



TORONTO, ON – MAY, 2009

**Toronto International Deaf Film & Arts Festival (TIDFAF) 2009! [www.tidfaf.ca](http://www.tidfaf.ca) May 21-23, 2009**

**OPENING NIGHT GALA FILM: UNIVERSAL SIGNS (captioned for the hearing in subtitles)**

ATTENTION FILM, ARTS/ENTERTAINMENT, LIVING, COMMUNITY, EDUCATION REPORTERS/PRODUCERS:

*Catherine MacKinnon (TIDFAF Festival Director), leading actor Anthony Natale, Producer Catherine Miller and Director Ann Calamia and others available for interview.*

**MEDIA: You are invited to the Opening Night Gala Film (May 21) "Universal Signs" & Reception:**

**SCHEDULE:** 5:30p.m. Doors Open, Wine & Cheese Reception 6, Universal Signs Screening 7:30, Post Show Q&A with Stars

**LOCATION:** Innis Town Hall, University of Toronto, 2 Sussex Avenue, Toronto, ON M5S 1J5

Spring has sprung and what better way to celebrate than to indulge yourself in one of the most diverse and edu-taining festivals exploring the wonderful and complicated world of Deaf culture. Deaf is not a disability and it certainly cannot be defined through stereotypes. Deaf is an identity, a history, an experience, a way of life that, across the continuum, can be both challenging and immensely rewarding.

In 2006 we made history with our festival being the first of its kind in Canada and this year TIDFAF has made history once again by selecting opening night gala film *Universal Signs* starring Canadian actors Anthony Natale (*Mr. Holland's Opus*, *Jerry Maguire*) and Sabrina Lloyd (*Sports Nights*) directed by Ann Calamia and produced by Calamia, Catherine Miller and Lupe Ontiveros. At 108 minutes *Universal Signs* is the first full-length Sign Language film in history! **Natale, Miller, Calamia and others will be in attendance at the Opening Night Gala and we want you - our supportive local media there covering every moment of it!**

*Universal Signs* is a modern silent film told in mesmerizing American Sign Language (ASL) and captioned for the hearing. After the death of his (Natale as "Andrew") fiancée's daughter, who dies in his care because he couldn't hear her drowning, Andrew a Deaf man shuts himself off from the world. Haunted by memories, it is only through a new friendship that he can learn to forgive, love and reconnect.

We thank all of our many sponsors, volunteers and particularly our founding media sponsor **Canwest Media Inc.** for making this festival possible. This year TIDAF also features a High School Student's Film screening showcasing the films created by students from Dante Aligerhi Academy (Milton), Toronto Robarts School for the Deaf (London), Northern Secondary School and EC Drury School for the Deaf on Saturday May 23, writing and acting workshops as well as a Saturday filmmaker's panel discussion on the ins and outs of the industry coordinated by TIDFAF, featuring speakers from the Toronto International Film Festival Group (TIFFG) and more. We look forward to your media support as we explore Deaf cinema from across the globe this year at the Toronto International Deaf Film & Arts Festival (TIDFAF). Visit [www.tidfaf.ca](http://www.tidfaf.ca) for film synopses, trailers, screening schedules and workshop/panel details.

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