

# FESTIVAL FILM JAKMÈL

VENEZ À HAÏTI ET REGARDEZ LE MONDE



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# FESTIVAL FILM JAKMÈL

**100 FILMS, 30 COUNTRIES, 7 DAYS**



**50,000 VIEWERS, 100 FILMS, 30 COUNTRIES, 7 DAYS**

FESTIVAL FILM JAKMÈL'S MISSION IS TO EDUCATE, ENTERTAIN, AND UNITE HAITIANS AND FOREIGNERS THROUGH CINEMA BY PROVIDING FREE SCREENINGS AND A DIVERSE SELECTION OF HIGH QUALITY FILMS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE. THE FESTIVAL SERVES AS A BRIDGE FROM WHICH HAITIANS CAN DISCOVER THE WORLD, AND THE FOREIGN COMMUNITY CAN EXPERIENCE THE INTENSITY AND BEAUTY OF THE HAITIAN PEOPLE AND CULTURE.

THE PICTURESQUE COASTAL TOWN OF JACMEL, HAITI, THE SETTING FOR FESTIVAL FILM JAKMÈL, IS CONSIDERED THE CULTURAL CAPITAL OF THE NATION AND PROUDLY REMAINS PEACEFUL DESPITE MUCH OF THE COUNTRY'S TURMOIL.

THE FESTIVAL IS PRESENTED BY FOSAJ (FONDATION SANT D'A JACMEL),  
A NON PROFIT FOUNDATION BASED IN JACMEL, HAITI.

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# FESTIVAL FILM JAKMÈL

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***"Cultural Awakening Enchants Thousands .....Wildly Ambitious"*** Miami Herald

***"Power of Cinema Curbs Isolation"*** Associated Press

Entering into its third year, Haiti's Festival Film Jakmèl brings the world to a population yearning for contact with and access to the outside. "We cannot travel; we don't have passports or money or visas to get to those places," said festival-goer Fenton Stevenson to the Miami Herald. "This way these places come to us." In packed theaters, with throngs of people waiting out front, some of the best in contemporary cinema screens for a week each summer in what's referred to as the cultural capital of Haiti; the picturesque coastal town of Jacmel.

With roughly 50,000 people attending throughout the week, all screenings are open to the public and free of charge. While daytime screenings take place in three makeshift theaters around town, the festival's feature presentations take place under the stars each night. A giant outdoor screen set up in front of the sea attracts thousands of families, students, market vendors, laborers, peasants, aid workers, diplomats and visiting foreign filmmakers, all gathering to watch films that have been lent free of charge by such companies as Bac Films, HBO Films, Dreamworks SKG, and Sony Pictures Classics. This year, a closing night concert for the over 6,000 spectators featured one of Haiti's most popular bands, Jahnesta.

Featuring 100 films from 30 countries the 2005 festival welcomed acclaimed directors Raoul Peck (*Sometimes in April*), and Jeff Zimbalist (*Favela Rising*) in addition to presenting award winning films such as *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George), *Motorcycle Diaries* (Walter Salles), *Maria Full of Grace* (Josh Marston), *The Agronomist* (Jonathan Demme), *Comme une Image* (Agnès Jaoui), *Le Goût de Jeunes Filles* (John L'Écuyer) and *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou). Beyond the screenings, the festival also presented daily film workshops hosted by visiting filmmakers, including Haitian-born Mr. Peck and Dany Leferriere. The focus of the workshops ran the gamut of subjects, from screenwriting to casting to actual production.

In addition to offering locals a temporary respite from their daily struggles, the festival offers wide exposure and global education through film. As filmmaker Zimbalist remarks, "With the exchanges that stem from watching a movie like *Favela Rising* in a place like Jacmel, one can see the potential for media to be a vehicle for very real change." With over 50% illiteracy and dramatic unemployment in Haiti, the festival employs dozens of locals, including a theater troupe that dubbed 12 films from their original language into Creole, Haiti's most widely spoken language. Through employment and attracting enough visitors to pack local hotels, the festival's financial impact on the local economy is increasingly significant.

Through exposure to the outside world and a growing important financial contribution to the town's economy, Festival Film Jakmèl is working to help salvage and resurrect at least one part of this struggling and often-misunderstood nation.



