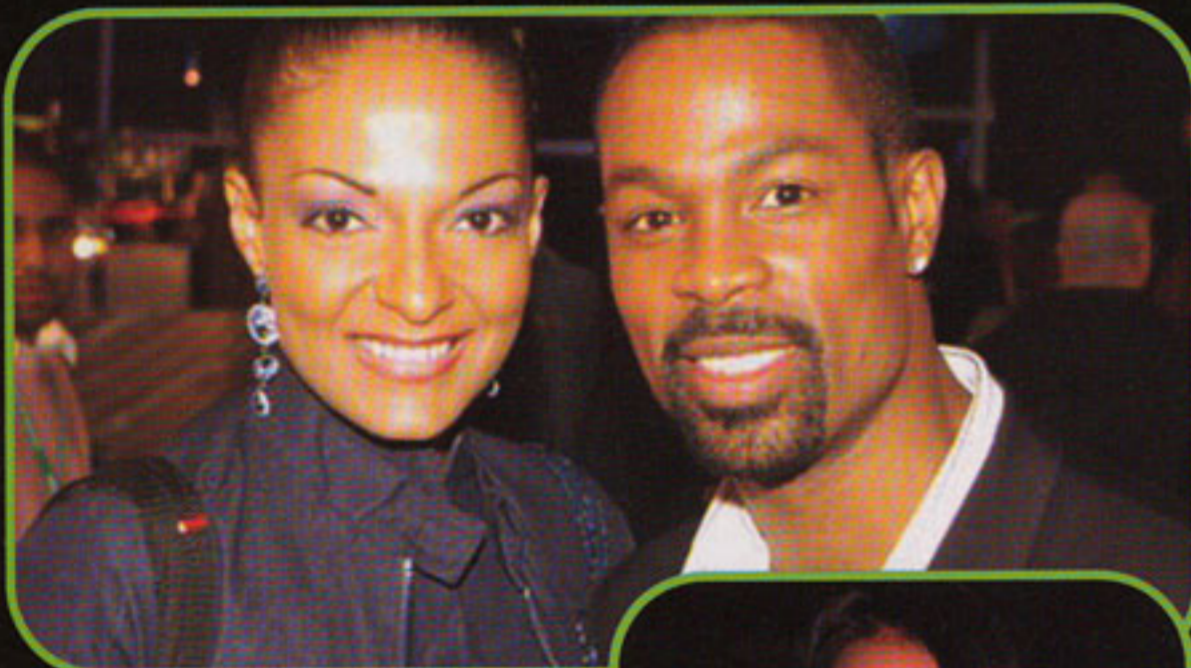


REEL WORLD Paves New Roads & Celebrates Milestones

Her goal is to empower people in the entertainment world so they can have successful and long careers. "You want to pave the road right," says Tonya Lee Williams who paved the way for the ReelWorld Film Festival six years ago. The actress of *The Young and the Restless* fame, Williams laid the foundation for the festival in response to the lack of diverse stories on screen. Today, she is proud of making it the 'Sundance' of Canada.



ReelWorld has emerged as a stepping stone for many Canadian filmmakers who are looking for their first break. It has become a unique threshold for budding talent from Aboriginal, Asian, Black, Latino, Middle Eastern, South Asian and other diverse backgrounds.

Garnering buzz and glamour, the festival is a five-day event, which showcases over 100 features, documentaries, animations, shorts and music videos from both raw and seasoned talent. Interestingly, the raw talent at ReelWorld is often more creative and exciting than big budget blockbusters. The festival also features industry panels, awards, parties and galas. Celebrities like Eriq La Salle, Robert Townsend, Shabana Azmi, Vivica A. Fox, Little X, Graham Greene and many more have been part of the festivities in the past years. "There are 72 film festivals in Toronto," says Williams, "there is very little Canadian content which reaches the public; sometimes audiences only get to see the film at a festival."



Director Richie Mehta's tale is a real life success story. "Richie came to ReelWorld in 2002," says Williams. "He felt so inspired because he saw people who looked like him." In 2004, Richie's film *Amal* was screened at the festival and won the award for Best Short. In 2005, he participated in the "PITCH THIS" competition at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) where projects from all across Canada competed. Richie won the pitch and is now shooting his feature. "He felt inspired every step of the way," says Williams, "that's how I know the festival is heading in the right direction."

For Richie, being at ReelWorld was immensely rewarding, "It was extremely gratifying because the film was conceived at





ReelWorld Initiatives

ReelWorld Diversity Directory is an online directory in Canada, providing free access to actors, singers, dancers, musicians, producers, directors, writers, cameramen and women, lighting technicians, makeup artists, wardrobe and hair stylists.

Indie Film Lounge at TIFF allows up-and-coming filmmakers to have access to many international buyers. It gives these select filmmakers the opportunity to present ideas, propose projects, and gain feedback and support from potential funding agencies. Each Indie Film Lounge features multiple special guest speakers like Danny Glover, Moses Znaimer and Deepa Mehta.

Writers Boot Camp, a screenwriters' workshop from Los Angeles, will now be held in Canada, thanks to ReelWorld.

ReelKids - Take One is a children's film series and workshop providing elementary students with the unique opportunity to explore and experience diversity through the art of making short films.

ReelYouth - Take One addresses the ongoing youth violence in the city by using cinematic arts.

ReelWorld," he says. "So two years after conception, to come home and be recognized by so many - in the presence of those who worked on the film - was amazing."

Understanding the nuances of immigrant communities, Williams says, "Our parents don't want us to be in the industry. They have made sacrifices and they know an artistic journey would leave us penniless. I come from a single mom home, and I had to make a living and take care of my bills."

She strongly believes people need to be proactive to sustain long careers like she has done in the highly competitive world of entertainment. The ReelWorld Foundation has developed initiatives which run all year round. It facilitates year-round training, mentorship, panels, outreach and screenings. ReelWorld also reaches out to the diverse seniors' community by creating screenings especially for them. And, ReelWorld has a new partnership with Cineplex for one-day programming all over Canada.

"ReelWorld is unique because there doesn't yet exist an environment which truly reflects Canada as a cultural mosaic," says Nick Yeo, festival operations manager. "Canada is very different from the United States. South of the border, you become American and your culture gets thrown into the great melting pot image. In Canada, we celebrate our differences."

According to Yeo, one of the challenges for the festivals has been public perception. "With Tonya being front and centre of the Festival, the audience has had the perception that ReelWorld is a Black film festival," he explains. "Similarly, in the year where we had a significant South Asian presence on our screens, certain groups believed that ReelWorld was an Indian film festival. For the record, ReelWorld is a festival that encompasses all races and all peoples - it is about the diverse stories that can be told."

The 2007 ReelWorld Film Festival will run from April 11 - 15, 2007. Speaking about the theme of the upcoming festival, programming manager and industry series director, Hayet Benkara says, "The themes will still be diversity and multiculturalism, through humanitarian issues and social and political challenges that Canadians and the rest of the world are facing today."

Benkara adds, "Be prepared for a celebration and an exciting rendezvous for anyone interested in talent, film and diversity."

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For more information, visit www.reelworld.ca.

