

# New Directions

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## Filmfest/DC

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## ... And Filmfest/DC



**F**ilmfest/DC, the Second Annual Washington, D.C., International Film Festival, surpassed last year's pioneering effort in size, scope and quality.

In all, 44 filmmakers from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe came to Washington for the 12-day festival from April 20 to May 1. Their collective works of 69 feature films and 20 short subjects were viewed by an audience estimated at 20,000. Last year's festival presented 40 films from 20 countries, viewed by about 12,000 persons.

The co-founders of this international event — Tony Gittens, a Howard alumnus and Filmfest/DC's executive director, and Marcia Zalowitz, its artistic director — outdid their praiseworthy performance of a year ago by adding more participants, two public symposiums on the cinema of Africa and all-day workshops.

Especially noteworthy was the "Evolving African Cinema" series, which featured 21 films from 13 countries. These countries included Angola, Tanzania, Tunisia, Somalia, Nigeria and Zaire. The series was enhanced by the presence in Washington of 10 African filmmakers who engaged audiences in discussions after the viewing of their films, some shown for the first time in the United States.

The African film program represented "the largest presentation of contemporary filmmaking from the Continent to be shown in North America in many years," according to festival organizers.

Malian director Souleymane Cissé's "Yeelen" opened the African films program. "Baara," also by Cissé, was among the films viewed at various venues throughout the city.

Another highlight: Howard filmmaker Abiyi Ford's latest work, "Burkina Faso: Land of the People of Dignity," premiered during the festival. This cultural/travelogue documentary was filmed in technicolor on location by a crew from Howard's School of Communications in collaboration with the University of Ouagadougou's Institute for Cinematography Studies.

The "Evolving African Cinema" series was directed by Howard professor Françoise Pfaff, who also was a moderator for a Filmfest/DC symposium at Howard. Participants in this symposium, "Medium, Message and Audience: Production, Distribution and Exhibition of African Films," included Howard filmmaker Haile Gerima and others from Tunisia and Cameroon.

A second symposium on "Themes, Issues and Social Realities in African Cinema" was moderated by Abiyi Ford. Panelists for this symposium, which was held at the Smithsonian Institution, included Mbye Cham, a faculty member of Howard's African Studies Program, and filmmakers from Burkina Faso and Mali.

Filmfest/DC has drawn positive reviews this year as well as last. Along the way, it has put the city of Washington on the premier list of festival locations for the exhibition of films from all continents.

The festival's success can be attributed to the cohesive collaboration of a number of cultural, artistic, diplomatic, educational, and commercial institutions in the city, as well as the maturation of audience interest in motion pictures created outside Hollywood and the energy, skills and enthusiasm of the festival's founder-organizers. □

— The Editor



