

The Arts

THE BLACK FILM FESTIVAL

By K. G. Coaston

It will be a long time before people stop talking about the highly successful first "Black Film Festival" for independent black film-makers from Britain and from the USA sponsored by the Commonwealth Arts Centre and the National Film Theatre.

For two weeks, February 1-13th, the Commonwealth Institute buzzed with the excitement of black images, issues and ideas. Amid conversations about art and politics and the sheer fun of seeing old friends, the stage was set for a memorable occasion.

about organising a black film festival but the high cost of bringing films to Britain made it seem like an impossibility. When festival organiser Parminder Vir attended a black American film festival in Amsterdam her interest was sparked: "It was such a refreshing thing to see positive images by black people and about black people." She began to develop the idea through her job as arts officer at the Commonwealth Institute.

The problem of financing the festival was solved when Parminder Vir found out that the National Film Theatre

film-makers.

Mr Jim Pines, a film historian and the festival organiser in charge of programming the films explains the aim of the festival: "We wanted to promote independent black films in a way that has never happened in this country. Independent film-makers have always been at the dogs end, especially black films which have always been ghettoised."

He developed each night's programme so that there was a complimentary black British and black American film, even though there were fewer

Presentations were made by film-makers, critics, historians and media representatives accompanied by open discussions on organisation, training, working in the industry as a performer or technician and setting up independent production companies. On the second Saturday of the festival there was a black animation programme devoted to kids where black cartoons and stories were shown.

With a close to capacity audience every night, as well as some nights where there was standing room only, the total number attending the festival was over five thousand. This mass support of the community was one of the most notable achievements of the festival, especially since no paper except WIV gave significant coverage to the festival.

Claudia Booth, director of the British film "No Virginity?" explains: "The greatest advertisement for this film festival did not come through the conventional channels but through word of mouth, one black person telling another the magnificent way the black community has responded."

For people attending the festival was also a strong feature of its success. Armet Francis, designer of the festival poster and leaflets puts it this way: "It got a lot of people out who would not normally come; a lot of the nine to five instead of the normal in-crowd and it attracted a lot of people who are concerned with the black situation in total."

Opportunity

The opportunity to listen to the communities assessment of their films gave film-makers useful information as well as a morale boost. Carl Clay, black American director of the film "Radio" says: "It has reinforced the film-makers determination to continue because you need that kind of feedback and support. The audiences were here and that shows that people are starved for alternative images. Each person who came out helped justify the need for more support for independent black films."

Information exchanged between the British and American film-makers was another significant feature of the festival. Horace Ove, veteran film-maker from this country who directed "Reggae" and "Pressure" sums it up by saying: "Black film-makers in this country for the first time met and had a dialogue with black American film-makers. We have been able to exchange ideas, get to know each other's problems and find out how each other work."

The difference in



Menelik Shabazz, Horace Ove

approach and technique was reason for mutual inspiration. The black American films had more experimental styles and themes as compared to the more formal social realism or straightforward documentary approach of the black British films.

While the direct approach in confronting political issues by the black British film-makers was in sharp contrast to the more subtle political approach taken by some black American film-makers.

American who lived in London for two years and who directed the film

people learn and the manner in which people examine things. There are a lot of things in society that should be called into question but there are also a lot of things in ourselves that need to be questioned."

Differences

In spite of any artistic differences, what all the film-makers had in common was a need to find more finance and distribution outlets for their films. They need to win patronage, subsidies and act as a pressure group for black British

support for black British and black American film-makers and in providing a platform for the film-makers to learn from each other. It has demystified the whole process of film-making and clearly shown that black people can master the necessary technical skills to reflect our own world view through the cinema.

Festival organiser, Parminder Vir notes: "Technical skills are not just the domain of the white man. The festival has demonstrated that we can master them making

As a springboard for black thought and



Festival organiser Parminder Vir

Finding out who was in the audience between films was almost as much of an attraction as the film showings. A high interest in the work of black independent films brought together a varied crowd: artist and activist, journalist and broadcaster, college students and community leaders, and most importantly the grassroots folk who will ultimately be called on to support the film-makers efforts.

