

TIFF PRESENTS

# HIGHER<sup>^</sup>LEARNING

Ways of Seeing (in) African Cinema:  
Films Programmed for Black History Month at TIFF Bell Lightbox  
(February, 2012)

## *African Phantasms: New African Short Films*

***The Cassava Metaphor (La Métaphore du Manioc)***. Dir. Lionel Mata, 2010, Cameroon. 15 mins.  
Production Co.: unknown.

Coco, an earnest taxi driver in Yaoundé, picks up a young woman with a strange destination in mind. An audience favourite at festivals around the world, *The Cassava Metaphor* is an irresistible road movie with a fantastically funny yet bittersweet twist.

***Mwansa the Great***. Dir. Rungano Nyoni, 2011, Zambia and U.K. 23 mins. Production Co.: Icreatefilms

A young boy uses his imagination to transform his everyday reality into an exciting quest, as he journeys from his village to the copper mines to recover the magical mud necessary to repair his sister's beloved doll.

***The Deliverance of Comfort***. Dir. Zina Saro-Wiwa, 2009, Nigeria and U.K. 7 mins. Production Co.: unknown.

Inspired by a UNESCO report on exorcisms performed on children by “priests” in West Africa, *The Deliverance of Comfort* is a satirical fable about one such “child witch.” Coining the term “Alt-Nollywood,” Saro-Wiwa utilizes supernatural and religious motifs common to the massive mainstream Nigerian film industry to challenge notions of belief, religion and childhood.

***Drexciya***. Dir. Akosua Adoma Owusu, 2010, Ghana. 12 mins. Production Co.: unknown.

Inspired by the myth and music of a 1990s Detroit electronic band, “Drexciya” is an underwater subcontinent that houses the unborn children of pregnant African women thrown off slave ships. Praised at the 2011 Tarifa African Film Festival for “the radical nature of the project” and its “poetic insight,” *Drexciya* is a stunning, eerie portrait of an abandoned Olympic-sized public swimming pool set against Accra's “Riviera,” Ghana's first pleasure beach.

***Hasaki Ya Suda***. Dir. Cedric Ido, 2011, France. 24 mins. Production Co.: DACP.

In a barren landscape sucked dry by climate change, three men battle to be the last man standing. Set in an unnamed, futuristic West African landscape, *Hasaki ya suda* is a bold, stylish twist on the samurai film.

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*Music, Magic, Clash: New Voices in the African Diaspora*

***Better Mus' Come.*** Dir. Storm Saulter, 2010, Jamaica. 104 mins. Production Co.: unknown.

A landmark in Caribbean filmmaking, *Better Mus' Come* tells the story of the infamous Green Bay Massacre of 1978, which was precipitated when rival political factions mobilized street gangs that turned an election campaign into a bloody national showdown. Against this backdrop, a wayward youth named Ricky (Sheldon Shepherd) struggles to find a place for himself as he falls into a romance with Kemala (Nicole Grey) and gets swept up in the maelstrom engulfing the streets. Director Storm Saulter uses an urgent, roving camera to create impressive set-pieces on the Kingston streets, resulting in a striking evocation of 1970s militancy that has earned his debut feature comparisons with that other indelible classic of Jamaican cinema, Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come*.

***I Want My Name Back.*** Dir. Roger Paradiso, 2011, U.S.A. 85 mins. Production Co.: unknown.

Legendary rap group The Sugarhill Gang changed the face of the music industry with their iconic 1979 release "Rapper's Delight," which brought hip-hop to the mainstream and remains to this day the biggest-selling single in hip-hop history. However, in one of the biggest swindles in music history (which is saying something), the platinum-selling group not only had their profits and publishing rights stolen from them by their mob-financed label Sugar Hill Records, but their names as well: the label took founding members Wonder Mike and Master Gee's names off of recordings that they wrote and performed, and even trademarked the group name — and Wonder Mike and Master Gee's own stage names — by providing false documents. Featuring testimony from fellow artists, music-industry insiders, fans, music journalists and the original members of The Sugarhill Gang themselves, *I Want My Name Back* chronicles Wonder Mike and Master Gee's thirty-year battle with Sugar Hill Records to reclaim their rights and recognition as hip-hop pioneers.

***Colour Me.*** Dir. Sherien Barsoum, 2011, Canada. 78 mins. Production Co.: unknown.

In the Toronto suburb of Brampton black youth are growing up with middle-class lives but ghetto dreams, immersing themselves in the outlaw fantasies of hip-hop culture as they try to form their identities. Into this emotional cauldron steps Anthony McLean, a dedicated, passionate teacher who leads motivational workshops in a Brampton high school, working with six young people to expand their ideas of what it means to be black. McLean is an apt tutor because he struggles with his own sense of black identity, having grown up biracial and attended schools where he and his brother were highly visible minorities. Director Sherien Barsoum brings a polished style and a sensitive eye to this engaging documentary, capturing the remarkable

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human alchemy as McLean coaxes his high-schoolers from put-on bravado into the riskier terrain of adulthood.

***Kinyarwanda***. Dir. Alrick Brown, 2011, U.S.A. and France. 101 mins. Production Co.: Blok Box IMG / Cineduc Rwanda / Commission Européenne / KinyarwandaMovie / Visigoth Pictures.

Winner of the 2011 Sundance Audience Award for most popular international drama, *Kinyarwanda* offers a new perspective on the 1994 Rwandan genocide. As the conflict between the Hutu and the Tutsi intensified, the Mufti of Rwanda, the most respected Muslim leader in the country, issued a fatwa forbidding Muslims from participating in the killing of the Tutsi. In the city of Kigali, the imams opened the doors of the Grand Mosque to those fleeing the conflict, making it a place of refuge for both Muslims and Christians, Hutus and Tutsis. Weaving together six narratives based on the accounts of survivors who sought safety in the Grand Mosque, *Kinyarwanda* deepens and broadens our understanding of those terrifying events. Born in Jamaica and trained at New York University, director Alrick Brown brings an African diasporic perspective to Rwanda's recent history, adding important new layers to the growing body of films on the subject.