

###

REEL ASIAN WELCOMES ESTEEMED COMEDIAN AND THE PROBLEM WITH APU STAR, HARI KONDABOLU, FOR FESTIVAL'S FIRST KEYNOTE EVENT

FESTIVAL OPENING AND CLOSING NIGHT FILMS EXPLORE LGBTQ REPRESENTATION WITH DEAR EX, AND TRADITION AND MODERNITY WITH WISH YOU WERE HERE

Festival runs November 8 to 16, 2018

Public tickets on sale on October 11 at reelasian.com

(TORONTO – October 3, 2018) The Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival (Reel Asian), Canada's premier pan-Asian festival, today announced that it will host its first ever keynote speaker with American comedian, writer and podcaster, **Hari Kondabolu**. Kondabolu is best known for his critically acclaimed documentary *The Problem with Apu* (2017) and the Netflix special *Warn Your Relatives* (2018). Reel Asian also announced its Opening and Closing Night Galas for the 22nd edition, Mag Hsu and Chih-Yen Hsu's heartfelt drama from Taiwan **DEAR EX**, and award-winning filmmaker Kenneth Bi's latest feature **WISH YOU WERE HERE**, a co-production between China and Japan. The Reel Asian Film Festival will take place **November 8 to 16, 2018**.

"We are pleased to welcome comedian Hari Kondabolu as our first Reel Asian keynote speaker and see this event as a platform to celebrate Asian representations on film," said Savine Wong, Interim Executive Director, Reel Asian. "With the success of his provocative documentary *The Problem with Apu*, Hari is one of the most influential voices in promoting diversity on screen. As well, the opening and closing night films delve into the universal themes of reconciliation, forgiveness and belonging, which set the tone for the dynamic lineup we have in store for our audiences."

Opening Night Gala (November 8) - DEAR EX - Canadian Premiere

Directors: Mag Hsu, Chih-Yen Hsu

Dear Ex follows three people who are linked by fate because of love and family. Adolescent Song Chengxi (Joseph Huang) loses his father Song Zhengyuan (Spark Chen) to cancer, but instead of having time to mourn, Chengxi finds himself caught in a feud between his widowed mother Liu Sanlian (Hsieh Ying-xuan) and his father's gay lover Jay (Roy Chiu). As Liu fights Jay for Song's insurance money, Chengxi gradually learns that what holds both Liu and Jay back is not the money, but the weight of the loving memories they each have with his father.

As conservative groups continue to voice opposition in advance of same-sex marriage becoming legal in Taiwan in May of 2019, *Dear Ex* is a timely reminder of the social and human impact that results from the lack of acceptance for LGBTQ rights.

Dear Ex was recently nominated for eight Golden Horse Awards, honouring the best in Chinese-language cinema, including Best Feature Film, Best Leading Actor (Roy Chiu), Best Leading Actress (Hsieh Ying-Xuan), Best New Performer (Joseph Huang), and Best New Director (Mag Hsu, Chih-Yen Hsu).

Co-director Mag Hsu and star Roy Chiu are expected to be in attendance for a Q&A.

Closing Night Gala (November 16) - *WISH YOU WERE HERE* - North American Premiere
Director: Kenneth Bi

On the eve of her latest fashion showcase in Beijing, successful entrepreneur Yuan Yuan (Faye Yu) is approached by Keiko (Ayane Kinoshita), a mysterious young Japanese woman. An admirer of Yuan Yuan's career, Keiko has learned Mandarin and fashion design for a chance to speak with her idol. As Yuan Yuan takes Keiko under her wing, long suppressed memories begin to surface of her time in Hokkaido and the husband she'd left behind.

Yuan Yuan finally builds up the courage to visit the small town she left behind more than 20 years ago in order to confront her past decisions and face her deepest fears in this journey of forgiveness and reconciliation. *Wish You Were Here* marks Kenneth Bi's return to Reel Asian, having previously opened the festival with his feature, *The Drummer*. His latest feature, a co-production between China and Japan, is an examination of a woman traversing through modernity and tradition; youth and maturity; past and future

Kenneth Bi is expected to be in attendance for a Q&A.

Keynote Event (November 10) - Speaker: Hari Kondabolu

This year, the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival is launching the first festival keynote speaker with American comedian, writer and podcaster, **Hari Kondabolu**.

The evening is a celebration of Asians in the film industry. Kondabolu will reflect on his personal experiences and speak to the ongoing need for diverse Asian representations in the media.

Hari Kondabolu is a comedian, writer, and podcaster based in Brooklyn, NY. He has been described by The New York Times as "one of the most exciting political comics in stand-up today." In 2017, he released his critically acclaimed documentary *The Problem with Apu* on truTV and in 2018, Netflix released his special *Warn Your Relatives*, and he was named one of Variety's Top 10 Comics To Watch. Most recently, Kondabolu was named GQ India's Comedian of the Year.

Hari has released two comedy albums, *Waiting for 2042* and *Mainstream American Comic* with the legendary indie rock label *Kill Rock Stars*. He has performed on *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *Conan*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, *John Oliver's New York Stand-Up Show*, and has his own half-hour special on Comedy Central. He is also a former writer and correspondent on the Chris Rock-produced FX show *Totally Biased with W. Kamau Bell*.

This year's festival programme will be announced at Reel Asian's press conference on October 11, 2018. Additional information about the press conference will follow in the next coming days.

About Reel Asian

The Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival (Reel Asian), presented by National Bank, is a unique showcase of contemporary Asian cinema and work from the Asian diaspora. As Canada's largest pan-Asian film festival, Reel Asian® provides a public forum for Asian media artists and their work, and fuels the growing appreciation for Asian cinema in Canada. This year's festival runs in November 2018 in Toronto and North York. Reel Asian will be showcasing special projects featuring prominent artists, content creators, up-and-coming filmmakers and will also include the "Reel Ideas" program for creative minds in the industry to connect. Works presented at Reel Asian include films, videos, and presentations by East, South and Southeast Asian artists in Canada, the U.S., Asia and all over the world.

-30-

For more information including media accreditation and interview requests, please contact:

Michelle Brykman
michelle@touchwoodpr.com
416.593.0777 ext. 205

Jess Harris
jess@touchwoodpr.com
416.593.0777 ext. 209