Opportunity

It was a rare opportunity to see most of the films because only a few will ever be on general release at the theatres or on television. Though the quality of the films was affected by money restraints, the commitment to explore black consciousness, life style and struggle was high.

For several years there have been discussions

was interested in sponsoring a similar project. The National wanted to have a festival that would feature US black independent films, but they were not interested in black British films because many of them had been shown at the National before, even though few blacks had attended.

Agreement

An agreement was reached so that the Commonwealth and the National could work in partnership, although each would have its own festival. The National paid for 15 American films and the cost to bring over 10 black American film-makers but the Commonwealth was given unrestricted use of the films.

The Black Film-maker Foundation based in New York city, worked with both institutions to collect the American films and to liaison with

British films. Only films that were made by blacks were accepted.

The total programme included 41 films of features and shorts. Through fiction, documentary and animation a wide range of subjects were explored — from history to education, social economic problems to political struggle, psychology to spirituality and the concerns of youth, women and artists.

The nightly film showings were complemented by community and regional programmes which were held in the Abeng Centre in Brixton, the Art Lab in Birmingham and the Afro-Caribbean Arts Centre in Nottingham.

Artistic

During the first weekend of the festival workshops were held to explore artistic and political issues facing independent film-makers.



T. Bone with wife and Rauf Addu

"Flesh, Metal, Wood" elaborates: "Black films made in Britain tended to be highly political which is good. You need films like these but you also need to check out how

films, along the lines of The Film-makers Foundation in New York, was repeatedly voiced.

This first "Black Film Festival" has achieved a lot in terms of mobilising

direction, the "Black Film Festival" will undoubtedly help shape the future development of independent black cinema in Britain and in the States.



Imruh Caesar speaking up from the audience

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Entertainment

by Carlyle Success



Eli — "not new to the music business".

ELI IMMANUEL — So Easy

ELI IMMANUEL is a name that should be familiar to most listeners of Reggae music on the radio.

After all, his record "Easy Lover" received a considerable amount of airplay on the radio stations that play reggae music, over the Christmas period. But, due to unforeseen circumstances, when the record was receiving the height of publicity, it was not possible for the record to be bought in the shops.

Eli says that this was due to the pressing plant that were under orders from the label on which the record was released were slow in delivering the finished product. Apparently, the first 1,500 copies that were pressed of "Easy", sold out within a few weeks!

Eli is not new to the

music business, in fact, he says he has been singing for as long as he can remember. But, as far as any recording was concerned, it happened in Jamaica, where Gregory Isaacs produced the single "Stranger in Love". This was in 1976.

Since then, Eli has been hopping back and forth between JA and GB trying to build up his musical experience while, at the same time, being able to make a living.

His musical influences are, apparently, only confined to Reggae (not that this is a bad thing). Bob Marley, for instance, is one of his primary influences. He says of him: "I first look on him as a rastaman. You have to check a man as rasta, because that's where his influence comes from — Rasta Fari."

"I see that he did come

out of the ghetto (as a Rastaman) and did express the feelings of the people left in the ghetto." Eli's other main influence is Gregory Isaacs whom he respects greatly and is very happy to know.

There are a few new things in the pipeline, that I am at liberty to disclose to you, the reader. Firstly, Eli plans to release a new single by Easter, entitled "Doing It Right", which he says is a

classic. Next, he is already working on an album with those legendary musicians Roots Radics. The album "Immanuel" and is expected to be released by the summer.

BLACK ECHOES AWARDS

The 5th Annual Black Echoes Reggae Awards Show takes place this year at Britain's biggest and newest rock venue, the Fair Deal in Brixton on Sunday March 7, 4pm to midnight.

The awards, sponsored by Black Echoes, Britain's only black music weekly, have become an important part of the UK reggae scene's calendar. The awards will this year be presented to artists in ten different categories as voted by the readers of Black Echoes in their

annual poll. The categories are: band, male vocalist, female vocalist, single, lovers rock single, album, musician, sound system, DJ, and newcomer. Guest personalities will be on hand for the presentations and the event will also feature a live concert.

Topping the bill are Jamaican DJ duo Papa Michigan and General Smiley, making their UK debut, supported by Ranking Dread, Carroll Thompson, Lion Youth, The Cool Notes and the

instigators.

