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## VCA Film & TV grad wins Sony Tropfest 2008 ...all-star tribute to Heath Ledger

## VCA graduate Michelle Lehman won top prize at the recent Sony Tropfest awards

**Sony Tropfest 2008**...Claudia Karvan, Naomi Watts, Geoffrey Rush and (main) winner **Michelle Lehman**

Thousands gathered in Sydney's Domain on Sunday 17 February for the screening of the festival's 16 finalists, won by 34-year-old expectant mother and director, **VCA Film & Television graduate Michelle Lehman**, who hoped the win wouldn't send her into labour. Lehman's entry, *Marry Me*, took the top prize at the 16th annual Sony Tropfest, billed as the world's largest short film festival. **(Michelle completed her Bachelor of Film & TV at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2002).**

"Oh my God, I hope this doesn't send me into labour," a delighted Lehman said as she accepted her award. The film, described as a little love story, was inspired by Lehman's childhood and her memory of chasing a boy around a schoolyard.

"I used to chase Jason Mahooney around school in my mum's nightie, which I used as a wedding dress," Lehman told AAP. "He never wanted to marry me ... I'm glad about that now."

Lehman, who is eight months pregnant with her first child, said she had been in the festival audience for years but this was the first time she had submitted an entry. About 15 people were involved with the production of *Marry Me*, but there were five "main players", said Lehman of her \$5,000 short.

**The Sony Tropfest first prize, presented by Australian screen legend Geoffrey Rush, includes a film scholarship trip to the US, with a program of meetings with industry agents and executives.**

"Baby or no baby, it won't stop me from going to the US," Lehman said. "I've got a very supportive husband who is also a filmmaker."

Before the award presentation, there was a two-minute video tribute to the late Australian actor, Heath Ledger. Earlier in the night fellow actor Rush had remembered Ledger. "He is one of our brothers, he is one of our clan and I had the great fortune to work with him on two films and knew him a little bit socially," Rush told News Limited newspapers. "We are going to miss him." Ledger's former girlfriend, Naomi Watts, was a judge and presenter at the festival. (Photo & copy courtesy The Age on-line, 18 February 2008)

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