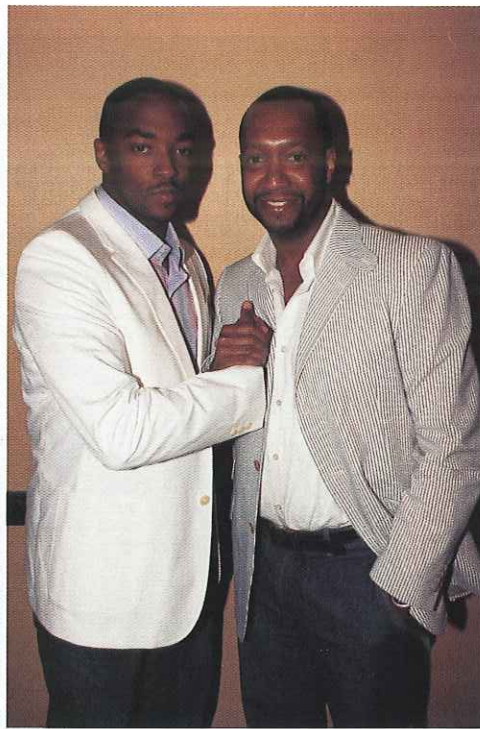


Gabrielle Union and Jason George at the 2007 ABFF



ABFF 2008 Ambassador Anthony Mackie and Festival CEO Jeff Friday



Gary Dourdan (r) at Black August Screening

Dozens of film festivals, from big to small, exist but until 1997—the year that the American Black Film Festival (ABFF) was founded—none existed that exclusively showcased films by and about people of African descent.

ABFF is the brainchild of Jeff Friday (CEO of Film Life, Inc.), Byron Lewis (founder, chairman, and CEO of Uniworld), and Warrington Hudlin (president of the Black Filmmakers Foundation)—three players in the movie industry. The three were having a conversation over lunch about the lack of Black representation in mainstream films when they came up with the idea to host a film festival for up-and-coming Black filmmakers.

“What we noticed is that we didn’t see a lot of Black films or independent films that addressed racism or featured people of color,” said Friday. “The idea for the festival was to be an alternative to Sundance,” he added.

Five months later the first festival took place in Acapulco, Mexico, linking the Black film community with Hollywood. That year, about 300 people, including actors and

directors like Halle Berry, Morgan Freeman, and John Singleton attended the festival, which primarily serves as a showcase for Black independent films. But the festival isn’t just about showing movies or making them more accessible to mainstream audiences. It’s about people helping people.

“ABFF is a tremendous mechanism for helping young, talented filmmakers build their careers,” said Friday.

Now in its twelfth year, ABFF will take place from August 7-10, 2008, and will be centered in West Hollywood and Beverly Hills. Actor Anthony Mackie, who has been featured in television series, films, and plays; and will portray Tupac Shakur in the upcoming film, *Notorious*, is the festival’s 2008 Ambassador.

Each year the festival chooses a different theme, a thread that weaves its way through every activity. The theme of this year’s festival is Exploring Black Romance and Sexuality in American Cinema.

“The majority of American films have romance and sexuality featured in them but realistic portrayals of how and whom Black men and women love are particularly uncommon,” said Friday.

According to ABFF, an internet search on IMDb (The Internet Movie Database) found that of roughly 350 films earning more than \$100 million at the box office just 50 of them had love scenes but none of those scenes involved a person of color. Moreover, for nearly 20 years there were no major films exploring how and whom Black men and women love.

ABFF will screen several films with Black romance and sexuality at their core. The films include *Carmen Jones*, *Mandingo*, *Mahogany*, and *She’s Gotta Have It*. Both *Mandingo* and *Mahogany* were released in the midst of the “Blaxploitation” era. Blaxploitation refers to a series of 1970s films in which Black characters and their lifestyles were presented in a manner that often reinforced negative stereotypes. *Mandingo* is set in the American South during the Civil War and focuses on the sexual relations between slave owners’ wives and slaves. *Mahogany* is about a poor Black woman who rises to become a popular fashion designer in Rome and has a love affair with a dashing political aspirant.

