



Culver City News

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Pan African Film Festival wraps second season in Culver City

The 18th annual Pan African Film and Arts Festival (PAFF) concluded its second year in Culver City on Wednesday, Feb. 17 with an awards ceremony for its winning films, and a star-studded afterparty at Gyenari Korean BBQ and Lounge.

Founded in 1992, this internationally recognized film and arts festival is the largest Black History Month celebration event in the United States, and is the single largest international Black film festival, showcasing more than 135 films from 36 countries, with members and participants from all over the world.

This year's events ran from Feb. 10 to Feb. 17 and included 40 films in competition, 64 feature-length films and 12 world premieres.

People of all races converged on Culver City to celebrate the artistic achievements of the African community. The Westfield Culver City mall was host to the PAFF art and fashion show, where Black fine art, home furnishings, designer jewelry, designer fashions and accessories with an "Afro touch" were displayed and sold.

The film festival itself was held at the Culver Plaza Theatre, which became the home of the PAFF last year. Prior to Culver City, the festival was held primarily in the Magic Johnson Theatres at the Baldwin Hills-Crenshaw Plaza.

"It is always nice to come here to Culver City," said film director Aaron Woolfolk. "It's a heart of Los Angeles, so people from all over the county come here. It is a nice central location. I love coming to this theater; it's the perfect place to have a film festival."

Wednesday's closing ceremony at the Culver Plaza Theatre was hosted by actress C.C.H. Pounder, who starred in the science fiction film *Avatar* and television show *Warehouse 13*. The festival's Filmmaker Awards ceremony honored 13 films in 11 categories, including Best Feature Narrative, Best Documentary Short and a few Audience Favorite Awards.

"I just want to congratulate all of our filmmakers who received awards tonight," Pounder said. "But most of all, to all the filmmakers who had the courage to create films and entered them in the

festival: Keep plugging away! Hopefully we will see you again next year with another project."

For first-time filmmaker Carmen Madden, the festival gave her a new appreciation for foreign films and enabled her to see her African heritage with new eyes.

"It's been a really nice learning experience for me to see all the films from Africa and around the world, especially the different parts of Africa where things are going on that I wasn't aware of," said Madden, whose breakout film *Everyday Black Man* took home the Programmers Award for Narrative Film. "It brings us filmmakers — especially us who live in the United States — a [special] awareness and perhaps something that we might want to add as we go along with our films."

The theme of this year's festival was "Get Involved," with many films actively bringing awareness to current and past issues and inspiring people to act.

Special attention was given to the relief efforts in earthquake-ravaged Haiti. The

documentary film *Haiti: The Sleeping Giant*, which highlighted the country's historical importance to the African community, was screened at least three times a day during the course of the festival. All proceeds from the screenings will benefit the Haitian Emergency Relief Fund.

The festival also proved very inspiring for several people who discovered their African roots.

Like many African-Americans, Mekita Faiye, producer of the film *Speed Dating* — which won an Audience Choice Award for Narrative Film — was unaware of her true ties to Africa.

"One thing that was really inspiring about the *Night of Tribute* was how some of the awardees found out where they were from in Africa," Faiye said. "It's funny, because my great-uncle came to L.A. to see my film, and I found out that my great-grandfather is from Ethiopia, and I never knew that about the family."

"I think this festival really focuses on the right things — connecting the African-Americans and Africans and reminding us that we're all

one and that we come from the same place."

Woolfolk, who won the First Time Narrative Feature Award for Directing for his film, *The Harimaya Bridge*, added: "I think a lot of times people forget that Africa is not a country. It's a continent with many distinct cultures and ethnicities and languages."

"You have people all over the world who fall under the umbrella of African but are so different from each other. It is always so nice to come to this festival in particular and just be able to see the different aspects of the African experience. It's always nice to see the films here. I love this festival."

– Natasia Gascon