



January 22, 2018

**NEWS RELEASE**

## **CHARLES OFFICER'S *UNARMED VERSES* WINS THE CANADA'S TOP TEN FILM FESTIVAL PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD**

**TORONTO** — *Unarmed Verses* has been voted winner of TIFF's 17th annual Canada's Top Ten Film Festival People's Choice Award. TIFF's celebration of Canadian cinema, screen talent, and creativity crowned its People's Choice Award winner, with Toronto audiences voting director **Charles Officer's** *Unarmed Verses* their favourite film from the festival's 10-feature lineup.

*Unarmed Verses* follows Francine Valentine, a sensitive, shy, and fiercely curious adolescent, as she discovers the power of poetry, of music, and of her own voice. Officer spent over a year documenting Francine and her family, and much of his film is devoted to her involvement in a songwriting and recording program run by the grassroots community-building organization Art Starts.

On winning the People's Choice Award, Officer said, "We are thrilled to have participated in the 17th annual Canada's Top Ten Film Festival with *Unarmed Verses*, and even more thrilled to receive the People's Choice Award. It is an absolute honour. Thank you TIFF for an amazing week of cinema and dialogues. A big thank you to the National Film Board for providing the space and resources for our team to do this work. Without the guidance and commitment of producer Lea Marin and executive producer Anita Lee, *Unarmed Verses* would not exist. To the youth from the Villaways community featured in the film; Francine, Lavane, Q'Mal, Tre and Sydney. Let this be your call to action. You are young, gifted, and black."

Producer Lea Marin echoed Officer's statement and added that "nothing could have been achieved without his vision, determination, and dedication."

### **Canada's Top Ten Student Shorts Awards**

The Canada's Top Ten Film Festival also spotlights student shorts in its annual lineup, presenting the top student shorts from colleges and universities across the country. In a ceremony held on January 13 at TIFF Bell Lightbox, prizes were awarded to student films in the live action and animation categories.

The winners were selected by Matthew Rankin, Top Ten filmmaker (*The Tesla World Light*, *Mynarski Death Plummet*); Lee Filipovski, Top Ten alumna and winner of the HFPA Award for the Canada's Top Ten Best Short (*Fluffy*); and Louis Calabro, Vice President of Programming at the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television.

Each award comes with a DCP output of the film courtesy of Technicolor; \$1,000 from the Directors Guild of Canada; a ticket to the Directors Guild of Canada Awards; and an Industry Pass to the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival.

### **Best Live Action Student Short**

The winner of the Best Live Action Student Film award is *Waiting for Lou*, directed by **Katerine Martineau**.

With assured direction and a stellar lead performance, *Waiting for Lou* explores the complex relationship between 16-year-old Jess and her eccentric grandmother — and their against-the-odds dream of road-tripping to California.

### **Best Animated Student Short**

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The prize for Best Animated Student Film goes to **Quarters**, directed by **FIG House** (Virginia Findlay, Tiya Zhong, Emily Millard, Brad Flowers, Karliegh Ivens, Maude Ashby, Una Di Gallo, Yingqi Wu, and Airin Budiman).

In this amusing animation, tenants in a run-down apartment complex are forced to leave their quarters — only to discover unwanted details about their annoying neighbours.

### **Canada's Top Ten Film Festival People's Choice Award**

The People's Choice Award goes to *Unarmed Verses*, directed by Charles Officer.

*Unarmed Verses* follows Francine Valentine, a sensitive, shy, and fiercely curious adolescent, as she discovers the power of poetry, of music, and of her own voice. Though clearly gifted, Francine battles both her diffidence and deep-seated insecurities about her identity. Living with her father, elderly grandmother, and brother in a Toronto Community Housing project, Francine is also facing relocation to make way for a new mixed-use development, an index of the city's relentless gentrification and a lack of concern for existing residents.

Established in 2001, the Canada's Top Ten Film Festival is one of the largest and longest-running showcases of Canadian film. The 10-day festival kicked off last week at TIFF Bell Lightbox in Toronto, featuring public screenings of the year's best Canadian feature films, shorts and student shorts, Q&A sessions, a special Industry Forum and special guest appearances by Alanis Obomsawin, Evan Rachel Wood, Jeremy Podeswa, and more.

The Canada's Top Ten Film Festival is supported by a nationwide tour with screenings in Vancouver and Montreal and continuing in Regina, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Ottawa and Saskatoon. More details about the national tour can be found on [TIFF.net](http://TIFF.net) and in local listings.

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### **About TIFF**

TIFF is a charitable cultural organization whose mission is to transform the way people see the world, through film. An international leader in film culture, TIFF projects include the annual Toronto International Film Festival in September; TIFF Bell Lightbox, which features five cinemas, major exhibitions, and learning and entertainment facilities; and innovative national distribution programme Film Circuit. The organization generates an annual economic impact of \$189 million CAD. TIFF Bell Lightbox is generously supported by contributors including Founding Sponsor Bell, the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, the City of Toronto, the Reitman family (Ivan Reitman, Agi Mandel and Susan Michaels), The Daniels Corporation and RBC. For more information, visit [tiff.net](http://tiff.net).

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**The Student Shorts Awards are generously supported by the Directors Guild of Canada and Technicolor.**

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