: We See You*, *Storm from the South*; cinematographer: *Born Rich*, *Only the Strong Survive*, and *Down from the Mountain*; and Executive Producer: *Encounter Point*, *Budrus*.

CONNECTED (Director: Jonathan Stack; Producer: Mara-Michelle Batlin) — What happens when highly-skilled professionals leave the world's leading technology companies in Silicon Valley, returning home to Africa to revolutionize business and governments there? *Connected* follows the challenges and triumphs of tomorrow's "DotCom Billionaires" who are bringing technology solutions that radically improve the lives of Africans.

Mara-Michelle Batlin is a co-founder and producer at Highest Common Denominator Media Group. She worked for over 2 decades as an executive, consultant and trainer in communications and advocacy for think tanks and NGOs in developing countries, helping to frame issues, develop communications strategies, and interface with critical constituencies for policy reform initiatives. She has a B.A. in economics from Mills College, and studied at the London School of Economics and the Naval Postgraduate School. She received an MA in International Policy and Economic Development from the Monterey Institute for International Studies.

Jonathan Stack is a multiple Emmy Award-winning and two-time Academy Award® nominated documentary filmmaker. During his career Jonathan has written, produced and directed over 25 films and 50 television programs including *The Farm: Life Inside Angola Prison*, which was honored with the Sundance Film Festival's Grand Jury Prize. His films have been distributed through HBO, BBC, A&E, Channel Four, the Discovery Channel, National Geographic Channel, and many others in 20 countries. With HCD Media Group Jonathan directed *The Farm: Ten Down* a story about a decade behind bars in Angola Prison.

UNTITLED PARTNERS IN HEALTH DOCUMENTARY (Director: Kief Davidson; Producer: Cori Shepherd Stern) — This is the story of Partners In Health, a remarkable public health charity organization operating in thirteen of the poorest countries around the world and the controversial man who founded it, Dr. Paul Farmer. Dr. Farmer and his colleagues are larger-than-life heroes to millions, fighting to change the way the world cares for its poorest citizens, by insisting on quality health care as a basic inalienable human right.

Kief Davidson is an award-winning feature film and documentary director, whose latest film *Kassim the Dream*, about a former child soldier turned boxing champion, premiered at the 2008 Tribeca film festival and won over 10 international film festivals including. Additionally, *Kassim* was nominated by the IDA for Best Feature and was released theatrically by IFC Films. His prior film, *The Devil's Miner*, won over 15 awards at festivals including Tribeca, Hot Docs, and Chicago.

Cori Shepherd Stern divides her time between international NGO work and producing film. Her credits include *The Arizona Project* for Miramax, script by Sheldon Turner, Ben Affleck directing. The film is based on true events in 1970s Arizona, which lead to 19 indictments of major crime figures and shut down mob activity in Goldwater's Arizona. Cori is also executive producing *Warm Bodies* for Summit, written and directed by Jonathan Levine. Additionally, Cori is known for her work as a social entrepreneur and innovative strategist for poverty alleviation. Her projects have been featured on BBC, NPR, and Oprah.

Sundance Institute receives major support for its Creative Producing Initiatives from: the Ford Foundation, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, B.Co., The Charles Engelhard Foundation, Cinereach Foundation, The Hollywood Foreign Press Association, Microsoft, the Open Society Institute, SAGindie, Sheila C. Johnson, and the Skoll Foundation.

About Sundance Institute

Founded by Robert Redford in 1981, Sundance Institute is a not-for-profit organization that fosters the development of original storytelling in film and theatre, and presents the annual Sundance Film Festival. Internationally recognized for its artistic development programs for directors, screenwriters, producers, film composers, playwrights and theatre artists, Sundance Institute has nurtured such projects as *Angels in America*, *Spring Awakening*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Sin Nombre*, *Born into Brothels* and *Trouble the Water*. www.sundance.org.

###