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FILM FESTIVALS

10th Annual Hollywood Black Film Festival Announces Jury and Audience Choice Award Winners

By

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With 102 films and 6 days of deliberation, jury and audience choice award-winners were announced Sunday for the 2009 Hollywood Black Film Festival (HBFF). Actress Vanessa Bell Calloway announced the winning films during the festival's invitation-only Filmmaker and Storyteller Awards brunch, held at Life on Wilshire.

"We are so pleased to be able to present awards to these filmmakers who have displayed an amazing array of cinematic talent and vision," said Tanya Kersey, Founder & Executive Director, HBFF. "The 2009 Hollywood Black Film Festival award-winners reflect the full breadth of talent, diversity, and evolution of independent black film."

"Our filmmakers this year displayed an extraordinary range and depth to their storytelling, and I am pleased to know that HBFF continues to garner a well deserved reputation as being the premiere festival for discovering and showcasing the next generation of talented Black

filmmakers," added Kersey. "We are thrilled at how the Hollywood Black Film Festival has continued to grow in attendance, local and national awareness and acclaim from filmmakers, writers and directors."

The winners receive prizes courtesy of Kodak, Writers Boot Camp, Entertainment Partners, Final Draft, Baseline Studio Systems & Film Tracker, Showbiz Software and Urban Network. In addition to product prizes and in keeping with the festival's motto:

◆ACCESS. OPPORTUNITIES. DEALS.◆ The winners also receive a series of meetings with agents, managers, development, acquisition and distribution executives. Over 44 meetings have been scheduled for the filmmaker and storyteller winners.

Director Lucky Ejim's feature film THE TENANT took the top audience prize at the 10th Annual Hollywood Black Film Festival. Sponsored by Indieflix the Audience Choice Award winner took home a cash prize in addition to prizes from Entertainment Partners, Baseline StudioSystems and Showbiz Software. In the film, Obinna, an African refugee, faces imminent deportation from Canada. His landlord, a dying retired immigration officer offers to stop the deportation if he convinces his estranged daughter to reconcile with him. In 30 days he has to turn the wheels of hate to one of love.

In the narrative feature film category, BLUE, directed by Ryan Miningham took top honors. BLUE tells the story of a prize fighter who struggles to put his dark past behind him as love seems to altar his course and makes him face his redemption while preparing for the fight of his life.

The Short Film winner was (MIS)LEADING MAN written and directed by Morocco Omari. (Mis) Leading Man is an exploration of what happens to a common man caught inside of the media fishbowl as a result of getting everything that he could ever dream of. Keith Holland seemingly has everything. He's a coveted A-list actor with all of the rights and privileges that accompany that position, but realizes that it comes hand in hand with a price that he didn't factor in. Nothing can prepare him for the fine print that comes with celebrity, or the duality of the media.

Llewellyn Smith's documentary HERSKOVITS AT THE HEART OF BLACKNESS earned first place honors in the documentary category. HERSKOVITS is story about 20th century anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits, who 're-defined' black history, making it

possible for a people formerly despised as ♦Negroes♦ to pride themselves as African-Americans. Herskovits himself was a white American of Jewish ancestry but he acquired the power to re-make the historical understanding of black people, and in the process engaged in conflicts with black scholars and elite institutions of the day. Rarely seen archival footage, provocative animation, photo re-enactments and scholars' commentary propel the story.

In the student film category, the award was presented to THE SECOND HALF written by Andrew Chang and directed by Ralph Jeffrey Elmont. In the film, Delroy, a night janitor in a high school, meets and mentors Harlan, one of the school's basketball stars, and is forced to confront his own past to save Harlan's future.

1 OUT OF 10, directed by Q, won in the music video category.

The 1st place winner in the HBFF Storyteller Competition was GOOD MOTHER written by Cassie Henderson of Tallahassee, FL. In GOOD MOTHER, a single mother diagnosed with breast cancer decides to commit a crime so that she can get healthcare in prison. BORN TO PITCH written by Robyn Hatcher of New York City took 2nd place honors. BORN TO PITCH is about Mamie ♦Peanut♦ Johnson who became the first woman to ever pitch major league baseball. A member of the Negro League♦s Indianapolis Clowns, this film follows Mamie♦s first season on the road with the Clowns where she realizes her life long dream to play professional baseball but faces losing her marriage, her child and her dignity. 3rd place went to FAR AWAY FROM HERE written by Dapo Adeshiyan of Piscataway, NJ . In FAR AWAY FROM HERE, when the soul-singing girlfriend of a rising star lawyer becomes an overnight sensation, their ten-year relationship is put to the test as her fame continues to rise, and his career begins to falter.

The HBFF Storyteller Competition was designed to promote and support new talent and continue the festival♦s pledge of creating opportunities for talented black screenwriters. As the main goal is to give new screenwriters industry exposure and help introduce them to Hollywood, in addition to the prize packages, the three finalists will have their scripts distributed to a number of studios and production company executives.

♦The diverse storytelling styles of this year♦s Storyteller Competition semi-finalists is impressive,♦ said Alexia Ryan, HBFF Storyteller Director. ♦We are pleased to be able to bring these talented, diverse voices to the attention of Hollywood♦s leading talent buyers.♦

Festival attendees enjoyed a whirlwind of six days hustling to see films, attending panels and workshops at the adjunct Infotainment Conference, and partying into the wee hours of the night. HBFF 2009 ran June 3-8 in Beverly Hills, CA.

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