



TORONTO, ON--March 11, 2008

Black Women's Film Festival Brings Sex, Violence, History, Religion and Identity to the Forefront

MPENZI: Black Women's International Film and Video Festival®

Queering Film: A celebration of award-winning films for, with and by Black Lesbians.

On Friday, March 28th, 2008 at the Medical Sciences Building Auditorium, University of Toronto (1 King's College Circle), MPENZI: Black Women's International Film and Video Festival® will showcase 5 award-winning national and internationally renowned films by 5 Black Lesbians as part of their 4th annual festival.

"This festival creates a forum for stories that often go untold in more mainstream film festivals," says Adonica Huggins, local activist and MPENZI festival founder and Program Director. "Our mission is to identify, screen and promote works from established and emerging directors, producers and writers from Straight, Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer or Questioning Black women, and Transgendered, Transsexual and Intersexed Black women and men", says Huggins. MPENZI is a Swahili word with many English translations the essence of which is 'one who loves' and 'one who is loved.'

This year's line-up includes *Rape For Who I Am* directed by Ugandan-born British filmmaker Lovinsa Kavuma. *Rape...* tells the story of four courageous South African Lesbians who have been violated because of their sexuality. It's their story of survival and empowerment against the backdrop of a homophobic community. This film is a Toronto Premiere. *Pariah*, written and directed by 2007 Sundance Screenwriting Fellow and 2008 Rockefeller Grant Nominee Dee Rees, explores the world of a Bronx Lesbian teenager. She juggles multiple identities to avoid rejection from friends and family. Straddling both straight and Queer worlds, pressures from home, school and within corrodes the line between her dual personas with explosive consequences.

MPENZI's *audience award for Best Short Film* is always a major hit with the sold-out gathering. "In a society where we are taught to be quiet and or silenced, it's a great feeling to see and hear people so engaged with the films and sharing their experiences", says Annemarie Shrouder, MPENZI Program Co-ordinator. This years programming will also include a silent auction with items donated by the many sponsors, and an *exclusive VIP and Media reception* beginning the evening at 5:30p.m. Films, panel discussion and Q&A directly follow from 6:30-9:00p.m.

Named one of Toronto's Top 10 Best Filmmakers by Cameron Bailey in NOW Magazine, director/producer/writer Michéle Clarke, in the acclaimed *Black Men and Me*, explores her position as a Trinidadian dyke and her complex relationship with Black men. Shot in a barbershop, she has her head shaved while she reflects on her Black masculinity.

Legacy by British director Campbell Blackman, is a visually and aurally sumptuous exploration of the imprint of slavery on mother/daughter relationships in African Caribbean culture. This film is a Toronto Premiere. Lastly, Canadian director Hana Abdul's *Before Nine* brings together three stories: two young girls' attempt to cope with the psychological trauma of racialized homophobia; a mother's search for a new job; and a grandmother's attempt to overcome the loss of her home and business.

Tickets are \$10.00 in advance and \$12.00 at the door. The festival is wheelchair accessible.

MPENZI Sponsors:

Proud 103.9 FM; Xtra!; NOW Magazine; Women & Gender Studies Institute, University of Toronto; Lesbian & Gay Community Appeal Foundation; Building Equitable Environments; Nine One One Maxim Studios; Jill Andrew Media; Trinity Square Video; Conxity.com; Inside Out: Toronto Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival; National Film Board of Canada; Toronto Rape Crisis Centre / Multicultural Women Against Rape; Kristyn Wong-Tam, Coldwell Banker Terrequity Realty, Brokerage; Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention; and Arleen Huggins, Koskie Minsky LLP.

Film stills and complete filmmaker bios available at www.mpenzi.ca.

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