# FESTIVAL FILM JAKMÈL

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## TESTIMONIALS

*"Festival Film Jakmel allowed us to visit several countries through movies. It put some activities in the town and gave us a good idea on how others are living in the world. Many people have the same problems that we have here. Many have found solutions. I hope next year the festival happens again."*

--Osse, moto driver

*"First of all, I have to say how impressed I was by Festival Film Jakmel because it took place when the country was in its deepest hole, once again, congratulations. The festival showed me that there was real hope for Haiti, cause I'm thinking, through art and film and music, tourists might start coming back to Haiti."*

--Jimmy Jean Louis, actor

*"Attending Festival Film Jakmel gave me a deeper understanding of the value of sparking dialog and debate in areas where the film's message is really relevant. The exchanges that stem from watching a movie like "Favela Rising" in a place like Haiti, one can see the potential for media to be a vehicle of very real change."*

--Jeff Zimbalist, director/producer

*"I just got home from the unprecedented and well-organized Film Festival Jakmel. Jacmel is an excellent place for a film festival, just like any the other film festival in the Caribbean. The staff was great, it was a terrific and very informative experience. As for "Cousines", thank you very much for your hard work, dedication, attention and all your efforts in promoting our film. I look forward for next year and every year to be at the Festival!"*

--Wilkenson Bruna, producer

*"The Film Festival is a beautiful project that should take place every year. It gives us decent distraction, the topic of some of the films deals directly with our problems here and makes us think of solutions."*

--Jules Aben, Jacmelien Cyber Café worker

*"Festival Film Jakmel is a positive thing for the town which we are so proud of. We received a lot of visitors during the festival which also gave business here a boost. Several of those who worked for the festival were happy for the security and ambiance. We are looking forward to next year."*

-- Dadou Maximillien, Pepsi Center

*"This is very new for Haiti, and I am surprised they had the guts to do it. It's like a giant public school. It's another kind of food."*

-- Raoul Peck, director

*"There are young people here who are full of hope, and every day, at every moment of their lives, they think about what's to come for Haiti. This helps to forget their daily life problems and helps them imagine what they can do tomorrow, for their families and their country"*

-- Jean Auguste, student



PHOTOS BY CARA BUCKLEY/HERALD STAFF

FOUNDERS: Patrick Boucard, right, and David Belle started the Jacmel International Film Festival, which has drawn big crowds.

# CULTURAL AWAKENING

A FREE FILM  
FESTIVAL IN  
SOUTHERN  
HAITI  
ENCHANTS  
THOUSANDS  
IN A  
COUNTRY  
GRIPPED BY  
DESPAIR.

BY CARA BUCKLEY  
cbuckley@herald.com

JACMEL, Haiti — One moonless inky night this week, 4,000 Haitians gathered along their town's waterfront, sat down and spent the next three hours lost in a large window of light.

A giant outdoor movie screen flickered before them, transporting them into other people's lives and to faraway places they'd never otherwise see.

Haiti might be in its darkest, most anarchic hour, with murderous gangs besieging its capital and its economy in shreds, but in this peaceful seaside city, a cultural awakening is under way. Every day this week, films from Haiti and the world have been screened around the city as part of a wildly ambitious international film festi-

val that has already achieved its founders' most basic aim: to infuse a stricken people with hope.

The Jacmel International Film Festival, which began July 9 and ends today, was different from most festivals of its kind. Films were shown three times daily in makeshift theaters, their crumbling walls patched with plywood, and at nighttime on a 18-by-25-foot screen on the city's wharf. Every screening was free, and without exception, packed by locals.

The incongruity between this movie festival in Jacmel and the horrors two hours north in Port-au-Prince, where a Haitian journalist's mutilated body was found

•TURN TO FILM FESTIVAL, 4B



MAKESHIFT THEATER: The film festival's outdoor screenings drew thousands of Haitians, including these youngsters,

## HAITI

## Fest offers hope to southern Haiti

\*FILM FESTIVAL, FROM 1B

Thursday, was lost on no one.

"There's always a looming sense of disaster from Port-au-Prince, and at some points, some members of our team were questioning whether we should do this," said David Belle, 33, one of the festival's founders. "But I felt it was more important than ever."

Belle, an American filmmaker who was romanced by Haiti 13 years ago, dreamed up the idea of hosting a festival here with a Jacmel native, Patrick Boucard, 49, in 2003.