The awards have proved a very popular annual event in the reggae field and tickets for the awards ceremony and show are available from all leading reggae specialists, Premier Box Office, London Theatre Bookings, or by post from Black Echoes, 113 High Holborn, London WC1. Tickets are £6.00.

For further details please telephone Paul Phillips on 01-405 0461.

RECORD REVIEWS

compilation LP (Ace)

This is a compilation album of some classic and some rare R & B and Blues recordings.

The title of the album is actually the name of a club that is run every Thursday night from 9pm to 3am, by a young man named Gaz. For those six hours, he and a friend play a non-stop selection of Golden Oldies ranging from Blues to Rock Steady.

The album first came about when Ted Carroll (one of the proprietors of Ace/Chiswick records, asked Gaz if he was interested in compiling an album of his favourite Blues and R & B tunes. Gaz agreed, and he was then let loose into the vaults to listen to some old master tapes, from which he chose the final selection.

Included on the album are two tracks from the legendary Etta James "Good rockin' mama" and "Tough lover". Also, there are tracks from Richard Berry, John Lee Hooker and many others. Definitely the album to have for 1982, as far as Blues collectors are concerned.

"Tighten Up Vol. One". V. Artiste (Trojan)

Trojan Records have only last week re-released this classic Rock-Steady compilation album. However, there is only a special limited edition of 1,000 copies.

The album was originally released sometime in the mid-seventies and sold considerably, even before it was officially in the

same thing will happen again. For, as they say, "The album has been re-released because of public demand."

Included on the Album are tracks "Long Shot Kick the Bucket", "Live Injection" and "Fattie Fattie", among others. For those who love old Rock steady, this album is a must.

*Also released on Trojan at the same time as "Tighten Up", is another rock steady album which has been compiled by Chris Lane (he of fashion records) and is called "Gems from Treasure Isle", or "Real Cool Rock Steady". This album features tracks by the Paragons, Dennis Al Capone and "U" Roy.

"Strange things are happening", Tristram Palma (Greensleeves)

SPECIAL ROOTS ROCKERS selection from the man with the future of Reggae in the palm of his hands. Heavy rhythm track, nice lyrics and some superb vocalising. Dare I say... another Palma winner.

"I won't close my eyes", UB40 (DEP International)

At the risk of sounding clichéd, these boys have come a long way from the hole queues of England and are rapidly establishing their trademark (UB40) as a household sign. The tune, "I won't close my eyes" is their most rootsy yet. The flipside is entitled "Politician", toasted by the man called "Astro".

The latest comedy example of what passes for humour on our television screens.

At a time when 'The Ronnies' are resorting to goliwog and 'native' jokes and Jim Davidson adds his gospel preacher imitations to Britain's growing industry for racist jokes, even the 'intellectuals' of 'Not The Nine o'clock News' throw in a joke about Do It Yourself Paki Bashing, 'Over The Top' certainly seems hell bent on proving that race and sex are definitely not too hot to handle.

Middle-aged whizz kid producer / presenter Chris Tarrant bared his soul early on in the series by flinging a bucket of water over a young black girl in the audience for allegedly looking like Joshua Nkomo (watch out for this name it crops up again and again in OTT) and followed that up with a phoney unfunny African accent. Mr Tarrant, who incidentally bears a striking resemblance to Andy Pandy, is not only under the impression that we all look alike (yawn), clearly he can't tell the difference between boys and girls.

In this he is not alone, lone female presenter Helen Atkinson Wood seems to be having some gender identity problems too. During OTT's 'daring' and 'spontaneous' escapades (often involving buckets of

goo being poured remains as limp, bland and detached as a slowly melting ice-cream. Dressed in a very restrained manner as if to dispel any possible idea that she belongs to the female species (in marked contrast to the usual bikini clad girls) she attempts to join in the nauseating male camaraderie of the programme with gusto. Particularly disappointing is Ellen Thomas, a talented black actress last seen in 'Teresa', whose contribution to OTT is grinning and baring it.

But the REAL star of the show is Lenny Henry, who has made his name, as others before him, from the central assumption that being black is in itself hilariously funny, that being African is a scream and that being Rastafarian is cute. Which is a shame because he could be really funny as part of the series 'Three of a Kind' indicates. Instead he condemns us all to more jokes about sun tans, jungles, monkeys, soul food and accents. Even black footballers don't escape the racist boot. Lenny Henry's humour should go down well on the terraces. Not enough for you Lenny?

