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NEW WORKS BY VETERAN INDIE FILMMAKER SHARE TOP HONORS AT 2009 FILM INDEPENDENT'S SPIRIT AWARDS

LOS ANGELES, CA (February 21, 2009) -- *The Wrestler*, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, and *Milk* shared top category honors at the 2009 Film Independent's Spirit Awards, making the highly anticipated annual event into a celebration of the diverse films that captured the public's attention this year. *The Visitor*, *Frozen River*, *In Search of a Midnight Kiss*, *Man on Wire*, *The Class* and *Synecdoche*, *New York* also received awards at the event.

The 2009 Film Independent's Spirit Awards were held Saturday, February 21, in a tent on the beach in Santa Monica. The Spirit Awards is a celebration honoring films made by filmmakers who embody independence and who dare to challenge the status quo. This annual event, which began as a small grassroots program, has grown into one of the most anticipated events of the film year.

This year's major category winners were Fox Searchlight Pictures' *The Wrestler,* which won Best Feature, Best Male Lead (Mickey Rourke), and Best Cinematography (Maryse Alberti); The Weinstein Company's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona,* which won Best Screenplay (Woody Allen), and Best Supporting Female (Penélope Cruz); Overture Films' *The Visitor*, which won Best Director (Tom McCarthy); Sony Pictures Classics' *Synecdoche*, *New York*, which won Best First Feature and the Robert Altman Award, *Frozen River*, which won Best Female Lead (Melissa Leo); and *The Class*, which won Best Foreign Film; IFC Films' *In Search of a Midnight Kiss*, which won the John Cassavetes Award for the Best Feature made for under $500,000; and Magnolia Pictures *Man on Wire*, which won Best Documentary.

Heather Rae, producer of *Frozen River* and *Ibid*, received the thirteenth annual **Piaget Producers Award**, which honors emerging producers who, despite highly limited resources, demonstrate the creativity, tenacity, and vision required to produce quality, independent films. The winner of the Producers Award receives an unrestricted grant of $25,000 funded by Piaget

Lynn Shelton, director of *My Effortless Brilliance*, won the sixteenth annual **Acura Someone To Watch Award**, a $25,000 unrestricted grant created to honor a talented filmmaker of singular vision who has not yet received appropriate recognition. The award is funded by Acura.

Margaret Brown, director of *The Order of Myths*, won the fifteenth annual **LACOSTE Truer Than Fiction Award**, presented to an emerging director of non-fiction features who has not yet received significant attention. The award is accompanied by a $25,000 unrestricted grant funded by LACOSTE.

Also given was the 2nd annual Robert Altman Award, given to one film's director, casting director, and ensemble cast. Charlie Kaufman's directorial debut *Synecdoche, New York* received this award, along with casting director Jeanne McCarthy, and ensemble cast members Hope Davis, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Catherine Keener, Samantha Morton, Tom Noonan, Emily Watson, Dianne Wiest, and Michelle Williams.

Film Independent's Spirit Awards ceremony is sponsored by IFC, Netflix, ELLE, AMC, Piaget, and LACOSTE. Principal Sponsors are Acura, Heineken, Garnier, and Australia.com. The official spirits of the Spirit Awards were provided by G.H. Mumm Champagne and Jameson Irish Whiskey. Hotel Shangri-La, Casa Del Mar, and Shutters on the Beach are the Official Host Hotels. Wire Image is the Official Photographer of Film Independent. American Airlines is the Official Airline Partner of Film Independent. ON 3 Productions is the Official Presenter Gift Lounge producer. FIJI Water is the official water of the Spirit Awards.

The ceremony aired live on IFC (Independent Film Channel), beginning at 2:00 pm PST. An edited re-broadcast will air later this evening on AMC at 10:00 pm EST/PST.

Actor Steve Coogan served as **Master of Ceremonies**. Alec Baldwin served as **Honorary Chair**. Diana Zahn-Storey executive produced the 2009 Film Independent's Spirit Awards for the fifteenth year.

The following is a complete list of the winners:

Best Feature	**Fox Searchlight Pictures**
The Wrestler	Producers: Darren Aronofsky, Scott Franklin
Best Director	**Overture Films**
Tom McCarthy	*The Visitor*
Best Screenplay	**The Weinstein Company**
Woody Allen	*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*
Best First Feature	**Sony Pictures Classics**
Synecdoche, New York	Director: Charlie Kaufman Producers: Anthony Bregman, Spike Jonze Charlie Kaufman, Sidney Kimmel

Best First Screenplay	**Fox Searchlight Pictures**
Dustin Lance Black	*Milk*
John Cassavetes Award (For the Best Feature made for under $500,000)	**IFC Films**
In Search of a Midnight Kiss	Writer/Director: Alex Holdridge Producers: Seth Caplan, Scoot McNairy
Best Supporting Female	**The Weinstein Company**
Penelope Cruz	*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*
Best Supporting Male	**Focus Features**
James Franco	*Milk*
Best Female Lead	**Sony Pictures Classics**
Melissa Leo	*Frozen River*
Best Male Lead	**Fox Searchlight Pictures**
Mickey Rourke	*The Wrestler*
Best Cinematography	**Fox Searchlight Pictures**
Maryse Alberti	*The Wrestler*
Best Foreign Film	**Sony Pictures Classics**

The Class	Director: Laurent Cantet
Best Documentary	**Magnolia Pictures**
Man on Wire	James Marsh

2009 FILM INDEPENDENT'S SPIRIT AWARD WINNERS BY DISTRIBUTOR

FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES	4
SONY PICTURES CLASSICS	3
THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY	2
FOCUS FEATURES	1
IFC FILMS	1
MAGNOLIA PICTURES	1
OVERTURE FILMS	1

ATTENDEES

Joining host Dawn Hudson, Executive Director of Film Independent, were Master of Ceremonies Steve Coogan, and Honorary Chair Alec Baldwin.