Boucard is from a prominent Jacmel family that still owns some of the largest buildings in town. After hopscotching around the United States in his youth, Boucard returned home with his wife, Kate, two years ago to open an arts center by the sea.

"I love this area, and I love the people, and I want to expand the horizons of Haitians," Boucard said. "In a selfish way, I'm preserving my environment."

## AN OASIS

If Port-au-Prince, with its kidnappings and bloodthirstiness, is Haiti at its most hellish, Jacmel is its oasis. The city is impoverished but beautiful in its near ruin, lined with grand, decrepit French colonial buildings that give it the feel of a lost New Orleans. Whenever Port-au-Prince descended into chaos, as it has again now, Jacmel kept its peace, largely because its people closely watch newcomers and manage to keep any probable troublemakers out.

Boucard's art center offers training to self-taught artists, but Boucard and Belle yearned to bring the world to Jacmel. Fifty percent of Haitians are illiterate; few can afford televisions, and even fewer can afford the luxury of a movie. Anyway, few theaters are operating.



For the first film festival, held in July 2004, Boucard and Belle scraped together \$120,000 and corralled 85 Haitian documentaries, shorts and feature films. They convinced American companies to rent them equipment and rigged up a screen at the town's crossroads.

Half the town showed up for opening night, but the next day, the festival's smaller venues were curiously vacant. After some sleuthing, Belle discovered locals couldn't fathom entering a private venue without paying. "They didn't know what a film festival was," Belle said. So he visited key people in each neighborhood to invite one and all. From then on, the screenings overflowed, and after the festival ended, locals dogged Belle and Boucard, asking when the festival was coming back.

It nearly didn't. As Port-au-Prince's violence spun out of control, Belle and Boucard worried about visitors' safety and feared that the thousands of locals gathered for the nightly film would provide an easy target should the capital's gang warfare bleed out. But Jacmel had opened its tiny airport, which meant outsiders could avoid the often

perilous road from Port-au-Prince to town. In April, as Haiti's prospects plummeted, the pair decided the festival was a go.

Help poured in. After some persuading, such major studios as HBO, Dreamworks and Lions Gate lent the festival major releases — among them *Hotel Rwanda* and *The Motorcycle Diaries* — for free. Friends threw fundraisers and showed up in Jacmel to work without pay. A young local theater group dubbed a dozen movies in Creole, recorded in a hastily erected sound room. Fat donations came from the French and Spanish embassies, Haiti's Ministry of Culture and Crowning Rooster Arts, which Belle runs with filmmaker Katharine Kean, who also owns Tap Tap Restaurant in South Beach.

In the end, the festival offered 100 films from 30 countries and, at least in the daytime, couldn't match local demand.

"We cannot travel; we don't have the passports or money or visas to get to those places," said Fenton Stevenson, 27, a festivalgoer from Jacmel. "This way, these places come to us."

Directors from the Caribbean, South Africa and New York flew in to host free filmmaking and acting workshops that immediately ran out of space. Others, though, stayed away, fearing for their safety. By late this week, security guards were installed at the

smaller daytime venues, because too many people were trying to shoehorn themselves in. Near bedlam ensued outside a jammed screening of *Sometimes in April*, a film about Rwanda by the Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck.

## SOME RISKS

"This is very new for Haiti, and I am surprised they had the guts to do it," said Peck, who hosted a filmmaking workshop. "It's like a giant public school. It's another kind of food."

But with every advance comes risk. One of co-founder Belle's greatest fears is that after bringing the world to Jacmel and teaching its youth to make films and project their realities on screen, people here will feel even more trapped and limited by their country's deepening failures.

Yet for one young Haitian at least, the festival offered sorely needed, if temporary, liberation: It lifted him out of the beleaguered Haiti of now into the Haiti that could be.

"There are young people here who are full of hope, and every day, at every moment of their lives, they think about what's to come for Haiti," said Jean Auguste, 22, a student who drank in the festival workshops.

"This helps to forget their daily life problems and helps them imagine what they can do tomorrow, for their families and their country," Auguste said.