And what do Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe and Zimbabwe have in common? Well, they are all African names, and in case you didn't know,

black people are about boils down to a list of African politicians names. Caribbean-fishes etc which could have been compiled by a moron and offer no insight or indeed humour. His stereotypes are presented for the amusement of the white audience and just in case you had any doubt about

where he is coming from, he is coming from the ghetto. If you can't beat 'em join 'em, eh Lenny? Talking to Russell Harty last week he said that he learnt everything he knows with the Black and White Minstrels. Too true.

It seems that TV companies, while making a few concessions and finally including some black faces on the box,

must counter racism through so-called light entertainment slots. More disturbing is the fact that there seems to be no shortage of black people willing to humiliate themselves in order to be accepted. Do black comedians, like Groucho Marx, only want to join a club which won't have them as a member?



WAVERLEY GEORGE

WAVERLEY GEORGE is this week's Miss Photogenic 1982 entry. Waverley is from Ealing, West London.

Photographic modelling, fashion modelling and cover girl all interest the 26-year-old. But at the moment she says that she is experiencing difficulty in contacting black agencies.

Remember girls, if you would like to enter our contest just send your black and white pics to: Westindian World, Miss Photogenic '82, 36 West Green Road, Tottenham, London N15 5NP.

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Arts Round-up by Don Kinch



UJAMAA

Ujamaa is the Swahili word for communal living. The word has inspired and influenced Black Organisations, from political parties to housing associations, because embodied in the word is the total concept of collectivity — doing things together.

Ujamaa Theatre Players (UTP), was founded at the University of Ghana, Legon in 1978 with the basis of its dramatic work rooted firmly in African ritualistic traditions. Using a mixed-media format: that is, a combination of dance, drama, poetry and music, the group aims at tracing the quintessence of the historical, religious, political and cultural heritage of Africa.

At present, the group is here on an educational / cultural tour out of the belief that the cross fertilisation of various groups is crucial to the

development of a black world culture.

They've brought with them, a highly impressive repertoire, which has already been performed in Birmingham, Bristol and Nottingham entitled THE AFRICAN IMAGE and which includes: Sunlae: A dance drama, The African Expression: Poetry and Music

The Return Of Kweku Munko: In this drama Kweku has gone to the land of the partially dead, while the younger generation mourn his departure. In this extract Kweku makes his plea to Odomankoma, who is the

maker of the land of the living and the dead.

KWEKU: My ancestors, higher spirits, I summon you all this dawn

to present to you, a bottle of schnapp.

I know I am obliged to offer you drink

I know I must slaughter sheep

pouring out the blood into the earth for your departed souls

So that you in turn will receive me after I have crossed the river of no return.

The group will be performing in London from April, watch this paper for specific details.

For further information contact: Ujamaa, c/o The Cultural Centre, 326/328 Hampstead Road, Birmingham B20 2RA.

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ARTS DIARY Tooting



IN the introduction to this arts page, I started out by attempting to make you aware of the surge of artistic activity and events now taking place in various black communities up and down the country. One such event will be taking place over this weekend from Friday 26th Feb - Sunday 28th Feb at the RACS Hall, 180 Upper Tooting High Street.

The show entitled 'CULTURAL COLLECTIONS' will feature groups such as Tara Arts, Staunch Poets & Players, Temba Theatre, Black Tulip, and Legba Dancers. David Roddigan of Capital Radio fame and Rudolph Walker of Love Thy Neighbour fame and currently appearing at the Lyric in 'Where There Is Darkness' will be putting in guest

appearances.

The event is being organised by The Tooting Youth Project, from which the proceeds will go towards buying a fifteen seater mini-bus. The idea behind the show is also to promote the wealth of Black Talent which exists among both the young hopefuls as well as the amateurs and professionals. But more importantly to provide much needed positive images for our young people and to demonstrate that there are those, who despite success and fame, are still very much concerned about the problems that face our community.

For further information and bookings contact: The Tooting Youth Project, 946 Garratt Lane, London SW17. Tel. 672 9643.

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