Presenters and musical performances included: Jessica Alba, Christina Applegate, Elizabeth Banks, Jason Bateman, Thomas Haden Church, Bradley Cooper, Bryan Cranston, Claire Danes, Laura Dern, Zooey Deschanel, Cameron Diaz, Aaron Eckhart, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Teri Hatcher, Anne Hathaway, Taraji P. Henson, Emile Hirsch, Robyn Hitchcock, Sir Ben Kingsley, Melissa Leo, Lucy Liu, Andie MacDowell, Michelle Monaghan, Sandra Oh, Mary-Kate Olsen, Ellen Page, Robin Wright Penn, Rosie Perez, John C. Reilly, Giovanni Ribisi, Tarra Riggs, Blair Underwood, Kerry Washington, John Waters, Rainn Wilson, Evan Rachel Wood, and ZO2.

Celebrity Guests and Nominees included: Maryse Alberti, Darren Aronofsky, Justine Bateman, Dustin Lance Black, Michael Bolton, Rose Byrne, Laurent

Cantet, Keisha Castle Hughes, Wyatt Cenac, Penélope Cruz, Hope Davis, Dana Delaney, Jonathan Demme, Rosemarie DeWitt, Melonie Diaz, Illeana Douglas, Eliza Dushku, James Franco, Jon Hamm, Lance Hammer, Werner Herzog, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Richard Jenkins, Charlie Kaufman, Catherine Keener, Ellen Kuras, Anthony Mackie, John Malkovich, James Marsh, Tom McCarthy, Charlie McDermott, Dominic Monaghan, Tom Noonan, Jim Myron Ross, Josh Peck, Lori Petty, Marc Platt, Heather Rae, Jeremy Renner, Eric Roberts, Howard A. Rodman, Mickey Rourke, Harris Savides, Haaz Sleiman, Mena Suvari, Jeffrey Tambor, Misty Upham, Rachel Weisz, Jennifer Westfeldt, Michelle Williams, Debra Winger, Adam Yauch, and many, many more…

ABOUT FILM INDEPENDENT'S SPIRIT AWARDS

Film Independent's Spirit Awards is a celebration honoring films made by filmmakers who embody independence and who dare to challenge the status quo. Televised in millions of homes and covered internationally by the press, the Spirit Awards has become the vanguard event in independent film, recognizing the achievements of independent filmmakers and promoting independent film to a wider audience.

Selected from more than 250 submissions, awards are given in the following categories: Best Feature, Best First Feature, Best First Screenplay, Best Director, Best Screenplay, John Cassavetes Award (given to the best feature made for a budget under $500,000), Best Male Lead, Best Female Lead, Best Supporting Male, Best Supporting Female, Best Cinematography, Best Foreign Film, and Best Documentary.

The Spirit Awards Nominating Committees apply the following guidelines in making its selections:

1. Uniqueness of vision

2. Original, provocative subject matter

3. Economy of means (with particular attention paid to total production cost and individual compensation)

4. Percentage of financing from independent sources

Eligible films must be at least 70 minutes long, and the cost of the completed film, including post-production, must be under $20 million. Films must have been shown in a commercial theater for at least one week between January 1 and December 31, 2008 or shown at one of the following festivals in 2008: Film Independent's Los Angeles Film Festival, New Directors/New Films, New York, Sundance, Telluride, or Toronto.

After the committees select the nominees, the members of Film Independent, as well as the members of IFP, cast the final votes. Voters attend nominee screenings and view nominated films through Netflix before selecting the winners.

This year's nominees for Best Feature were *Ballast, Frozen River, Rachel Getting Married, Wendy and Lucy,* and *The Wrestler*. Best First Feature nominees were *Afterschool*, *Medicine for Melancholy*, *Sangre de mi Sangre*, *Sleep Dealer*, and

Synecdoche, New York.

Last year's Spirit Award winners included *Juno,* which won Best Feature, Best Female Lead (Ellen Page), and Best First Screenplay (Diablo Cody), *The Savages*, which won Best Male Lead (Philip Seymour Hoffman), and Best Screenplay (Tamara Jenkins), and *Once* which won Best Foreign Film; and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, which won Best Director (Julian Schnabel), and Best Cinematography (Janusz Kaminski), and *The Lookout*, which won Best First Feature. *August Evening* received the John Cassavetes Award for the Best Feature made for under $500,000.

ABOUT FILM INDEPENDENT

Film Independent is a non-profit membership organization that champions independent film and supports a community of artists who embody diversity, innovation, and uniqueness of vision. Film Independent helps filmmakers make their movies, builds the audience for their projects, and works to diversify the film industry. Anyone passionate about film can become a member, whether you are a filmmaker, film industry leader, or a film lover.

With over 250 annual screenings and events, Film Independent provides access to a network of like-minded artists who are driving creativity in the film industry. Film Independent also offers free Filmmaker Labs for selected writers, directors, and producers; provides cut-rate services for filmmakers; and presents year-round networking opportunities. Film Independent's mentorship and job placement program, Project:Involve, pairs emerging culturally-diverse filmmakers with film industry professionals.

Film Independent produces the Los Angeles Film Festival, celebrating the best of American and international cinema, and the Spirit Awards, a celebration honoring films and filmmakers that embody independence and dare to challenge the status quo.

For more information or to become a member, visit FilmIndependent.org