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Thurs May 4, 2006
11:34 AM

Festival Review

2nd Atlanta Women of Color International Film Festival

By Spencer Moon

April 25, 2006— Since festivals cannot be all things to all people, Atlanta now has quite a few film festivals. Enjoying its second year is the Atlanta Women of Color International Film Festival, produced by Iyálódè Productions. The festival was held March 24-26 at the Auburn Avenue Research Library. Admission to the festival was free.

Iyálódè Productions will present a screening of the audience favorites from the festival on May 5, 2006. According to the festival's website, the top six films were:

1. *Sweet Honey In The Rock: Raise your voice*
2. *God Sleeps in Rwanda*
3. *Daughters of the Wind (FILHAS DO VENTO)*
4. *Oxtails*
5. *City Of Women (A CIDADE DAS MULHERES) & Hoo Hoo: losing mother tongue (tied)*
6. *Scene Not Heard: women in Philadelphia Hip Hop*

Q&A with Festival Director Mojisola Sonoiki

The festival artistic director is Mojisola Sonoiki. In her role as founder of Iyálódè Productions she works as a cultural activist, creating programming and consulting on film festivals and cultural events around the world. Mojisola recently completed a stint at IMAGE Film & Video where she was the first black woman to head the 18TH Annual Out on Film Festival. She programmed the first African-American series ever shown in the Out on Film Festival.

Give me a brief history of the AWOCIFF?

Sonoiki: I came up with the idea of starting a film festival focusing on the stories and achievements of Women of Color in 1999 after working successfully on a series of film screenings that explored alternative cinema in London. The first festival was called "E Wa Wo

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(come & see) - Sistahs In Film™ showcasing films by Black women filmmakers from around the world. The first of its kind in London, the festival was a sold-out event and received critical acclaim. On moving to Atlanta, it only seemed natural to continue where I left off, having found a void in the film festival circuit here. 2005 was the first year of the Atlanta Women of Color festival in Atlanta and it was extremely successful. It has now become an annual event.

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What is your biggest achievement in this year's festival?

Sonolki: This year's festival was expanded to include an extra day. Our biggest achievement this year was having the extra day be very well attended.

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Q&A with Festival Director Mojisola Sonoiki - continued

As the Festival grows, will it continue to be free?

Sonoiki: This is a question that is still open for discussion. We would like to give something back to the community that is exciting and enriching. This can be extremely challenging if we don't get the hands-on support we need to organize the festival. We would, therefore, expect the community to support us, too, by offering their services to help us to achieve our goals without having to attach a cost to it.

We encourage people to volunteer from the planning to the development stage of the festival. Right now we are seeking a sponsorship coordinator, grant writer, hospitality coordinator, and media relations coordinator.

Are you interested in getting films to screen in schools as an audience development tool?

Sonoiki: Yes, very much so. This is one of our plans for the near future.

Talk about your relationship with any new sponsors or the role of sponsors in general?

Sonoiki: Our biggest sponsor is our venue --the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History. Sponsorship, a lot of the time, is about whom you know and who knows you. We tend to go back to the people and organizations who know about the work we do and who feel it is worth their while supporting us. For next year's festival, we are developing a new sponsorship package that we can use to solicit new sponsors.

What was your attendance this year, compared to last year?

Sonoiki: Our audience attendance increased from 750 people last year to over a 1,000 people this year.

Did the number of submissions increase?

Sonoiki: Acquiring films for the festival is a two-fold process. We seek out films as well as send out a call for submissions. The response to our call for submissions this year doubled. I suspect this

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will become the trend as more and more people get to know about our festival.

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I noticed there were some films in the Independent Black Film Festival that also appeared in your festival. Was this by design or accident/coincidental?

Sonoiki: Filmmakers submit their films to various festivals. We had no restrictions as to how many festivals our entrants can submit to.

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What is the biggest challenge currently for the Festival from year to year?

Sonoiki: The biggest challenge is finding a strong, dedicated team of people who have the skills and knowledge to run a successful film festival of this type without being financially rewarded.

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Were there any specific challenges getting films from other countries?

Sonoiki: Format issues were the major challenges we faced when getting films from abroad. For example some of the films were shot on 35mm, which we didn't have screening capabilities for. So we had to get the filmmakers to make DVD copies specifically for the festival, which was quite time consuming.

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Are you cooperating with other local Festivals and or local black cinema exhibitions as you move forward?

Sonoiki: We have spoken with the organizers of the Atlanta Hip Hop Festival about the duplication in submissions and look forward to working with them to avoid this. Most of the film festival directors that I know in Atlanta help one another in promoting each other's festivals. Last year Yemi Toure, Director of the Black Man's Film Festival, organized several meetings with a group of Atlanta-based festival Directors to discuss ways that we could support one another.

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Tell the audience something you want them to know that makes your Festival unique or special?

Sonoiki: The Atlanta Women of Color International Film Festival is the only one of its kind in the Southeast region of the United States, showcasing films by and about women of color. The majority of the films were written, directed, produced, edited, and/or shot by women of color filmmakers. That is to say, women of color were in key creative positions as well as being at the helm in decision-making process. All the films told stories that revolved around the lives of women of color. I think all these points make our festival unique. §

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