

## MEL BROOKS RECEIVES BFI FELLOWSHIP

**LONDON – Embargoed until 8pm, Friday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

The BFI is pleased to announce that Mel Brooks was awarded the BFI's highest honour, the BFI Fellowship, at a private dinner hosted by Greg Dyke, BFI Chair, in London tonight.

Mel Brooks said *"I am deeply honoured to be the recipient of the BFI Fellowship and to be inducted into such distinguished company. When I was informed that I had been chosen, I was surprised and delighted. Not many Americans have been offered this prestigious award...and for good reason."*

Greg Dyke, BFI Chair said *'We are thrilled to honour Mel Brooks with a BFI Fellowship. His brilliant wit and satire have continued to surprise and delight and, sometimes, astonish, as he delights in flouting convention, taking comedy to areas once held taboo. Mel's irrepressible energy and dazzling originality have made the world a much funnier place.'*

Sir John Hurt, BFI Fellow and star of Mel Brooks' films including *The Elephant Man*, *A History of the World Part 1* and *Spaceballs*, gave a citation at the event. Alan Yentob, also a BFI Fellow, interviewed Mel at the event in front of guests.

Mel Brooks is a giant of world cinema whose unparalleled career has encompassed an enormous range of work in both television and film, as a writer, actor, producer and director. His legendary comic genius has created a brilliantly original and hugely influential body of work which has inspired and entertained audiences around the world and won him Tony, Emmy, Grammy and Oscar awards along the way.

Mel Brooks' first feature film *The Producers* (1968), an affectionate celebration of a particular type of theatrical impresario with its unforgettable big budget, musical number, "Springtime for Hitler", took on a new lease of life with its re-creation as a Broadway musical in 2001. *Blazing Saddles* (1974), co-written with Richard Pryor and starring Cleavon Little as an unconventional cowboy, was a fantastic satire on the Western and Hollywood clichés. Subsequent films have mined a rich seam of comedy brilliantly sending up film genres such as the silent cinema in *Silent Movie* (1976), the thriller in *High Anxiety* (1977) the horror film in *Young Frankenstein* (1974) and *Dracula: Dead and Loving It* (1995), costume drama in *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993) and science fiction with *Space Balls* (1987). Part of the real success of Brooks' work is his deep knowledge and affection for his subjects, so while he may be pointing up the absurdity of Hollywood musical numbers or the conventions of the horror film, he does it with a grace and verve which can only come from the heart.

His fearless comic instincts were honed from an early age in stand-up comedy, then radio and television. He was a writer on the legendary TV show *Your Show of Shows*, and the radio show *Caesar's Hour* for Sid Caesar in the early 1950s. He created the stylish television satire of the spying world, *Get Smart* (1965), a delicious riposte to the then current obsession with slick, secret agents, and he also worked on *The 2000 Year Old Man* (1975). His skill as a stand-up comedian will be on display in London for a one-man show at London's Prince of Wales Theatre on Sunday 22 March. The Producers starts a new UK tour this month.

The BFI Fellowship is awarded by the BFI Board of Governors and it is presented for outstanding achievement in film and television. Previous recipients include Sir Christopher Lee, Ralph Fiennes, David Cronenberg, Dame Judi Dench, Isabelle Huppert, Tim Burton, Martin Scorsese and Orson Welles. Since 1983, a total of seventy nine Fellowships have been awarded – the full list is a roll-call of the leading lights of the world of film and television.

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[Pictures of the event are available via Getty Images](#)

**Note to Editors:**

The Fellowship of the BFI (British Film Institute) was created in 1983 to coincide with the BFI's 50th anniversary. On that occasion the British film industry gathered in the Guildhall for a televised event at which the first group of Fellows were created - Marcel Carné, David Lean, Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, Satyajit Ray and Orson Welles.

Since its creation, the BFI Fellowship has been awarded to key figures in British cinema including Peggy Ashcroft, Dirk Bogarde, Alec Guinness, Maggie Smith, Laurence Olivier, Vanessa Redgrave, Mike Leigh and Helena Bonham Carter. Also recognised have been such film industry luminaries as Jack Cardiff, Sydney Samuelson and Jeremy Thomas, and some of the giants of world cinema, including Michelangelo Antonioni, Abbas Kiarostami, Akira Kurosawa, Jeanne Moreau, Elem Klimov and Bernardo Bertolucci.

The BFI Fellowship also celebrates achievement in the world of television with such names as Alan Yentob, Jeremy Isaacs, David Rose, Michael Parkinson, Lynda La Plante, Lord Bernstein and Verity Lambert all receiving the award.

Since 1983 a total of 78 Fellowships have been awarded.

**About the BFI**

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations

- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter. The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Greg Dyke.