

## INSIDER SERIES: SDIFF SCREENS ‘OFFICIAL SECRETS’

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By Jeanne Ferris



Keira Knightley appears in *Official Secrets* by Gavin Hood, an official selection of the Premieres program at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. Courtesy of Sundance Institute.

LA JOLLA — The Film Insider Series saw the golden sun lower its languorous, warm rays on Arclight Terrace — allowing the stars to come out and play for a special screening of *Official Secrets*.

Fit, in a taupe dress shirt with grey denim pants and sporting rock star hair — Gavin Hood was in the house. The South African born, Oscar-winning director of *Tsotsi* flew in to attend the exclusive *Official Secrets*. And it was much appreciated.

Hood and Tonya Mantooh, CEO and executive artistic director of San Diego International Film Festival (SDIFF), were in the spotlight and joined by local luminary Naila Chowdhury, director of social impact and innovation at UC San Diego and a new SDIFF board member.

Everywhere you looked, the lights reflected back from the crowds of dark stylish shades — the literati and glitterati.

Madame and messieurs: sweet summer has finally arrived in the Jewel that others call La Jolla.

SDIFF cofounder Kevin Leap was seen sharing celebratory smiles with Film Insider Series devotees comprised of stellar volunteers, anonymous benefactors, fabulous patrons of the arts, international press corps, Hollywood studio producers, and they-who-support-the-machine: cinephiles, as those with a passionate interest in cinema are sometimes called.

Anticipation was high for the screening of the political thriller that stars Keira Knightly and the buzz rose with each guest arriving. Food was plentiful with pints of Stella Artois, gourmet wine, Urban Leaf elixirs, and Liberty Call Distilling Co., and appetizers from Eureka, Craft pizza, Frill, and the Melting Pot. The evening's presenting sponsors were Morgan Stanley, Procopio, and Maserati. The dress was decidedly San Diego glam: sleek business casual and envious haute couture — all waiting for magic hour.

*Official Secrets* saw its world premiere at Sundance Film Festival where it won the Audience Award. Massachusetts's own Provincetown International Film Festival awarded it Best Narrative Feature.

Based on real interviews with British Intelligence whistleblower Katherine Gun, played by Knightly, the story revolved around a leaked memo to the press. It contained a directive of an illegal NSA spy operation designed to push the United Nations Security Council into sanctioning the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

An Oscar and BAFTA nominee, Knightly also was nominated as best actress for *Pride and Prejudice* by Boston Society of Film Critics. And of course, by association with an international director: sometimes cast and crew read like a passenger manifest from the QEII.

British thespian Ralph (Rafe, like safe) Fiennes shares the screen with Knightly, playing a steely barrister. Boston showed its approval when the film critics awarded Fiennes Best Supporting Actor for *Schindler's List*.

Also from across the pond: London educated, handsome (unrecognizable with a buzz cut) Matthew Goode dubbed a rising star by Brits — is a Primetime Emmy nominee and an Aussie awards fave. Serious Welshman, Rhys Ifans (Ee-vans), a BAFTA winner, adds his shape shifter persona as an f-bombing guerrilla journalist. Adam Bakri, a young Palestinian auteur, plays Knightly's husband. Estonia (yes, the country) bequeathed Bakri with Tallinn Black Nights Festival Jury Prize Best Actor.

Afterward, Tonya moderated an uproarious Q & A with Hood, a candid raconteur: “[My] *Eye in the Sky* producer contacted me and asked if I had heard of Katherine Gun. I said no and he replied, ‘Google her and call me back.’”

“I called back and asked if I could meet her. We met in London and spent five days talking. As a former lawyer, I can assure you this is deeply and accurately researched and part of the challenge in writing this story is that all the people in the movie are still alive. We shot the film in 36 days. What attracted me to this story is loyalty. Her loyalty — to her conscience, her husband, and to the British people. She insisted that it was for the British people she worked for and not the government. When I asked if Keira would consider it... She said, ‘I want a role with substance and not heavily made up with a corset.’” The audience of course, laughed on cue.

At the post screening champagne and Cookies by Cravory reception: Cookie monsters, red carpet selfies and corner table conversations regarding the upcoming SDIFF are bandied about. Plans are made to attend exclusive screenings, biz card flurries, and cinephiles audibly declare their passion for film with promises to reunite on October 15 to 20, 2019.

Until then—ladies and gentlemen, it’s a wrap! [www.sdfilmfest.com](http://www.sdfilmfest.com)

Rated R for language, release date: August 30, 2019