CARA BUCKLEY/HERALD STAFF

**WAITING TO GET IN:** Festivalgoers try to see a jammed screening of the movie *Sometimes in April*.

# Haitians glimpse Paradiso on Earth

A film festival demonstrates the power of cinema to curb isolation

SAPA-AP  
Jacmel, Haiti

A muddy track instead of a red carpet, guest directors in jeans not tuxedos, and an abandoned customs house as a makeshift lobby. It isn't the Oscars or the Croisette promenade at Cannes, but the Jacmel Film Festival is as close as Haiti comes to having its own international film event.

On closing night last Saturday, the public didn't pay the last gusts of wind from Hurricane Emily much notice as they sat under the stars in front of a giant screen set up on a disused wharf.

About 5 000 children and teens huddled on the ground, with hundreds of adults behind them competing for a few old cane chairs.

The southern city of Jacmel and its film festival are an oddity in Haiti, a country going through some of its bleakest hours of violence and misery in the 17 months since ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled a bloody rebellion.

Yet, with nearly 100 movies from about 30 countries screened free of charge over the past week, the festival achieved its prime goal: to be a window onto the culture of one of the world's most deprived people, of whom 80% among the 8-million-strong population are illiterate.

"Cinema is the most immediate medium, especially here, where culture is very visual and few people can own a TV or a radio," said Patrick Boucard, the festival's co-director.

"We thought it was the best way to show the rest of the world to Haitians, open up their minds. When you're in misery, it's easy to feel isolated."

Boucard (49) belongs to an old family of Jacmel, a port city two



PHOTO: ARIANA CUBILLOS / AP

**Great escape ...** thousands of Haitians huddle in front of an open-air screen to watch the documentary *Favela Rising* as part of the closing night of Haiti's Jacmel Film Festival.

hours' drive south of the capital, Port-au-Prince. Hidden behind steep mountains and a single winding road, it has been spared much of the violence and kidnappings that shake the capital, where hundreds have been killed since Aristide was forced out.

The hometown of many celebrated Haitian writers and artists, Jacmel retains a certain cultural prestige. Life goes on quietly along its dusty streets, where crumbling colonial mansions with gingerbread facades and wrought-iron balconies seem frozen in the days of the French coffee planters who built them more than 200 years ago.

A painter and sculptor himself, Boucard has an art gallery in a former coffee warehouse from which he runs the festival and the Jacmel Art Centre Foundation, which provides free cinema and art workshops for the city's youth.

"Every Haitian is an artist," he said. "We've lost our agriculture, never had an industry: art and culture is the only thing we have to sell. It's what makes us unique."

Boucard launched the first festival last year with co-director David Belle, who is in charge of programming.

They said this year's screenings – on the wharf and at four other locations – had attracted about 45 000 viewers.

"At first we had to do a lot of community outreach. People couldn't believe it really was free," said Belle, a 32-year-old film director from New York who has lived in Jacmel, on and off, for 13 years.

He said once-empty screenings were now overcrowded, and that security had been needed to handle the crowds that couldn't get in.

Organisers raised \$150 000 (about R1-million) to rent the electricity generator and other equipment for the festival, while industry heavyweights such as Sony and HBO provided movies free of charge.

And what a selection it was, running the gamut from triple Academy Award nominee *Hotel Rwanda* to an *Asterix and Obelix* feature cartoon.

Belle said about 200 local volunteers helped with organisation, "but anything you do in Haiti is a struggle because of the complete lack of infrastructure and educated human resources".

The closing night featured *Favela Rising*, a Jeff Zimbalist-directed award-winning documentary about a group of self-taught musicians in a Brazilian slum.

The audience booed and jeered as pictures of gang wars and police abuse showed a reality that was uncomfortably close to their own.

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

Andrew Maykuth Online  
The Philadelphia Inquirer  
July 18, 2004

## Artists try to show another side of Haiti amid political chaos

*The Jacmel Film Festival offers 70 films free of charge to an isolated people starved for movies, a rarity even in the capital.*

JACMEL, Haiti -- It takes some fortitude to plan a film festival in a country where the central government has collapsed, the president has fled into exile, and the only international visitors are relief workers and peacekeepers.

But the Jacmel Film Festival opened July 9 in this musty city on Haiti's southern coast with only a few hiccups: An American projectionist failed to show after reading a State Department advisory warning U.S. citizens to stay away from Haiti; and a power outage temporarily darkened the screens until backup generators were found.

"We're trying to change the image of Haiti as a place of war and dictators," said Patrick Boucard, a Haitian artist born in Jacmel who organized the festival along with David Belle, a U.S. independent film director.

