

SA films draw attention at Toronto International Film Festival

07 September 2017 - 19:04 Nadia Neophytou



A screengrab of a scene from the film Five Fingers for Marseille. Picture: YOUTUBE

Three South African films are on the line-up for this year's Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) which opened on Thursday and runs for 10 days. The festival showcases possible Oscar contenders and debuts the latest world cinema offerings.

The South African products are set to be a solid showing from the country, which has been building up its presence at the festival over the years since it first started participating in the event, considered a gateway to the US film industry.

Already drawing much buzz is Five Fingers for Marseilles, a western with a South African twist, from the film-making duo of director Michael Matthews and screenwriter Sean Drummond. It's a movie that's been eight years in the making, and its moody, majestic trailer with snippets of Xhosa and Sotho has made it a hot ticket at this year's festival.

Starring Vuyo Dabula, Kenneth Nkosi, Mduduzi Mabaso and Jerry Mofokeng, the film tells the tale of a battle to save the soul of a remote Eastern Cape town, set against the backdrop of apartheid.

SA's past lingers in the follow-up feature film from Capetonian filmmaker Jenna Bass, who piqued interest with her 2014 debut Love The One You Love. Her new film, High Fantasy, was shot entirely on a couple of iPhone 7s: it's about a group of young friends who take a trip to a farm in the middle of nowhere and wake up to discover they've all swapped bodies.

In tackling subjects such as race, gender and class in post-1994 SA, the film makes its cast co-scriptwriters, making use of a "selfie-video" style that sees Bass an important member of the new wave of film-making.

No stranger to the international film festival circuit, Khalo Matabane is bringing his drama, 28, about a veteran member of a prison gang to TIFF. Based on the best-selling, award-winning book, The Number, by Johnny Steinberg, the film tells the story of Magadien Wentzel, who served 25 years in the South African prison system, becoming deeply embroiled in its gang culture. Wentzel is played by Mothusi Magano, who also starred in Of Good Report, which debuted at TIFF in 2013.

The film, which received support from the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), also stars Warren Masemola, Lemogang Tsipa, Deon Lotz and Tsotsi's Presley Chweneyagae, who was seen in iNumber iNumber, a movie that drew much acclaim at TIFF in 2014 and was picked up for a US re-make by Universal Pictures.

A co-production documentary made by SA, Kenya and Canada, will also screen at TIFF: Silas, which profiles the life of Liberian environmentalist and activist Silas Siakor. The NFVF will also be marking the 20th anniversary of a co-production treaty signed with Canada, one that has yielded a number of films, mutually boosting both country's cinema industries.

