

AUSTRALIANS IN FILM HONORS JAMES MACKAY WITH 5TH ANNUAL HEATH LEDGER SCHOLARSHIP

Australians in Film, a Los Angeles based non-profit organization that serves as the industry guild for Australian filmmakers and performers in the US, announced the 2013 winner of the Heath Ledger Scholarship Award, James Mackay, at their 5th annual fundraising dinner on June 12, 2013 in Los Angeles, CA.

The scholarship—established in 2008 in memory of Australian actor Heath Ledger, who served as an ambassador for the organization—includes a return flight to Los Angeles on Virgin Australia, a 10-day California trip from Visit California, one year of acting classes at the Stella Adler Academy of Acting & Theatre, a VIP casting package, and \$10,000 cash, affording talented young Aussies the opportunity to establish themselves in the heart of the entertainment industry, and reach an international audience.

Kim Ledger, father of the late AiF ambassador, will assume the role of Patron in honor of his son, ensuring that the Heath Ledger Scholarship program continues to thrive, and that emerging Australian actors will always have a shot at the major international market. “Making a start in entertainment can be a tough and unforgiving business in any country,” said Ledger. “I hope continuing this award with its consequential connections, offers the final recipient a little extra support in their pathway to success.”

Chosen from a group of 15 finalists, Mackay is a graduate of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts in Perth, and a founding member of the Cry Havoc Theatre Company in Sydney. The 28-year old actor first gained notoriety for his role in the company’s contemporary adaptation of *Julius Caesar*, set in 1978 amid the chaos and tragedy of the Jonestown Massacre, and has since appeared in a number of film and television roles, including a role opposite Katie Holmes and Guy Pearce in the film *Don’t Be Afraid of the Dark*, as well as the upcoming feature *Singularity*, also starring Josh Hartnett.

Previous recipients of the scholarship include Bella Heathcote (*Dark Shadows*), Ryan Corr, (*Not Suitable for Children*) Oliver Ackland (*The Slap*, *Cloudstreet*) and Anna McGahan (*House Husbands*). Benefactors to the program include the Ledger family, Michelle Williams, Naomi Watts, Nicole Kidman, Alex O’loughlin, Hugh Jackman, Deborra-Lee Furness, Phil Noyce and Baz Luhrmann.

As in the past, the 2013 judging panel consisted of influential actors, casting agents and industry executives, including: Wes Bentley, *Actor*; Ann Fay, *Casting Director*; Gregor Jordan, *Director* (NED KELLY); Leslee Feldman, *Head of Casting at Dreamworks*; Will Ward,

Manager, Nikki Barrett, *Casting Director*, Kieran Darcy-Smith, *Director* (WISH YOU WERE HERE); and Steve Alexander, *Talent Agent*. Past judges have included actors Jude Law and Rachel Griffiths, directors Gregor Jordan and Catherine Hardwicke, and Warner Bros. President of Production, Greg Silverman.

This year's runner-ups are Will Howarth and Georgia Flood, who will also receive roundtrip airfare to LA, as well as a VIP casting package. Other finalists include Hannah Barlow, Elizabeth Blakemore, Laura Brent, David Coussins, Ashleigh Cummings, Geraldine Hakewill, Reef Ireland, Kate Jenkinson, Andrew Hazzard, Andrew Lees, Bob Morley, and Alex Williams.

ABOUT AUSTRALIANS IN FILM

Founded in May 2001, in celebration and support of Australian film and television artists and their work, the Los Angeles based non-profit organization holds regular screenings, seminars and labs, and currently has over 500 members. For further information please visit www.australiansinfilm.org.

ABOUT VIRGIN AUSTRALIA

Virgin Australia is proud to be the Presenting Partner and exclusive airline of Australians in Film. Flying non-stop between Los Angeles and Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, Virgin Australia offers 33 lie-flat beds in International Business, 40 all-leather International Premium Economy seats and 288 International Economy seats – the widest across the Pacific. Virgin Australia also offers attentive in-flight service, two in-flight boutique bars, gourmet meals, generous legroom, state-of-the-art in-flight entertainment, and unique mood lighting. Once you've landed Down Under, Virgin Australia can fly you to more than 50 destinations within Australia and New Zealand. For more information on Virgin Australia, please visit www.virginaustralia.com.

ABOUT VISIT CALIFORNIA

Visit California is a non-profit organization with a mission to develop and maintain marketing programs – in partnership with the state's travel industry – that keep California top-of-mind as a premier travel destination. According to Visit California, travel and tourism expenditures total \$106.4 billion annually in California, support jobs for 917,000 Californians and generate \$6.6 billion in state

and local tax revenues. According to preliminary overseas visitor arrival forecasts, 546,110 Australians visited California in 2012 and spent \$959 million. For more information about Visit California go to www.visitcalifornia.com or www.visitcalifornia.com.au.