



Festival newsletter no. 6 (28 September 2016) Closing party, audience prizes and epilogue

Epilogue with live music from Mali

The 14th African Film Festival drew to a close on 27 September with a spectacular "encore", a North Rhine-Westphalia premiere of **MALI BLUES** in cooperation with Cologne-based distributors Real Fiction. The large hall at the Odeon cinema was sold out long before the start of the event, meaning dozens missed out on the screening, only to be consoled by the fact that the film will hit cinemas on 29 September (in Filmpalette). Director **Lutz Gregor** was there to present his documentary about Malian musicians whose concerts stand up against the ideology of Islamic fundamentalists, who occupied the region around Timbuktu in northern Mali in 2012 and banned musical instruments. Several of the protagonists were invited to the film premiere in Cologne thanks to help from the Malian embassy, including Tuareg singer **Amanar** with his band and rapper **Master Soumy**. They took to the stage for a surprise concert following the film and the jam-packed Odeon cinema quickly transformed into a concert hall. The event closed to rapturous applause from the audience for the film and musicians.

Closing party with live music from Zimbabwe

There was also an unexpected live performance at the official closing party of the 14th African Film Festival on 25 September, as Zimbabwean rapper **AWA**, who was on the original billing for the event, also brought along her compatriot **Cal_Vin**, one of the most popular musicians in her country. In between the two concerts by the two young stars from Zimbabwe, the organisers from FilmInitiativ once again invited all directors in attendance on stage and thanked everyone who had made the festival – which was attended by several thousand guests – possible and who helped out along the way.

Congolese director **Zeka Laplaine**, who has visited the festival in Cologne on numerous occasions, then took the microphone and gave an ironic speech to the great amusement of those present in the cinema hall. He said that, as guests, they unfortunately don't get picked up in flashy cars or put up in luxury hotels, that they have to walk to the cinemas and don't get to walk in on red carpets, but "I still love this place!". In her closing statement, Algerian-French director **Fatima Sissani** stressed the importance of the festival's theme "Sisters in African Cinema", while also thanking the organisers and the public for the great interest they showed in the films and for their active participation in the many in-depth film discussions.

Audience prizes: Tunisian double success

The audience prizes for the best feature film (sponsored by "choices" magazine) and best documentary (sponsored by WDR) both went to Tunisian films this year. Feature film **À PEINE J'OUVRE LES YEUX** (AS I OPEN MY EYES), which was presented by **Leyla Bouzid** on the opening day of the festival, was the clear winner of the audience vote. It tells the story of a female rock singer during the times of the Ben Ali dictatorship who winds up in the clutches of the secret police due to her lyrics that are critical of the regime. The film will hit cinemas in Germany on 6 October. The director, who had already left Cologne, gave her thanks in an email and took the prize as evidence that the voice of opposition, as represented in the film by the singer, is now being heard and cannot be silenced.

Female filmmaker **Feriel Ben Mahmoud** was able to accept her prize for her documentary **LA RÉVOLUTION DES FEMMES: UN SIÈCLE DE FEMINISME ARABE** in person. The film about the history of the women's rights movement in the Arab World had already been very well received at its well-attended screening with subsequent discussion at the Filmforum. **Jutta Krug** from the documentary film department of WDR presented the prize and also commended the work of all other filmmakers whose wonderful films have left their mark on the festival and its **Sisters in African Cinema** theme.