

Record entries for Encounters

Since its inception nine years ago, Encounters, the South African International Documentary Festival, has gained in popularity and grown significantly. Out of the record number of over 500 films received from around the world this year, 51 have been chosen which tackle pertinent and quirky issues, tell tales and true stories, introduce audiences to illustrious, forgotten or little known figures, charismatic revolutionaries and leaders, and milestone events in world history.

The festival takes place at in Johannesburg at Nu Metro Hyde Park, 13 – 22 July 2007 and in Cape Town at Nu Metro V&A Waterfront, 20 July – 5 August. Encounters, with support from the Cape Film Commission, will repeat its outreach in Nyanga with three days of free screenings at the Zolani Centre.

This festival and its projects are supported by: SABC, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), Jameson Irish Whiskey, the Cape Film Commission (CFC), the Western Cape Provincial Government, the Gauteng Film Commission (GFC), IDFA's Jan Vrijman Fund, Africalia Belgium, Nu Metro, Tempest Sixt, Business and Arts South Africa (BASA), Input, Exclusive Books, the British Council, M-Net, the French Embassy, the Danish Film Institute, the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg, the Italian Institute of Culture in Pretoria and Holland Film.

World premieres

Among the 51 films, from 18 countries, there are 11 world premières, the second African Focus with films from Tunisia, Egypt, Senegal and the DRC, and a new sidebar – the Jameson Environment Focus, and R20 000 prize money for the winner of the Jameson Encounters Audience Award for the Best South African Documentary.

Eighteen local and 10 international filmmakers will be in attendance. In addition to the five filmmakers who will host our master classes, Encounters looks forward to welcoming 23 local and international guests, delegates representing the International Documentary Film Festival (IDFA), the Brazilian TV Producers' Association, the Docusur Festival in Spain and Al Jazeera.

In addition there are a number of events to which everyone, not just the aficionado, is welcome to enjoy – SABC/Encounters Master Classes with award winning filmmakers, presentations by the SABC and the National Film and Video Foundation, the Cultural In/Sensitivity Debate that will tackle issues of mis/understanding and mis/representing cultures and censorship. Finally, there is the New Media Panel Discussion, in association with Mobfest, that will look at burgeoning digital (cellphone and Internet) platforms.

Films

This year's opening night film, *A Pair of Boots and a Bicycle*, tells the story of Black South Africans' role in World War 2.

The film's director, Vincent Moloi, scooped last year's Jameson Encounters Audience Award.

Another local film about a remarkable man is Love, Communism, Revolution & Rivonia – Bram Fischer's Story.

South Africa's most famous satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys and Justice Albie Sachs will introduce the films in which they feature.

Among the international movies are Beethoven's Hair, Oscar-nominee Jesus Camp, Primo Levi's Journey and Jonestown: the Life and Death of Peoples Temple. Two films that focus on the socio-political significance of music are Byron Hurt's Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes and Screamers, which focuses on the popular heavy metal band System of a Down, directed by Carla Garapedin, who will attend the festival.

Manufacturing Dissent beats the master at his game and takes a critical look at Michael Moore's work. Award-winning Taxi to the Dark side follows a rural Afghani farmer to Guantanamo and Thomas Sankara: The Upright Man, provides fascinating footage on the charismatic founder of Burkina Faso. Please Vote For Me recently scooped a Sterling Feature Award at Silverdocs 2007.

Five titles feature as part of the second edition of African focus: Jihan El-Tahri's enthralling Cuba: An African Odyssey, traces the influence of Cuba in Africa's political landscape from the 1960s to the end of the Cold War. Not to be missed is the hilarious Tunisian documentary, made by Néjib Belkadhi, VHS Kahloucha. The other African focus films come from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Senegal.

Festival innovations

Besides the new Festival Card (which allows a 20% discount on 10 tickets, a saving of R70), Encounters 2007 features the Jameson Environmental Focus, consisting of four top documentaries that look at the state of our environment.

Five renowned filmmakers will be offering SABC/Encounters Master Classes: these fascinating and accessible sessions reveal tricks of the trade and the challenges facing documentary filmmakers. Eva Mulvad directed the Sundance winner Enemies of Happiness in Afghanistan and will discuss the challenges of working abroad, of portraying cultural differences. Ditsi Carolino will share her experiences with regard to access, ethics, funding and working in a developing country.

Emmy-nominated Jihan El-Tahri will talk about the challenges of sourcing and using archive material. Sundance and International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) winner Leonard Retel Helmrich will talk about when and how best to reconcile being a director and cinematographer. Emmy-award winning writer and producer Thomas Wallner will give insight on how to conceive ideas and produce a solid script for documentaries.

Input

Encounters' relationship with Input continues to grow. Input will also be hosting a presentation in Joburg and Cape Town at the Festival to prepare filmmakers for Input in May 2008 in Johannesburg.

This year six films are being co-presented with Best of Input and a special world premiere screening of the Glow of White Women by Yunus Vally which is also a product of the Encounters/SABC series Black on White, is being co-hosted. The screenings will be held in Johannesburg on 21 July at 6pm and in Cape Town on 27 July at 6pm.

Debates

Filmmakers often find themselves positioned on the fault-lines of tradition and modernity, straddling freedom of expression, academic inquest and interest with the sanctity of some indigenous knowledge systems and traditional societies. The Cultural In/Sensitivity Debate will look at how to engage with culture in South Africa, how to represent it, what to omit. Given the high profile of our panellists, this promises to be a lively debate and event not to be missed!

Presentations

The SABC will be hosting two presentations. In keeping with the Festival's theme of Heritage, the first presentation is around the erosion and destruction of African traditions and beliefs, and the threats presented by global warming to South Africa. The other is on the crucial topic of co-production.

The National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) will make a presentation on what opportunities there are for South African filmmakers in promoting their documentaries internationally and in what ways the NFVF lend its assistance.

New media panel discussion

What opportunities and challenges does new media hold for documentary filmmakers in South Africa? A discussion hosted by Encounters will bring together key experts who will address pertinent issues such as content, consumers, markets, distribution and media rights. During the festival, Encounters, in association with Mobfest, will facilitate the production of 10 three-minute films by 10 selected directors, each with the same brief and equipped with a Nokia handset: How a cellphone changed my life. The Gauteng Film Commission and the Cape Film Commission support this initiative.

Workshops

Encounters, in partnership with the Jan Vrijman Fund of IDFA, present a four-day workshop run by Leonard RetelHelmrich, which will focus on storytelling and production. The outcome of the workshop, offered in Johannesburg, will be five films, to be screened at our 10th festival next year.

Encounters, in partnership with SABC, Gauteng Film Commission and Africalia, is running a three-day Documentary Producers' Workshop, covering all the bases for successful producing. This workshop will be open to 10 documentary production companies.

Encounters makes tickets and transport available to township-based filmmakers, school learners and film students. This year it has partnered with the *Sowetan* (Power Your Future) and the Learning Channel on the Johannesburg Access programme.

Go to www.encounters.co.za for further information and booking details.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>