The retrospective of 70 films, most of them with Haitian themes, was timed to mark the 200th anniversary of Haiti's independence. But it was nearly canceled when a rebellion broke out in February and President Jean-Bertrand Aristide fled the country, prompting the United Nations to send in international peacekeepers to restore order.

"We stopped planning and were totally uncertain about where it was going," said Belle, who shuttles between homes in New York and Jacmel. After calm returned - Jacmel was never seriously affected by the rebellion - the organizers decided to forge ahead, persuading 15 foreign directors to travel to Haiti from Europe and the Americas.

"There's never been a proper film festival in Haiti, and never anything on this scale," said Belle, 32, who first visited Haiti in 1993 while working on a documentary. The 10-day festival ends today.

Boucard and Belle wanted to make the films accessible, so they are not charging admission - the festival's \$125,000 cost has been underwritten by Haitian corporate sponsors and friends. The two men even commissioned taxis to drive into the mountains around Jacmel to bring rural Haitians into town.

"We're interested in showing films to people who have never seen movies before," Boucard said. Movie theaters are a rarity even in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and are nonexistent in the countryside.

"We're trying to get as many people to see [the festival] as possible," he said. "We'd like to change their idea of films, to show them that films are more than action movies."

Festival offerings include historical documentaries, short features, and full-length movies, including *The Comedians*, a 1967 classic based on the Graham Greene novel set in Haiti and starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Many were shot by Haitians and are in Creole, the local language. A few are set elsewhere but touch on themes of interest to Haitians - AIDS, environmental degradation, globalization.

The movies are playing to packed and enthusiastic houses in local schools and public buildings, where the venues may be makeshift - one was shown to an audience seated on benches, on a porch darkened by hanging sheets - but the equipment is first-rate.

"I can see in people's faces that they're enjoying it," said Ronald Demedet, 23, an artist who was serving as the

doorman outside one presentation. He said Jacmel residents had been starved for movies since the only local cinema closed three years ago.

Jacmel, founded three centuries ago during French colonial times, is graced by swaying palm trees and fronts on the turquoise waters of the Caribbean. But many of its stone warehouses and wooden buildings have rusty metal roofs and are in advanced states of decay, reflecting the decline of Haiti's economy. The port now is used only by a few local fishermen.

Boucard, 48, whose prosperous family were Jacmel coffee exporters, grew up in Haiti and Mexico, dabbling in the Haitian crafts market before getting a master's degree in art in England. Last year he and his South African wife, Kate Tarratt Cross, began to restore his family's aging seaside warehouse compound into an art school.

Two weeks before Aristide's government collapsed, they opened the Jacmel Art Center, known in Creole as Fondation Sant d'A Jakmel.

Most art training in Haiti is aimed at producing painters to make the cookie-cutter primitive art aimed at the tourist market. The art center's mission, assisted by foreign benefactors and patrons, is to expose Haitian artists to international influences.

"Ours is the only painting school in Haiti that is current and contemporary," Boucard said. Fourteen resident artists work at the center.

"We're trying to make Jacmel the cultural capital of Haiti," said Boucard, who is also opening a cafe as part of the center. Next year the school plans to expand its programs into other media and bring in 25 foreign artists for teaching stints.

"Haiti is isolated, so it's important to bring in some ideas from outside," he said.

The same idea motivated the film festival - to expose Haitians to other points of view.

"Fifty years of dictatorships and terror have had a lot of effect on Haitians," said Boucard, who stays out of Haitian party politics because it is so perilous.

"We're working on a small scale here. People may see how things are done in other places, and maybe things here will start changing."

# The World Association for Christian Communication Media Development

Celebrating Cinema / January 2005



## Haiti - Cinema Revival

by Charles Arthur

**A** remarkable event took place in a small south coast town in Haiti in July 2004. Over ten days from 9 July, the first Jacmel film festival featured 195 projections of 85 films shown free-of-charge at six different venues, including a large open-air public space for night-time screenings. More than 20 directors attended, with delegations travelling from as far as France and Spain, as well as Cuba, Jamaica and the United States, and some of these visiting directors hosted workshops on various aspects of film-making.



Jacmel high street with banner advertising the film festival. 'The films are free' it proclaims in Creole, in line with the festival's aim to reach the impoverished majority. Photo by Tequila Minsky.

