



South Australian Film Corporation



Press Release
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SAFC ANNOUNCES INAUGURAL PLACEMENT L.A. RECIPIENT GENA ASHWELL FIRST WINNER IN GENDER AGENDA INITIATIVE

Adelaide-based producer Gena Ashwell was today announced as the inaugural recipient of Placement L.A., an annual professional placement in Los Angeles for established women producers from South Australia.

Placement L.A. was recently announced as a key part of the SAFC's Gender Agenda, a comprehensive new suite of initiatives designed to address the gender imbalance in the industry and drive established and emerging South Australian female practitioners forward into the next phase of their career.

Supported with \$15,000 from the SAFC Placement L.A. sees Gena travel to Los Angeles in November 2016 for a four-week placement, a unique opportunity to work alongside one of the industry's most eminent producers, Cassian Elwes (*Dallas Buyer's Club*, *The Butler*, *Blue Valentine*), in his Los Angeles office. Elwes is a prolific producer and executive producer with extensive experience in film financing and distribution and multiple Oscar® winning and Oscar® nominated credits to his name.

As head of William Morris Independent for fifteen years, Elwes arranged finance and distribution for more than 300 films, including *Monster's Ball*, for which Halle Berry won the Best Actress Oscar®, the first African American woman to do so. Since then Elwes has either produced or executive produced over 50 films including John Hillcoat's *Lawless*.

Placement L.A. also includes attendance at The American Film Market & Conference (AFM), November 2nd – 9th, in Santa Monica. Access to the AFM, generously provided by the AFM in support of the initiative, includes full registration for the week's events including access to all conferences.

South Australian Film Corporation Chief Executive Officer Annabelle Sheehan said Gena Ashwell has been selected from a very strong field of applicants.

"The knowledge and networks Gena will gain in LA will be of benefit to both her and the broader South Australian screen industry," said Ms Sheehan.

"Developing the talents of women screen professionals to create a more equitable industry is a key priority of the SAFC."

Gena Ashwell began her film career in the UK working at Pinewood Studios, and worked in development, production, sales and distribution while also going on to produce *Bad Day* and *Gridiron UK*. Ashwell is now a partner in the successful Adelaide-based Dancing Road Productions with Helen Leake (*Wolf Creek 2*, *Black and White* and *Swerve*).

"I feel this placement has come at a perfect time and I am thrilled to be the first recipient of this exceptional initiative. This is an enormous opportunity to broaden my knowledge and give me valuable experience observing how the industry works in the Hollywood landscape" said Gena.

"Our industry is becoming more and more global, so having the opportunity to have a placement with one of the industry's best independent producers will no doubt enrich

my creative and business practices.”

The SAFC Gender Agenda initiatives, which focus on a number of areas including leadership, mentorship, attachments and workshops, are in response to the data demonstrating that women in the screen industries globally and in Australia are still significantly underrepresented in key creative roles.

For more information visit <http://www.safilm.com.au/news/latest-news/?newsid=51>

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Background to the SAFC’s Gender Agenda

In preparing its approach to supporting gender balance SAFC conducted research across the period 2011 to 2016 regarding the % of women working in key roles on SAFC productions and found it to be similar to the national average or in some cases slightly higher. Female producers are reasonably well represented with 43% of all producers across drama and documentary being female and of Seed Company Development recipient companies having women principals. Drama statistics showed similar levels to the national average with 38% of all Producers, 15% of all directors and 28% of writers being female as compared to 32%, 16% and 23% respectively as per the figures supplied by Screen Australia with regard to the national average.

Cassian Elwes: Biography

Cassian Elwes began his producing career with 1983’s *Oxford Blues* and quickly went on to make another 29 films. In 1994, Elwes joined William Morris and headed William Morris Independent for 15 years. He financed such indie hits as *Slingblade* and *The Apostle*, both of which were nominated for multiple Oscars® and *Monster’s Ball*, for which Halle Berry won the Best Actress Oscar®, the first African American woman to do so. He was their expert on independent films having arranged financing and distribution for almost 300 films during his tenure. Since leaving William Morris Independent, Elwes has either produced or executive produced over 50 films including John Hillcoat’s *Lawless*, Lee Daniels’ *The Paperboy*, David Lowery’s *Ain’t Them Bodies Saints*, which was nominated for a Gotham Independent Film Award™ for Best Feature, and Lee Daniels’ *The Butler*, which featured an all-star cast headed by Forest Whitaker and Oprah Winfrey. He also executive produced J.C. Chandor’s *All Is Lost* starring Robert Redford and executive produced and arranged financing for the Oscar®-winning hit *Dallas Buyers Club* directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, starring Matthew McConaughey, Jared Leto, and Jennifer Garner. He produced *Elvis & Nixon* starring Kevin Spacey and Michael Shannon and most recently *Mudbound*, *The Brits are Coming* and *Billionaire Boys Club*.