



**MELINA MATSOUKAS
AFI CLASS OF 2005
TO GIVE KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT
AFI DWW+ SHOWCASE ON APRIL 10**

DWW+ Class of 2024 to Premiere Their Films

**AFI DWW 50th Anniversary Honorary Committee
Includes Iconic Leaders of the Community**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Los Angeles, CA, April 5, 2024 – Today, the American Film Institute (AFI) announced that AFI Alum Melina Matsoukas (AFI Class of 2005) will deliver the keynote address at the AFI DWW+ Showcase for the Class of 2024 which will take place on Wednesday, April 10 at 7:00 p.m. at the Directors Guild of America (DGA) in Los Angeles.

An integral and longstanding part of the AFI DWW+ program, the Showcase provides an opportunity for the graduating cohort of AFI DWW+ to premiere their short films to an audience of agency and studio representatives, as well as working artists from throughout the creative community.

The presenting directors from the Class of 2024 are Vanessa Beletic, Chloë de Carvalho, Desdemona Chiang, Naomi Iwamoto, Huriyyah Muhammad, Joanne Mony Park, Kerry O’Neill and Roxy Toporowych. The directors were mentored by AFI DWW+ Guest Artistic Director Shaz Bennett (AFI DWW Class of 2012) who also oversaw the artistic curriculum for the 2023–2024 program.

“AFI’s dedication to empowering underrepresented artists and creating pathways for success in the director’s chair through our AFI DWW+ program has not wavered in 50 years,” said Susan Ruskin, Dean of the AFI Conservatory and Executive Vice President of the American Film Institute. “Together with Melina, we look forward to honoring this year’s class of diverse directors as they debut their new films that will inspire their fellow artists and audiences alike.”

AFI also announced the filmmakers, artists and industry leaders who are members of the AFI DWW 50th Anniversary Honorary Committee. The committee members include Neema Barnette (AFI DWW Class of 1982), Tessa Blake (AFI DWW Class of 2014), Ellen Burstyn (AFI DWW Class of 1974), Dime Davis (AFI DWW Class of 2015), Ava DuVernay, AFI President Emerita Jean Picker Firstenberg, Lesli Linka Glatter (AFI DWW Class of 1982), Lee Grant (AFI DWW Class of 1974), Siân Heder (AFI DWW Class of 2005), Linda Hope, Gale Anne Hurd, Sherry Lansing, Eva Longoria and Chloé Zhao. Together with AFI, they will oversee the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the

AFI Directing Workshop for Women and work to ensure the program's future for another 50 years. Launched in 1974, AFI DWW+ is one of the first gender impact programs in the cinematic arts and one of the longest-running and preeminent film and television workshops, and has since trained over 350 filmmakers.

RSVPs are required for the AFI DWW+ Showcase on April 10. Email DWWinfo@afi.com for more information.

This year's AFI DWW+ program is generously supported by Paramount Pictures, The Golden Globe Foundation, NBCUniversal, The Walt Disney Studios, The Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation, Participant and Valhalla Motion Pictures. Additional support comes from the Rosalind Wyman Living Trust and Robert and Betty Wyman, Jean Picker Firstenberg, Linda Hope, Gale Anne Hurd, The Nancy Malone Living Trust and other individual supporters committed to providing opportunities for historically underrepresented voices in the media arts.

AFI DWW+ is part of the AFI Conservatory's Department of Innovative Programs, which also includes the Cinematography Intensive for Women. Through a range of learning opportunities, Innovative Programs serves a diverse community of aspiring visual storytellers to cultivate cutting-edge technological and media-making skills, bridge access to professional networks and place participants on an upward career trajectory. Read more about [Innovative Programs](#) on [AFI.com](#).

Melina Matsoukas is a filmmaker whose brand of provocation comes from a unique, inherently multicultural point of view focused on diverse storytelling. Matsoukas made her powerful feature directorial debut at AFI FEST 2019 with QUEEN & SLIM, which she also produced. Matsoukas began her television career as an executive producer and director of the critically acclaimed HBO series INSECURE. She went on to direct MASTER OF NONE's Emmy® -winning "Thanksgiving" episode and most recently directed and executive produced THE CHANGELING for Apple TV+. She has also brought her singular vision to music videos for Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Rihanna, Snoop Dogg, Lady Gaga and for global campaigns of major commercial clients such as Nike, Beats, and Calvin Klein.