In October 2003, he and his wife opened the Jacmel Art Centre in a converted coffee warehouse on the seafront. Belle visited Haiti for the first time in 1993 while filming a documentary about the military coup regime in power at that time. He subsequently decided to stay on and relocated to a village outside Jacmel, from where he has made a series of documentaries.

The festival benefited too from the absence of politically-motivated violence in Jacmel which remained relatively tranquil while much of the rest of the country was convulsed by clashes between protestors and police, and attacks on police stations by rebel forces.

As Belle explained to one of the numerous foreign journalists who covered the event, 'There's never been a proper film festival in Haiti, and never anything on this scale.' The US\$125,000 costs, which were met partly by Boucard's own money but mainly relied on funds supplied by corporate sponsors, foundations and friends, were high because the organisers were determined that the films would be free so as to enable as many people as possible to view them. The vast majority of Haitians exist on an income of little more than a dollar or two a day, and spare cash for entertainment is an extreme rarity.

For Boucard, the idea of accessibility was a key one. He said, 'We're trying to get as many people to see (the festival) as possible. We'd like to change their idea of films, to show them that films are more than action movies.'

The staging of the event was remarkable for several reasons, not least that it happened at a time when the country was still experiencing significant political upheaval in the aftermath of the overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his government at the end of February 2004. The implementation of the concept owed much to the courage and determination of the festival's two main organisers, the Jacmel native, Patrick Boucard, and the US-born resident, David Belle.

Boucard, an artist from a notable local family, recently returned to his home-town after years studying and working abroad.

## Capacity audiences

In the event, the public response – an estimated daily audience of around 3,500 people over the ten days – was hailed by the festival organisers as ‘overwhelmingly positive’. The New York-based photojournalist, Tequila Minsky, who attended the festival, said that venues for nearly all the screenings were full, and that the audiences were keenly attentive and engaged. Over the two weekends of the festival, many visitors came from the capital, Port-au-Prince, a two and a half-hour drive, and all the hotels and restaurants were reportedly full to overflowing.

During the week though, it was local people who filled the audiences. ‘Every night the main street of Jacmel, which was blocked to traffic, showed two or three films on a huge screen’, Minsky recalled. ‘The street was always full with curious Jacmelians’.

Local people were thrilled in particular to see documentaries featuring local people. At one screening at the town’s French Institute building, the well-known Jacmelian Vodou priestess, Madame Nerval, viewed the 1999 documentary about her and her life made by the French director, Charles Najman. Another notable instance of participation was the screening of *La Vi Ka Bel Pou Tout Moun* (Life Can Be Beautiful for Everyone), directed by the Haitian, Laurence Magloire. The documentary – which is a compilation of testimonies of the stigma experienced by those trying to live a full life with HIV/AIDS – was followed by a discussion involving a woman in the film who fielded questions from audience.

For many in the audiences, these were the first films they had ever seen. Jacmel’s only cinema closed down several years ago, and there are few theatres in any towns other than the capital. Boucard stressed that one of the aims of the festival was ‘to show films to people who have never seen movies before’, and to this end, he and Belle even commissioned two taxis to drive into the surrounding countryside to bring people into town. Minsky remembers one example, ‘The two films about HIV/AIDS were viewed by an audience that included a group of 20 teenagers who were brought in from the remote fishing village of Cayes-Jacmel’, she said. ‘That’s an hour’s drive along the coastal road to the east of Jacmel.’

In a country where official estimates of adult literacy are around 50% but those involved in the limited number of non-governmental literacy campaigns cite a figure of 20%, film has obvious merits as a vehicle for ideas and information. A further obstacle to communications, even by use of cinema, is the linguistic barrier experienced by the vast majority of the population whose only language is Creole – the educated elite traditionally communicate in French, thereby effectively excluding an estimated 90% of the population.

The first film drama made in Creole – and one that was shown at the Jacmel festival – was Rassoul Labuchin’s *Anita*. Made in 1980, it tells the story of a young servant girl who leaves Haiti’s countryside to work for a rich family in Port-au-Prince. *Anita* was one of the first Haitian films to assert a cinematic language rooted in the recurring themes of Haitian culture: the rural exodus, domestic life, class relations and the significance of Vodou.

