

AFI Launches 50th Anniversary Celebration

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

It was 50 years ago that the American Film Institute began its mission â?? to preserve the heritage of the motion picture, to honor the artists and their work and to educate the next generation of storytellers. Established by Lyndon B. Johnsonâ??s presidential mandate in the White House Rose Garden, AFI commemorates its golden milestone on June 5, 2017 â?? 50 years from the date of its official founding â?? at the AFI Conservatory Commencement on the grounds of the historic TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood.

AFI will continue to celebrate through 2019, which will mark the 50th Anniversary of the Conservatoryâ??s 1969 inaugural class. Throughout this timeframe, AFI will announce activities and programs that promise to educate todayâ??s audiences and tomorrowâ??s artists.

AFIâ??s founding statement of purpose was to â??elevate cinema to its fullest potential â?? to preserve, stimulate, enrich and nurture the art of film in America.â?• Here are some of AFIâ??s milestones:

Preserving Americaâ??s Precious Film Heritage

When film was in its infancy, movies were shot on volatile nitrate stock that disintegrated in short time. There are estimates that more than 50 percent of the films shot before 1950 are lost forever.

One of AFIâ??s first acts was to rally the studios to donate copies of their highest quality prints, and now 60,000 films are secure in the **AFI Collection at the Library of Congress**.

> AFI restored the oldest surviving American feature film â?? the long-lost 1912 silent adaptation of W
> AFI restored the oldest surviving American feature film â?? the long-lost 1912 silent adaptation of William Shakespeareâ??s RICHARD III â?? as part of its mission of preserving Americaâ??s precious film heritage.

In 1968, AFI launched a project of epic ambition â?? the ***AFI Catalog of Feature Films***, which published its first volume of research in 1971. Never before had there been a singular scholarly resource for every American film. The Catalog is a historic record, and in 2017 AFI is proud to announce that the first 100 years of American film will have been documented.

â??No other source of information is as complete and accurate,â?• said director Martin Scorsese. â??And no other source is produced with the scrupulous level of attention to scholarship and research as the *AFI Catalog*.â?•

Educating the Next Generation of Storytellers

Inspired by words first spoken by President Johnson in the White House Rose Garden â?? â??We will bring together leading artists of the film industry, outstanding educators and young men and women who wish to pursue the art form as their lifeâ??s workâ?• â?? AFI opened the Center for Advanced Film Studies (now the **AFI Conservatory**) in 1969.

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An elite and intimate MFA program that accepts only 140 Fellows a year, AFI boasts alumni that include Andrea Arnold, Darren Aronofsky, Julie Dash, Caleb Deschanel, Patty Jenkins, Janusz KamiÅ?ski, David Lynch, Terrence Malick, Robert Richardson, Paul Schrader and many more film and television luminaries. The immersive training program focuses on learning by doing in an intensive production-based curriculum. AFI alumni have won every major award and boast an employment rate of 81%.

Addressing Gender Diversity in the Industry

In 1974, AFI recognized a dire imbalance in gender representation among the voices telling Americaâ??s tales, and so it launched the **AFI Directing Workshop for Women** (DWW). AFIâ??s leadership role continues to this day with this celebrated, tuition-free training program committed to increasing the number of women working professionally in screen directing.

AFI Conservatory Directing Workshop for Women (DWW) participant Maya Angelou
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Elevating Film Masters to Be Appreciated as Artists

In 1973, the Institute established the **AFI Life Achievement Award** to ensure that â??great accomplishments of the past are recognized to the end that the masters of film may take their deserved place in history beside leaders in other arts.â?•

The AFI Life Achievement has been broadcast around the world for 45 years. All honorees are listed **here**.

Sidney Poitier accepts the 20th AFI Life Achievement Award in 1992.
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In 2000, AFI created **AFI AWARDS** to honor the extraordinary screen stories of the year in a noncompetitive environment. AFIâ??s unique format recognizes the collaborative nature of the art form

by celebrating the creative ensembles in a private ceremony â?? with rationales that contextualize their contributions to Americaâ??s cultural heritage.

Jennifer Lawrence and Lena Dunham at the AFI AWARDS 2012 luncheon
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Catalyzing a Global Dialogue About American Film

In 1998, AFI sparked a worldwide conversation that continues to this day by launching **AFIâ??s 100 Yearsâ?¦100 Movies** â?? a countdown of the 100 greatest movies of all time revealed in a three-hour CBS television event.

With this first authoritative list of its kind, AFIâ??s goal was to shift the conversation from box office or now-popular numerical scores for films toward public discussion about what makes a great movie and why.

These AFI specials spanned 11 years â?? and nearly 80 hours of television programming â?? and are still used as a reference today for film lovers and historians alike.

CITIZEN KANE, #1 on AFI's 100 Years...100 Movies list
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Providing Access to Filmâ??s Finest

When AFI was founded, access to films was limited to theatrical venues. One of AFIâ??s earliest goals was to establish an exhibition presence at **Lâ??Enfant Plaza** in 1970 before taking up official residence in the **Kennedy Center**, unveiling premiere restorations, classic film prints and more. Today, that work continues at the **AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center** in the Washington, DC, area.

AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center Opening Night (L-R) James Hindman, Jean Picker Firstenber
AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center Opening Night (L-R) James Hindman, Jean Picker Firstenberg, County Executive Douglas Duncan, Clint Eastwood and Ray Barry

Under an alliance with FILMEX, the Institute in 1987 launched the AFI Los Angeles International Film Festival, which became **AFI FEST presented by Audi** â?? a weeklong extravaganza for master filmmakers and emerging artists to engage with audiences in the heart of the movie capital of the world. AFI FEST remains the first and only festival of its stature that is free to the public.

Oprah Winfrey, Ava Duvernay and David Oyelowo at the AFI FEST 2014 presented by Audi Secret S
Oprah Winfrey, Ava Duvernay and David Oyelowo at the AFI FEST 2014 presented by Audi Secret Screening of SELMA

Convening Americaâ??s Storytellers and the Nationâ??s Leaders

Since 2003, **AFI DOCS** has celebrated the best in nonfiction filmmaking. Today, AFI hosts the event in Washington, DC, with the goal to bring together storytellers who wish to change the world with men and women who have the power to do so. Attendees and participants include members of the Supreme Court, Congress and the Presidentâ??s Cabinet, as well as ambassadors from nations around the world, journalists and enthusiastic lovers of the art form.

Al Gore, Martin Scorsese and Jim Jarmusch at AFI DOCS (then known as Silverdocs)
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