



## FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

AN AT-A-GLANCE LOOK AT NEXT WEEK'S EVENTS

Unlike New York's annual Urbanworld Film Festival, which early on opened its ranks to Asian and Latino filmmakers, the HBFF has limited its entries to works by black writers and directors (and producers, in the cases of opening- and closing-night films). But "Forgive Me," for example, centers on a white girl and has no black protagonists.

"We've got 'black films' where there's not a black person in the film because it's not about the content," Kersey-Henley says. "What we didn't anticipate was the many white filmmakers with all-black casts who would call us and plead their case to get into the festival."

The Infotainment Conference now is the centerpiece of the HBFF, featuring panels and workshops that cover all aspects of the art and craft — and business — of filmmaking.

"The impetus of the festival is to get people to have a greater business savvy," says actor-director Bill Duke, a member of the HBFF advisory board since its inception. "It's not enough just to be a filmmaker; we need to be businesspeople also."

But are the issues encountered by independent black filmmakers really different from those encountered by any other indie filmmaker? Duke and his colleagues say yes.

"A young black filmmaker making a film that is indigenous to his or her experience — that has 'black subject matter' — is told that there are no foreign legs, that the investors are not going to get any kind of foreign recoupment at all," Duke says. "That has a very powerful impact in terms of how young black people start thinking about what they instinctively want to do. Whether they think it's unfair or not, the industry's not going to change for them, so they have to start thinking in a relatively pragmatic way."

Says actor-director and advisory board member Tim Reid: "It's the best of times for successful black actors but the worst of times for indie producers. Black studio films are the most profitable films today when it comes to the proportion of negative costs and boxoffice receipts, but in terms of the independent business of black Hollywood, it's in a drought."

Reid's latest film — an urban twist on "My Fair Lady" titled "For Real," in which he

"WE TRY TO FIND FILMS THAT DON'T FALL INTO THAT NORMAL STEREOTYPE OF WHAT A 'BLACK FILM' SHOULD LOOK LIKE" — HBFF FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TANYA KERSEY-HENLEY



stars as a high-powered music attorney who plays Pygmalion to his housekeeper's street-wise niece (Tamara Curry) — will open the 2003 festival at the DGA Theater in Los Angeles. He sees "genre-breaking" as the biggest challenge for black independents — moving beyond limitations of the hip-hop market and "retraining our audience" to embrace a broader range of styles and subject matter.

"We're not 'black filmmakers'; we're filmmakers who happen to be black," Gregory says. "I want to be able to do any film, whether it's about whites, blacks or Chinese people. But the perception is that you have to make a 'black movie' to get noticed, a \$6 million-\$8 million buddy comedy that will attract a hip-hop audience. So there is a resounding irony that we have to have a black film festival to get people to notice us, so we won't have to be labeled as 'black directors.'"

Adds Reid, "The Hollywood Black Film Festival is a forum for passion, for attention and respect to a slice of the business that very rarely gets respect and attention from the mainstream — and it is very much needed."

Reid will attend this year's festival with a new hyphenate — "buyer" — after partnering with Radio One and Comcast to provide programming for the companies' new black network. "We'll be there like everybody else, looking for titles," he says.

As for the future of the HBFF? "It's becoming more national, even taking on an international profile," Duke says. "It's gaining attention because the need is there. As long as the need is there, I think it's going to grow." ■

Get out your hand-helds and make way for the fifth annual Hollywood Black Film Festival, which runs Tuesday-June 8 in various venues. Among the 46 short films, 11 documentaries, eight feature films, five animated projects and three world-cinema shorts in competition are 38 world premieres and four U.S. premieres from new and established black filmmakers.

Screenings begin Wednesday at Harmony Gold Preview House in Los Angeles, with early buzz humming around titles including "Big Ain't Bad," Ray Culpepper's Beta SP feature about a young man who learns the cost of being a "player" after losing his fiancée to a wealthier, more mature rival.

Two documentaries also are creating a stir: Andrea Kalin's "Partners of the Heart" tells the true story of a black carpenter's apprentice who became a cardiac pioneer and teacher to two generations of premier heart surgeons through a remarkable partnership with a white surgeon during segregation; and Bianca M. White and Sandra M. Krasa's "Ocoee: Legacy of the Election Day Massacre" centers on a prosperous black community in Florida that was wiped out in one day in 1920, after Mose Norman and July Perry attempted to vote.

The Infotainment Conference, set to run Thursday-June 7 at festival headquarters at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, boasts an impressive list of speakers and panelists, including producers Sam Kitt (2002's "25th Hour") and Michael Besman (2002's "About Schmidt"), writer-producer Kriss Turner (Fox's "The Bernie Mac Show") and executives Rose Catherine Pinkney (Paramount Network Television) and Robin Gurney (Zoetrope Studios).

Other highlights include a Kids Fest, set to take place from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Thursday at Los Angeles Film School. Shorts by black student filmmakers will be screened for elementary and middle school students, who also will be treated to prizes, goody bags and lunch.

The festival concludes Sunday with the HBFF 2003 Filmmaker and Storyteller Awards Luncheon, which begins at 11 a.m., followed by closing-night ceremonies, including the final festival screening with a party to follow.

Festival passes are available for \$395, with one-day passes (including screenings and conferences) available for \$115. Admission to single conference sessions is \$30; tickets to evening screenings cost \$10.

For more information, call (310) 712-3998 or visit [www.hbff.org](http://www.hbff.org).