Despite the example of *Anita*, during the 1970s and 80s most Haitian films remained what Haitian director and producer, Richard Senecal, described as ‘intellectual films’, ones inaccessible to the larger population. In part this was a consequence of the brutally repressive Duvalier dictatorship that forced many aspiring directors into exile. The dictatorship would not tolerate the few films made by those who stayed if they appealed to the masses.

## Using the Creole language

Films made by foreign directors and producers would have been able to escape the strict censorship but few, if any, used the Creole language. Leah Gordon, is a British film-maker, who co-directed the 1997 documentary, *A Pig's Tale* about the 1973 eradication of the country's entire pig population, a probably unnecessary response to an outbreak of swine fever which delivered a terrible blow to the rural economy and the two-thirds of the population who worked in it.

Asked why her original intention to make a Creole-language version for screening in Haiti never happened, she replied, 'The film was funded by British and French television companies, and they weren't interested in a Creole version. We couldn't find the money. It was as simple as that.' However Gordon is proud to relate that although the voice-over is not in Creole most of the dialogue is, and as French or English sub-titles are used, there would still have been much to engage the Creole-speakers who viewed the film when it was shown at the Jacmel festival.

Clearly the only answer is for cinema made by Haitians for Haitians, and the Association of Haitian Filmmakers issued a special communiqué to commend the Jacmel Festival for being an important incentive to the local film industry. The president of the association is Arnold Antonin, a pioneer of politically motivated cinema, who spent 23 years in exile in Europe and Venezuela. He returned to Haiti in 1986, and since then has helped nurture a new wave of Haitian directors by organising film shows at the centre he runs in the Port-au-Prince suburb of Petionville.

In a recent interview with the Associated Press Antonin said, 'Our cinema is embryonic, but full of potential. Haitians don't want to be invisible. They want to see themselves and their problems portrayed on the screen.'

Antonin claims that the digital camera has transformed filmmaking in Haiti in recent decades. He told the *Miami Herald*, 'Before there were no financial means to produce movies in Haiti. Film was expensive in itself and you had to have it developed in a lab overseas.' The advent of cheaper technology coincided with massive increases in the urban population creating a vastly enlarged potential audience. Director Reginald Lubin took advantage of this conjuncture when, in late 2001, he released his digital-video feature *La Peur d'Aimer* (*The Fear of Loving*), about a young woman's unplanned pregnancy. This film's sensational success was due in no small measure to its use of techniques such as good cinematography and a strong script that up until then had been largely absent from Haitian cinema.

In the wake of Lubin's success, other filmmakers began to follow suit.

After making a series of documentaries, Antonin tackled his first feature-length film in 2001. The satirical comedy, *Piwoli and the Gangster*, with a script written by Gary Victor, one of Haiti's most prominent novelists, was released to critical and popular acclaim in 2002, and was one of the hits of the Jacmel festival. It was shot in two weeks but took three months to edit because of Haiti's notoriously unreliable electricity supply.

Another director featured in Jacmel, and who is making waves in the rest of Haiti, is Senecal. He has recently made two very popular feature films, *Barikad*, the 2002 feature about the problematic relationship between a servant maid and the son of the head of the house, and another problematic romance, *I Love You Anne* (2003).

For Seneca, the problems of raising finance for Haitian-made films remains pressing. He told the *Miami Herald*, 'Banks and other businesses, obvious choices as prospective financiers, rarely invest in films.'

And when they do, they demand that the filmmakers feature their businesses in the storyline.'

The other constraint is the limited size of the Haitian cinema-going audience. There are, according to one estimate, just 100,000 Haitians out of a population of over eight million who can afford to go to the cinema. Bearing in mind that patrons pay 60 Haitian gourdes – about US\$1.50 at today's exchange rate – at a top cinema such as the Imperial in Port-au-Prince, and about 50 US cents at others, there is clearly little in the way of a profit margin. The decline of the Haitian economy over recent decades has hit the industry badly, with seven theatres closing down, leaving only four open in a city with a population of around two million people.

In this context, subsidised film festivals in provincial towns like the one held in Jacmel in 2004 can provide an essential boost to both existing directors, and to those who might be inspired to creativity in this medium in the future. Boucard and Belle are vowing to try and repeat their success in 2005, with a longer-term plan to get government support to turn it into a regular annual event.

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