

MEDIA Announcement

Friday 6 May 2006

University of Melbourne/VCA Honorary Degree to be awarded to film director, Fred Schepisi

The Victorian College of the Arts and the University of Melbourne will tonight grant Fred Schepisi an honorary Doctorate of Visual and Performing Arts – the VCA’s first Honorary Doctorate. Fred Schepisi who emerged as one of Australia’s finest film directors in the “New Wave” of the 1970s was of the first Australian directors to work in Hollywood.

A winner of multiple awards, Schepisi’s international credits include, “The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith” (1978), “Roxanne” (1987), “Evil Angels” (1988), “The Russia House” (1990), “Six Degrees of Separation” (1993) and the mini series “Empire Falls” (2005) for which he gained an Emmy nomination for best director and won a Golden Globe for Best Mini-Series.

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Professor Glyn Davis will present Mr Schepisi for the award of the honorary degree at tonight’s graduation ceremony.

“The University of Melbourne is delighted to recognise Fred Schepisi’s distinguished contribution to the visual and performing arts with the award of this honorary degree. His outstanding work as a film-maker throughout the world is well-reflected in his fine reputation as an “actor’s director” excelling at translating difficult material into entertaining and captivating work for the screen, and his work as a producer and a writer of adapted and original work.”

Congratulating Schepisi, Professor Andrea Hull, Director of the VCA, commented that the award was particularly significant in a year where the VCA School of Film and Television celebrates its 40th birthday.

“Schepisi’s extraordinary career shows not only his talent as a film-maker but also his commitment to developing the film industry and encouraging young talent in Australia. He was integral to establishing the Swinburne School of Film and Television which became the VCA School of Film and Television. We are very proud to award this degree to recognise Fred’s remarkable commitment and to applaud him for the example he has set and the artistic leadership he has shown,” said Professor Hull.

Schepisi’s contribution to the Australian film industry was recognised in 2004 with an Order of Australia for his creative work; the contribution of his expertise to the Film industry, the development of creative talent and his support for the preservation of Australia’s film heritage.

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Fred Schepisi Background Information

Fred's first fiction film made in 1975 in collaboration with Thomas Keneally was "The Priest", a half hour segment for the episodic feature "Libido". It earned him a Silver Award from the Australian Film Institute (AFI). He wrote, directed and produced his first feature, "The Devil's Playground" (1976), a semi autobiographical look at a young boy in a Catholic seminary that won 6 AFI awards, including Best Film. This was followed in 1978 by another collaboration with Thomas Keneally, "The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith", which brought him to international attention winning him a New York Critics Circle Award and leading to a series of US features including "Barbarosa" (1981), "Plenty" (1985) and "Roxanne" (1987). He returned to Australia to make "Evil Angels" (1988) which was based on John Bryson's book on the media frenzy around the Lindy Chamberlain case. It won the AFI award for best film as well as gaining Fred a Golden Globe award nomination for best writer and director.

While continuing to make films overseas, Schepisi's a base is Melbourne. Other film credits include "Iceman" (1983), "The Russia House" (1990), "Mr Baseball" (1992), "Six Degrees of Separation" (1993), "I.Q." (1994), "The Last Orders" (2001), "It Runs in the Family" (2002) and the mini series "Empire Falls" (2005) for which he gained an Emmy nomination for best director and won a Golden Globe for Best Mini-Series. He is currently in pre-production in Australia with "Last Man", a film about Vietnam war-veterans.

Schepisi has directed some of the best leading actors including Meryl Streep, Kirk and Michael Douglas, Paul Newman, Helen Hunt, Stockard Channing, Meg Ryan, Helen Mirren, Donald Sutherland, Ed Harris, Bob Hoskins, Michael Caine, Sam Neill, Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Tim Robbins and Steve Martin. He has developed a reputation as an "actor's director" excelling at translating difficult material into entertaining and captivating work for the screen. He also has extensive credits as a producer and a writer of adapted and original work and has won writers guild awards for "The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith" and "Roxanne".

Schepisi has continuously contributed his expertise to the Film industry most recently as the president of the 2006 Bangkok International Film Festival. He was awarded the AFI Raymond Longford Lifetime Achievement award in 1991, the Brisbane Film Festival's Chauvel award in 1994, the Australian Screen Directors Association's Outstanding Achievement Award in 2003 and an Order of Australia in 2004 "For services to the Australian film industry as a director, producer and screenwriter, the development of creative talent as a mentor and to support for the preservation of Australia's film heritage."