



Basketball documentary headlines film series at JC Museum this weekend

By JEFF THEODORE
ARTS EDITOR

At the fifth annual African Diaspora Film Festival coming to Jersey City this weekend, audiences can bear witness to an insider's view of two cultures: the competitive elements of youth basketball and an authentic and rare take on black life in Cuba.

Reinaldo Barroso-Spech, co-director of the film fest, said the diverse approaches are by design.

"We're trying to enhance the film series with more people from different perspectives, to show people we're relevant and entertaining at the same time," Barroso-Spech said.

On the bill Saturday will be "Slaying Goliath," which traces a Harlem-based group of fifth-graders' efforts to win a basketball title, and "La Ultima Rumba de Papa Montero," which details through the eyes of two Rumba dancers the ins and outs of Afro-Cuban life.

Today, the festival kicks off with "The Great Bazaar," a tale about two boys who become friends despite distinct differences, and "Made in Jamaica," which examines reggae music's past and present.

However, Barroso-Spech singled out a film like "Slaying Goliath" in efforts to draw a younger audience to the festival.

"Through our years of doing the festival in Jersey City, we haven't really been able to attract young people yet," he said. "This is a great story about basketball and everybody loves that."

In "Goliath," filmmakers and married couple Joe Brewster and Michelle Stephenson spent three years following the travails of their son's fifth-grade basketball team.

"Documentaries take a while and this one took a couple of hundred hours of editing," Brewster said. "In the end, the main message of this film is that teamwork is a difficult process. And that wasn't the message we started out with. We started with idea of kids who were exceptional athletes trying to achieve a goal (winning a championship). In the mix of it all, the parents of the players were very emotional, and that makes good theater."

Stephenson said the film also forced Steve Harris, the team's coach, to re-evaluate his coaching style.

"He acknowledged that his approach has changed significantly," Stephenson said. "He indicated that he's more patient now. Coaching is a complicated thing, like parenting."

Brewster said the film's title comes from religious metaphors often used by the coach and team members.

"We took the metaphor and ran with it," he said. After the "Goliath" screening, the festival will switch gears and focus on Afro-Cuban life with "La Ultima Rumba" and a documentary about Sara Gomez, an influential Afro-Cuban filmmaker from the 1950s. Directly afterwards, Barroso-Spech will chat

about aspects of Afro-Cuban life with noted Jersey City artist and New Jersey City University Art professor Ben Jones.

Since 1977, Jones has been on visits to Cuba more than 50 times.

"I've been able to get an in depth look at the culture," Jones said. "The average American doesn't have any idea how black Cuba is. The country looks very integrated as opposed to what you'd find here. Yet when you look beneath the surface, where the power is, it's still dominated by whites. Through these films, you'll see the richness and range of black culture, which many outsiders don't know about."

WHAT: African Diaspora Film Series

WHERE: Jersey City Museum, 350 Montgomery St.

WHEN: noon to 5 p.m. today and tomorrow

COST: \$10 per screening; \$8 for students and seniors, \$7 for museum members; \$30 film series pass

DETAILS: Go to www.nyadff.org or call 212-864-1760