Download Melina Matsoukas' headshot [here](#). (photo credit: Micaiah Carter)

About the AFI DWW+ Class of 2024 Filmmakers and Films

Vanessa Beletic

EVIL, I

Logline: A gifted Haitian girl has one day to discover the key to her dangerous psychic powers and decide once and for all who she really is: good or evil.

Vanessa Beletic is a director and writer from Port-Au-Prince, Haiti. Her first narrative short CATCHING SPIRITS won the Jury Award Live Action Short in 2022 and screened worldwide at over 23 Academy Awards® and BAFTA-qualifying festivals. Moving to the U.S. at 13 years old, Beletic studied dance at New York City's Hunter College, before pursuing her life-long passion for

filmmaking. Her music video for Run The Jewels' "Ooh-La-La" was nominated for the 2020 MVPA, UKMVA and the 2021 Libera Awards. She has directed commercials and ads for Levi's, Walmart, Nikon and Vaseline starring Regina King, and her work has been featured during the Emmy Awards® and on outlets like Condé Nast and Rolling Stone.

Chloë de Carvalho

THE LONG WAY HOME

Logline: When childcare falls through, Clara decides to bring her eight-year-old daughter, Dora, along on a nighttime mission, treading a thin line between danger and family outing.

Chloë de Carvalho is a Brazilian director based in Los Angeles. She is interested in genre films that reinterpret tropes and subvert expectations, often telling stories where the lives of women and children drive the narrative. Her commercial and music video work has been featured in various festivals and exhibited at the Design Museum in London, and her short films have screened and won awards at international festivals, such as São Paulo, Dubrovnik, Miami and Morelia. Attracted to characters stuck in between cultures or outsiders trying to fit in and failing spectacularly, she often draws from her experiences as a mother and an immigrant, to shape her unique perspective as a director and storyteller.

Desdemona Chiang

MADE IN USA

Logline: After getting abruptly fired from her job of over 20 years, a dutiful Chinese-American casino host turns her home into a birth hotel to regain control of her life.

Desdemona Chiang is a Taiwan-born American director and writer based in Seattle, WA, and Ashland, OR, with over 20 years of experience directing in American regional theatre. She is now expanding her work to include film and television, creating and developing stories about unique intergenerational immigrant experiences. Her TV pilots have been developed with the Sundance Episodic Program, Film Independent, The Orchard Project, The Writers Lab and the WeScreenplay Diverse Voices Lab. Additional affiliations and awards include an MFA in Directing from the University of Washington, the Princess Grace Award, a CAPE Julia Gouw Short Film Challenge Honorable Mention and the Sundance Institute Asian American Fellowship.

Naomi Iwamoto

SIXTEEN

Logline: When a 16-year-old girl is outed to her conservative church community one Sunday morning, she is forced to attend a conversion therapy meeting.

Naomi Iwamoto is a Japanese American writer/director who grew up between Los Angeles and Tokyo. Her television writing credits include Hulu's half hour dramedy TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS, Lena Waithe's TWENTIES, CBS's HAPPY TOGETHER, NBC's CONNECTING and an upcoming Marvel series. Iwamoto is an alumna of the HALF Director Shadowing Program and holds an MFA in Production from USC's School of Cinematic Arts and undergraduate degrees from UCLA in Political

Science and Asian American Studies. She is developing her first feature, a coming-of-age story that follows an academically ambitious teen with a drug habit who learns how to grieve and love her mom.

Huriyyah Muhammad

CHOCOLATE WITH SPRINKLES

Logline: On their 25th wedding anniversary, a bickering married couple is given one day to do something they haven't done in 25 years – work on their marriage.

Huriyyah Muhammad is an award-winning writer, director and producer whose projects have been invited to the Sundance Film Festival, Tribeca, AFI FEST, Outfest, NewFest, the American Black Film Festival and more. Her work, fun and hopeful, invites audiences to explore the world with humor and heart, often through the eyes of child and YA protagonists. She is a recipient of the Sundance Creative Producing Award, SFFILM Rainin Grant for screenwriting and the Black List Feature Residency. Muhammad is also a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community and does her best work as a loving wife and mother.

