

## Festival Reviews

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## Interview with Co-Founder Karl Rössel (AFRIKA FILM FESTIVAL)

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AFRIKA FILM FESTIVAL KÖLN  
1992 – 2015: 25 years of Films from Africa in Cologne/Germany

### THE FESTIVAL:

FilmInitiativ Köln e.V has been organising the AFRIKA FILM FESTIVAL KÖLN since 1992 in Cologne/Germany. In 25 years more than 750 films from 40 African countries have been shown and the cinema-goers had the opportunity to get to know more than 160 filmmakers.

The AFRIKA FILM FESTIVAL KÖLN presents the most comprehensive range of contemporary African cinema in Germany. As a result, the festival has grown in national and international stature during the years.

In preparation for the Cologne festivals FilmInitiativ has regularly attended the panafrican film festival FESPACO in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. FilmInitiativ has also attended African film festivals in Durban, Tunis (Carthage), Rabat and Cairo, as well as those in Milan, Amsterdam, Leuven, Tarifa/Cordoba and Frankfurt a.M. Special programmes featuring films from Africa that are screened at international film festivals, such as Cannes, Berlin, Rotterdam, Venice, Locarno, Toronto and Innsbruck, are also reviewed and evaluated for the Cologne festival.

FilmInitiativ offers information about all films and guests that were presented at the festivals in Cologne via a database in three languages on the website:

<http://www.films-from-africa.com> (<http://www.films-from-africa.com>)

The 15th edition of the festival will be held from September 21 to October 3, 2017. It will mark the 25th anniversary of the festival.

## Contact

- [Email \(mailto:filminitativ@googlemail.com\)](mailto:filminitativ@googlemail.com)
- [+49 221 -469-6243 \(tel:+49 221 -469-6243\)](tel:+492214696243)
- [Heidemannstraße 76a](#)  
[Köln 50825](#)  
[Germany \(https://maps.google.com/?q=Heidemannstra%C3%9Fe+76a+K%C3%B6ln+50825+Germany\)](https://maps.google.com/?q=Heidemannstra%C3%9Fe+76a+K%C3%B6ln+50825+Germany)
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### **Matthew Toffolo What is your Film Festival succeeding at doing for filmmakers?**

Karl Rössel: The festival provides an opportunity for filmmakers from Africa and from the global African diaspora to present their films to the German audience. We promote those films not only by presenting them at our festival in Cologne, but also by recommending them to cinemas and festivals in other German cities. We also subtitle some of the festival films as it makes it easier to distribute them in Germany.

For those filmmakers who come to visit the festival we organise meetings with the documentary and feature departments of the WDR. The WDR is Germany's biggest public TV station and based in Cologne.

### **What would you expect to experience if you attend the festival this year (2017)?**

Given that we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the AFRIKA FILM FESTIVAL KÖLN, people attending our festival can not only expect about 80 new films from more than 20 countries in Africa and from the diaspora, but also 30 guests, two exhibitions, four live music acts including an anniversary concert (with the Kasai Allstars from Kinshasa) and a party (with the Steven Ouma Band from Cologne).

### **What are the qualifications for the selected films?**

The films for our festival are selected by the whole festival team. If the opinions in our team on certain films are inconsistent we also ask friends from African communities and others for their advice. We always try to present the best films from festivals in Africa, including those winning major awards.

The most important criteria for the selection is, that films should be directed by people from Africa or the African diaspora and not by Europeans or Americans. We deliberately present films from Africa, not about Africa. All genres and styles are welcome as long as the content and form of the films are interesting and inspiring. Given that we see cinema as a form of art we are not interested in mainstream films, which are just shot for commercial reasons.

### **Do you think that some films really don't get a fair shake from film festivals? And if so, why?**

At festivals like the Berlinale (as well as other international A-festivals like Cannes, Venice and Rotterdam for example) films from Africa still are widely ignored. The few exceptions from this rule do not represent the great variety of genres, styles and contents of contemporary filmmaking in Africa. While films from Asia and Latin America are more regularly presented at international festivals, they still seem to be not interested or capable to do comprehensive research on new developments in African cinema.

### **What motivates you and your team to do this festival?**

The association organising the festival, FilmInitiativ Köln e.V., was founded in 1988 when it set itself the objective of "arousing interest in cinematic art by screening films and giving lectures and seminars and also to stimulate and encourage political discussions". In doing so, "primarily films that are not represented in the listings of commercial cinemas should be given a platform. These could be significant films in cinematic history or culture which document the cinematographic works of non-European filmmakers". After presenting a first series of films from West Africa in 1992, the whole team of FilmInitiativ in 1993 traveled to Burkina Faso to attend the legendary pan-african film festival FESPACO. Overwhelmed by the amount of fascinating films from African directors, which we discovered at this festival in Ouagadougou, we decided soon after to concentrate on

the presentation of films from Africa. By providing opportunities to watch those films and to discuss with African directors at eye level we also try to overcome stereotypes and racist prejudices, which are still widely spread in Germany when it come to Africa and its people.

### **How has your FilmFreeway submission process been?**

We received more than 400 film submission via FilmFreeway. The problem is, that even if you define certain criteria, many filmmakers submit their films without fulfilling the criteria.

### **Where do you see the festival by 2020?**

We hope that we will be able to present (and finance!) a festival in 2020, which will be as comprehensive, diversified and ambitious as our anniversary festival this year.

### **What film have you seen the most times in your life?**

„Hyènes“ by Djibril Diop Mambety from Senegal, because we have presented this masterpiece several times in the last 25 year.

### **In one sentence, what makes a great film?**

A great film moves and changes the audience watching it.

### **How is the film scene in your city?**

There are not enough cinemas and screens in Cologne.

Film does not play the role it should. If people in Cologne still get a chance to watch important films from around the world, it is due to the efforts of independent film groups (like FilmInitiativ Köln e.V.) and a few art house cinemas.



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Interviewer Matthew Toffolo is currently the CEO of the WILDsound FEEDBACK Film & Writing Festival. The festival that showcases 20-50 screenplay and story readings performed by professional actors every month. And the FEEDBACK Monthly Festival held in downtown Toronto, and Los Angeles at least 2 times a month. Go to [www.wildsound.ca](http://www.wildsound.ca) (<http://www.wildsound.ca/>) for more information and to submit your work to the festival.

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