

Black filmmakers on sidelines at Toronto Festival

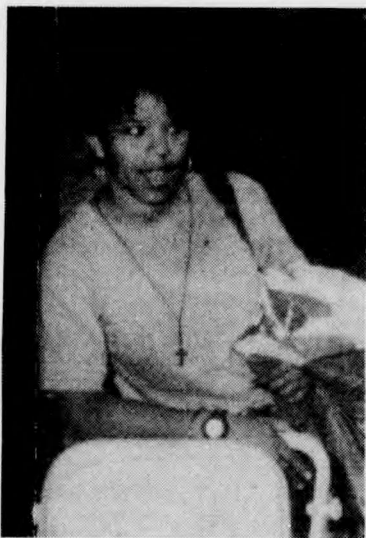
by Michelle Hughes

The Toronto International Film Festival of Festivals has left a bad taste in my mouth.

The films were both enlightening and relevant to my experience as a Black woman. Some of the films were made to show different perspectives instead of the male-eurocentric view. These films were made for people like me to see themselves in film and to send messages to their respective communities.

These are the so-called *alternative* films. Some were in the *On the Edge* category. What do these terms mean? Alternative to what? On the edge of what? Reality? Whose reality? Enough with the semantics. What is really upsetting is that the audience was generic in each screening. And it wasn't generically Black.

Initially, the film festival wasn't that appealing. The posters included six white people gasping at neon festival lights. It would preview Woody Allen's new film and mentioned that Robert Redford was attending, but the films about Black people, women, and gay relationships seemed delegated to festival small print advertising. It wasn't until a friend highlighted some of the Black films being screened, that I decided to pick up the film festival book.



Leslie Harris earned recognition by portraying a Black woman's perspective in *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* The film could be the second film by a Black woman to gain wide-audience release.

Why are these films inaccessible? Why don't the people who need to see these films get to see them?

It isn't easy to figure out which films get promoted and who finds out about them. Two African-American film directors, Zeinibu Irene Davis and Marco Williams mentioned how much the make-up of their audience disappointed them. It is not that their films are not for all races, but they want the people for whom their films are made to see them.

Williams said "the poster sends a profound message with six white faces" and there needs to be better outreach; he said all the festivals have the same problem.

Davis is frustrated to find "feature films get all of the promotion... so that doesn't give exposure to the shorts. They are seen as less important."

She said the success of *Daughters of the Dust* was due in large part to the word of mouth and heavy promotion by its director and her friends.

Who hears about the film festival? People in the film industry and people who want to be in the industry, as well as film buffs. How many of you knew there was a festival before you saw the reviews in the papers? And if you did, did it not seem geared to a white audience?

Members of the Black community must gain access to these films. They need to hear the messages in films like *Survivors*, which dramatizes the true story of a Black family dealing with AIDS.

AIDS is a growing concern in Black communities; forums are needed to address these problems. *It's a Powerful Thang* and *In Search of Our Fathers* show the variety of the Black reality. *The Noise and Trait*



Michael Rapaport and N'Bushe Wright star in *Zebra Head*, which explores the theme of whites idolizing Black culture. While films by Black filmmakers continue to reach small audiences, film festivals gear their ads toward a white mainstream market.

D'Union highlight society's stereotypes. Women and men would benefit from viewing *Open Letter: Grasp the Bird's Tail* to a) show women their fears are real and shared, and the added pressures of being a woman of colour, and b) show men and non-coloured people what it is like to live in fear.

When I took it upon myself to see through the narrow advertising and attend some of these films, I was mistaken as an usher working at the theater. And at the screening of *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.*, my friend,

who looks nothing like the leading male character, was mistaken for the actor. The message is obvious: *Why else would you be here unless you work here or worked in the film.*

The film festival board should reconsider its advertising plan and establish outreach programs to help make contact with those outside of the mainstream film market. They seem to spend a considerable amount to bringing these films to the festival; it would only make sense to go the extra bit to effectively promote them.

Hits 'n' Bits continued

the song contains the first ever sampled piece of another video. — EA

Halloween Night will be one to remember when **The Jesus And Mary Chain, Curve and Spiritualized** play at The Skydome Skybowl. Tickets are impossibly cheap, \$10.20, with the change going to UNICEF. The Chain's Lollapalooza stint was one of the highlights, while Curve's "Doppelganger" album is on my list for the Top 10 best this year. A castoff from Spaceman 3, Spiritualized's music of hallucination and platonic moods begin the night that Satan will finally appear. — EA

Dance
"Savage," "frenzied" and "surrealistic" are used to describe the Montreal dance group **La La La Human Steps**. They're coming to Toronto's O'Keefe Centre on Oct. 30 and 31, part of their world tour of *Infante C'est Destroy*. Edouard Lock, choreographer, promises a dance reflecting our "contemporary alienation." The dance is based on La energy and rhythms of rock and modern dance, using La film, La lighting effects and La breathtaking steps. — SP

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EVALUATION:

1st essay 20%; 2nd essay 35%; final exam 30%; class participation including seminar paper 15%.

READING LIST:

Required Reading (in order of study): early folklore material; Goethe, *The Bride of Corinth*; Coleridge, "Christabel"; Keats, "Lamia"; Byron, *Manfred*; extracts from the works of Freud and Jung; Polidori, *The Vampire*; Sheridan La Fanu, *Carmilla*; Stoker, *Dracula*; Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*; Suzy Charnass, *The Vampire Tapestry*; Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber*.

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