Kerry O'Neill

INTERLOPER

Logline: A troubled 16-year-old girl disrupts the harmony in her new foster home.

Kerry O'Neill is an Emmy®-losing writer and director whose recent television work includes the hybrid comedies MURDERVILLE (Netflix) and Amazon's breakout hit JURY DUTY, which she also acted in. O'Neill uses her improvisational comedy background to create work that feels experiential and personal. Her films have screened at festivals worldwide and premiered to critical acclaim. In 2023, she was named a Vimeo Breakout Creator. In 2024, O'Neill won an Independent Spirit Award for Best Ensemble Cast in a New Scripted Series for JURY DUTY, and the show was also honored with an AFI AWARD. She is currently nominated for two WGA Awards – please cross your fingers for her. O'Neill continues to bring her darkly hilarious characters to the screen, both as a television writer and a film director. She is currently in development on her first feature.

Joanne Mony Park

BLOOMED IN THE WATER

Logline: BLOOMED IN THE WATER portrays a Korean immigrant single mother who misinterprets school picture day, resulting in surprise when her son's appearance differs from his classmates'. With her sisters by her side, Min navigates the aftermath, exploring themes of making mistakes and self-acceptance.

Joanne Mony Park is a Korean-American writer/director based in Los Angeles. Her work explores the intersection of hyphenated-American experiences and queer narratives. Known for capturing the essence of the in-between with levity, her films have screened at festivals including Slamdance, Edinburgh and the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival where she won Best Director for her first feature film, FISH BONES. Park earned an MFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and a BFA from

UC San Diego. Currently, Park is developing her next feature film with support from the TIFF x CJ K-Story Mentorship Programme.

Roxy Toporowych

UKRAINIAN DANCE MOVIE

Logline: A professional dancer, whose career was cut short by war, is urged to take the reins of her spirited father's folk dance school, after he announces his own life-altering decision.

Roxy Toporowych is an award-winning writer/director whose narrative feature debut, *JULIA BLUE*, was named one of the top 10 films about Ukraine by The Guardian UK. Previously, Toporowych directed the documentary *FOLK! (HotDocs/East Silver Markets)* and the comedy web series *2ND AND 9TH* and was a finalist for SeriesFest and Almanack Writers Labs for her comedy series, *COMMIE PARTY!* Additionally, she has served as a producer on documentaries for Hulu, HBO and Tribeca Enterprises. Toporowych is a graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, a Fulbright scholar and the IFP/Gotham Award recipient for Emerging Directors.

About the American Film Institute (AFI)

The American Film Institute (AFI) is a nonprofit organization with a mandate to champion the moving image as an art form. Established in 1967, AFI launched the first comprehensive history of American film and sparked the movement for film preservation in the United States. In 1969, AFI opened the doors of the **AFI Conservatory**, a graduate-level program to train narrative filmmakers. The Conservatory, which counts Deniese Davis, Affonso Gonçalves, Susannah Grant, Matthew Libatique, David Lynch, Melina Matsoukas and Rachel Morrison as Alumni, is ranked the #1 film school in America. AFI's enduring traditions include the **AFI Life Achievement Award**, which honors the masters for work that has stood the test of time; **AFI AWARDS**, which celebrates the creative ensembles of the most outstanding screen stories of the year; and scholarly efforts such as the **AFI Catalog of Feature Films** and the **AFI Archive** that preserve film history for future generations. AFI exhibition programs include **AFI FEST** and year-round exhibition at the **AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center** in Maryland. **AFI Movie Club** is a destination for movie lovers from around the world to celebrate and engage with the art form every day. Other pioneering programs include workshops aimed at increasing diversity in the storytelling community, including **AFI DWW+** and the **AFI Cinematography Intensive for Women**. Read about all of these programs and more at AFI.com and follow us on social media at Facebook.com/AmericanFilmInstitute, YouTube.com/AFI, Twitter.com/AmericanFilm and Instagram.com/AmericanFilmInstitute.

Press contact:

American Film Institute

Shari Mesulam, Shari@themesulamgroup.com