Coming off a phenomenal year of black films, the Pan African Film and Arts Festival (PAFF) is raising the bar, and set to give movie-goers a 11-day marathon of offerings from around the Diaspora. PAFF is celebrating its 28th anniversary in grand style with a string of highly-anticipated films, which includes a comedy by the multi-hyphenated host and entertainer Nick Cannon; a feature, executive produced by NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal; plus, a special screening of the action-packed series, "Queen Sono," out of South Africa, presented by Netflix; and to cap it all off ... a film about a wedding! This year's theme is "20/20 Vision," kicking off the decade with a fresh lens and solidifying its commitment to tell diverse stories with a global, luminous view.

PAFF is the largest Black film festival in the United States and the largest Black History Month cultural event in the nation. Here are the festival stats: PAFF has selected a record-breaking 225 film, representing 52 countries in 26 languages - that is, 86 feature films; 128 short films and 11 new media selection. Plus, ArtFest will feature more than 100 fine artists from around the world. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) has designated PAFF as an official qualifying film festival for live action and animation short films.

On February 11, 2020, the festival kicked off opening night festivities at the Directors Guild of America with the film "HERO: Inspired by the Extraordinary Revolutionary Life and Times of Diplomat and Judge Ulric Cross," directed by Caribbean filmmaker Frances-Anne Solomon. Solomon leads a pack of women screening films at PAFF in record numbers with 81 of its film selections, helmed by female directors.

Here's a quick look at some of PAFF's hot picks:

CENTERPICE

- SHE BALL- (2019/US/97 minutes | February 21, 2020 at 7:45 p.m. - directed Nick Cannon. Movie synopsis: Rooted in discourse about race, gentrification, criminal justice and female empowerment, "She Ball" follows the love of the game through the struggles of Avery Watts, a single father who lost his NBA dreams to gang violence. Avery now struggles to keep his family's community center open amidst rising gentrification in the
City of Inglewood. Stars Nick Cannon, Cedric The Entertainer, Fasion Love, Marla Gibbs, Evan Ross, Luenell, Melody Rae, DC Young Fly, Big Boy and Birdman.

CLOSING FILM
- Zulu Wedding (Feature Narrative/South Africa/81min) | Sunday, February 23, 2020 at 6 p.m. - directed by Lineo Sekeleloane. Movie synopsis: Lou left South Africa and her Zulu-Sotho heritage behind to become a dancer in America, and when she falls in love with Tex, she knows he’s the man to marry. But when she brings Tex home to meet her family, she discovers she’s been promised since birth to a Zulu king. Caught between two men, two families, and two countries, Lou has to come to terms with who she is so she can fight for what she wants. Darrin Dewitt Henson (“Lincoln Heights,” and “Soul Food”) and Carl Anthony Payne II (“Martin” and “The Cosby Show”) lead this ensemble cast.

BUZZ-WORTHY SPOTLIGHTS
- Foster Boy (Feature Narrative/US/109 min) | Tuesday, February 18, 2020 at 4 p.m. - directed by Youssef Delara and executive produced by NBA legend Shaquille “Shaq” O’Neal. Movie synopsis: Micheal Trainer is a lawyer at the center of a trial in which a for-profit foster care agency puts a known sex offender into the same foster home as his young client Jamal, with catastrophic results. Michael, a successful litigator with a long career protecting corporate interests, wants nothing to do with Jamal’s case, until a Judge forces him to accept it. Initially he sees Jamal as a kid off the streets looking to grab a piece of corporate profits. But, when Jamal refuses to settle the case for any amount of money, Michael begins his representation in earnest. As their work together reveals the horrifying depth of the corrupt and abusive for-profit foster care agency.

- The Cuban (Feature Narrative/Canada/Cuba/109min) | Thursday, February 20, 2020 at 1:05 p.m. - directed by Sergio Navarretta. Movie synopsis: When Mina, a young Afghan immigrant, gets her first job in a nursing home, an unexpected friendship with Luis, an elderly Cuban musician, reignites her love of music and changes her life forever. THE CUBAN boast an all-star cast with Oscar winner Lou Gossett Jr and Oscar nominee Shohreh Aghdashloo, as well as Giacomo Gianniotti (“Grey’s Anatomy”), Lauren Holly and Ana Golja “(Full Out,” “The Fanatic”). The film features the music of Grammy nominated pianist Hilario Duran, as well as the Oscar-winning sound team from “Shape of Water.” For more information, visit TheCubanMovie.com.