In addition to screening the

mentioned films, ABFF will also devote the evening of Saturday, August 9, to celebrating the film *Love Jones*, a 1997 romantic drama film written and directed by Theodore Witcher in which actors Larenz Tate and Nia Long portray a young, romantic, upwardly-mobile Black couple navigating through Chicago's club culture. The evening will consist of a panel discussion at the Writer's Guild of America Theatre that will thoroughly and thoughtfully explore whether or not Black romance and sexuality in film is taboo or too hot to handle, speaking to ABFF's mission to strengthen the Black filmmaking community through resource sharing and education.

ABFF has been described as the premier Black film market. This year, more than 5,000 people are expected to attend. Official festival screenings will be organized into four sections—short films, feature-length narratives, documentaries, and animation—and the best films will be recognized at the ABFF Awards Announcement on August 10.

What sets ABFF apart from Sundance, Cannes, Tribeca, and other film festivals is that it was born out of a need to generate distribution opportunities for independent Black films and promote cultural diversity within the motion picture industry. In addition to its cinematic showcases, ABFF nurtures artists in a variety of disciplines by offering workshops, symposiums, exclusive parties, high-level networking, and signature events.

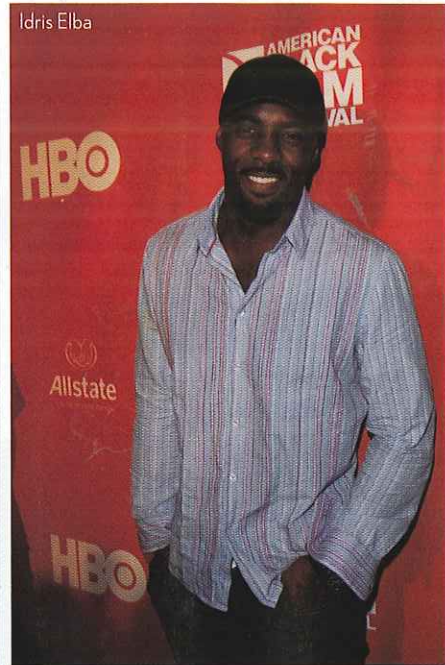
"We evaluate our success based on the people that have come through the festival and whether or not they are working in the industry, and most of them are whether it be as producers, editors, and directors or in other behind the scenes jobs," said Friday.

Since its inception, ABFF has screened more than 500 independent films. Festival alumni include producers Rob Hardy (*This Christmas* and *Stomp the Yard*), Will Packer (*This Christmas* and *Stomp the Yard*), and Roger M. Bobb (Tyler Perry's *Why Did I Get Married* and *Daddy's Little Girls*), and director Sylvain White (*Stomp the Yard*), among others.

ABFF is a property of Film Life, Inc., a New York-based film marketing and distribution company. For more information, please visit www.abff.com. ■



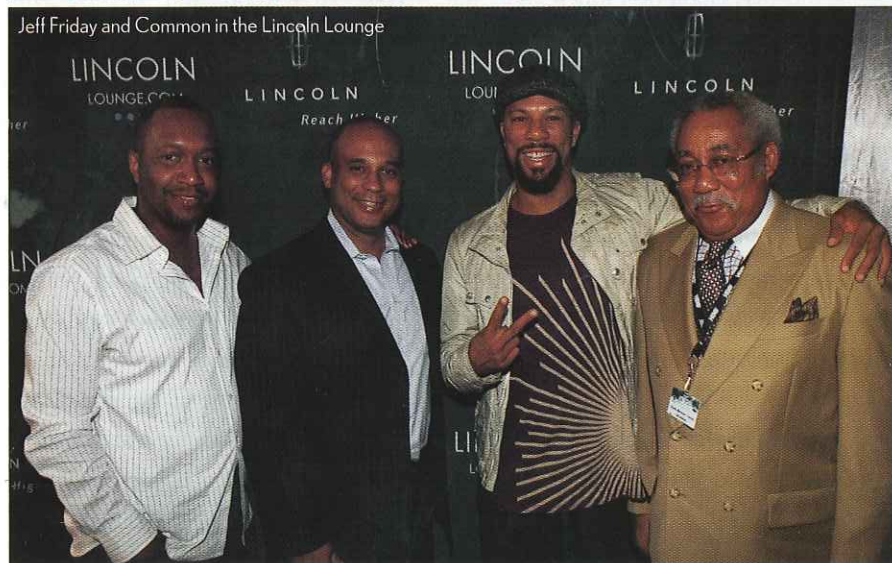
Lauren London and Will Packer



Idris Elba



This Christmas cast and crew



Jeff Friday and Common in the Lincoln Lounge