- Queen Sono Ep. 1 & 2 (Series/US/89min) | Thursday, February 20, 2020 at 7:40 p.m. - directed by Kagiso Lediga & Tebogo Malote. Presented by Netflix, this action-packed series follows Queen Sono (Pearl Thusi), a highly trained top spy in a South African agency whose purpose is to better the lives of African citizens. While taking on her most dangerous mission yet, she must also face changing relationships in her personal life. Joining Pearl on this mission is a star-studded cast including the multi-talented Vuyo

Dabula, Kate Liquorish, Chi Mnende, Khathu Ramabulana, Enhle Mbiya Mlotshwa, Loyiso Madinga, Rob Van Vuuren and Ma' Abigail Kubeka. The series is directed by Kagiso Lediga and Tebogo Malope. Queen Sono premieres globally in 190 countries on the 28th of February 2020.

- Knuckle City (Feature Narrative/South Africa/124min) | Wednesday, February 19, 2020 at 7:05 p.m. and Sunday, February 23, 2020 at 9:20 p.m. -- An aging, womanizing professional boxer and his career-criminal brother take one last shot at success and get more than they've bargained for.

The festival is being held from February 11 - 23, 2020 at the Cinemark 15 Theatres, located at the Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza in Los Angeles. (The theatre is situated on the corner of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Crenshaw Boulevard.)

The festival has cemented its role as a HUB for breakthrough and award-winning Black films and filmmakers from around the world. PAFF is dedicated to the cinematic promotion and cultural exploration of peoples of African descent. It is PAFF’s goal to present and showcase the broad Spectrum of Black creative works, particularly those that reinforce positive images and help destroy negative stereotypes. PAFF believes film and art can lead to better understanding and foster communication between peoples of diverse cultures, races, ethnicities, and lifestyles in an entertaining way.

The festival will hand out juried prizes for Best Narrative Feature, Best First Feature Film, Best Documentary Feature, Best Documentary Short, and Best Narrative Short as well as audience favorite awards at the close of the festival.

PAFF is sponsored by Los Angeles City Council President Emeritus Herb Wesson, Jr.; Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas; Los Angeles City Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson (District 8); Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza; Cinemark 15; the Directors Guild of America (DGA); FilmLA; Sony Pictures; Brotherhood Crusade; as well as the City of Los Angeles; the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs and the Los Angeles County Arts Commission.

Additional support of opening night festivities and the screening of “Hero” made possible by Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts; Imagine Media; CaribbeanTales; and California Pictures.

Gearing up for its 28th anniversary, the Pan African Film and Arts Festival (PAFF) is America’s largest and most prestigious Black film festival. Each year, it screens more than 150 films made by and/or about people of African descent from around the world. PAFF holds the distinction of being the largest Black History Month event in the country. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) has designated PAFF as an official qualifying film festival for live action and animation short films.

PAFF is a non-profit corporation, founded in 1992 by award-winning actor Danny Glover ("The Color Purple," "Lethal Weapon" movie franchise), Emmy Award-winning actress Ja'Net DuBois (best known for her role as Willona in the TV series, "Good Times") and executive director, Ayuko Babu, an international legal, cultural and political consultant who specializes in Pan African Affairs. PAFF is dedicated to the promotion of ethnic and racial respect and tolerance through the exhibit of films, art and creative expression.

The goal of PAFF is to present and showcase the broad Spectrum of Black creative works, particularly those that reinforce positive images, help to destroy negative stereotypes and depict an expanded vision of the Black experience. PAFF believes film and art can lead to better understanding and foster communication between peoples of diverse cultures, races, ethnicities, and lifestyles in an entertaining way while at the same time, serving as a vehicle to initiate dialogue on the important issues of our times.
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