

# BlackStar Film Festival Wraps Up 9th Year, Announces Winners for 2020 Competition

(Philadelphia, PA – August 27, 2020) The BlackStar Film Festival, the world's premier celebration of Black, Brown, and Indigenous film and video artists, presented this year with lead sponsor Color of Change, is pleased to announce this year's award-winning films.

Winners include Best Feature Documentary *Stateless (Apátrida)*, exploring the depths of the racial hatred and institutionalized oppression that divide Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and Best Feature Narrative *Miss Juneteenth*, in which a former beauty queen and single mom prepares her rebellious teenage daughter for the "Miss Juneteenth" pageant. The full list of winning films is below.

This year also marks the first **Vimeo Staff Pick Award** at BlackStar. Short films featured in the festival are eligible for this award, which includes a \$2,500 cash prize and, of course, a Vimeo Staff Pick. The winning film, [Curtis Essel's ALLUMUAH](#), will be available to watch worldwide for free on Vimeo starting at 10:30am EST on August 27.

Lionsgate and STARZ also partnered with BlackStar to present the first **Lionsgate/STARZ Short Film Award** this year. The five winners of this prize will each receive \$1,000 each and have the opportunity to showcase their films on STARZ in Black. Winners include Martina Lee's *Black Boy Joy*, Oniffe White's *Echoes of a Winter Sunshine*, Amy Aniobi's *HONEYMOON*, Suha Araj's *Rosa* and Felicia Pride's *tender*.

The winner of the second annual **BlackStar Pitch**, offering filmmakers of color the chance to propose their works-in-progress to an illustrious panel of funders, distributors and producers, was **Iyabo Kwayana's *By Water***. Kwayana will receive a \$25,000 co-production deal with WORLD Channel and free graphic design services



from Melancholy Star. Honorable Mention was awarded to **Yeelen Cohen** for *Fighting for the Light*; Cohen will receive \$2,500 from IF/Then along with free graphic design services from Melancholy Star.

Finally, BlackStar members voted *Legendary: 30 Years of Philly Ballroom* and *Daughters Of* as the winners of the **Shine Award**, given each year to films directed by Philadelphia-based filmmakers. This year 11 films were eligible for the prize, marking a steep increase in Philadelphia-based representation for the festival. Both *Legendary* and *Daughters Of* were world premieres.

This year's BlackStar Film Festival lineup included approximately 90 films, including 24 world premieres and representing more than 20 countries. In addition to presenting an array of live programs and panels, this year also marked the debut of *BlackStar Live!*, a special daily morning show featuring filmmaker interviews, live performances, astrological updates and roundtable discussions of the day's film programming, streamed exclusively on Facebook Live. The festival also featured three live drive-in screenings in the parking lot in front of Philadelphia's Mann Center for the Performing Arts in West Fairmount Park. These screenings--*Be Water*, *The Forty-Year-Old Version* and *Miss Juneteenth*--were presented by Xfinity in partnership with Lyft, Red Bull and the Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation, as part of their new Philly Drive-In Movie Nights initiative. *The Forty-Year-Old Version* was presented by Netflix.

BlackStar receives support from its dedicated audience along with private foundations, public agencies, corporate, non-profit and individual sponsors. Our lead sponsor for 2020 is Color of Change. Additional supporters include (in alphabetical order): Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences, All Ages Productions, American Documentary/POV, Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, Annenberg School for Communication at University of Pennsylvania, Apple Original Films, Barra Foundation, Catapult Film Fund, Cinereach, Expressway Rentals, Facebook, Ford Foundation/JustFilms, IF/Then, Impact Partners, Independence Public Media Foundation, International Documentary Association, Lionsgate/STARZ,

Lyft, MacArthur Foundation, MediaJustice, MING Media, Nathan Cummings Foundation, Netflix, PECO, Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development, Pennsylvania Humanities Council, Philadelphia Cultural Fund, Red Bull, Samuel S. Fels Fund, Sundance Institute, Surdna Foundation, Vimeo, WarnerMedia, Wyncote Foundation, WORLD Channel, and Xfinity.

For overall information on the festival and its programs, visit [blackstarfest.org](http://blackstarfest.org).

### **About BlackStar Film Festival**

The BlackStar Film Festival is an annual celebration of the visual and storytelling traditions of the African diaspora and global communities of color – showcasing films by Black, Brown, and Indigenous people from around the world.

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# Winning Films:

## Best Experimental Film

Jurors: Kamal Aljafari, Filmmaker; David Hartt, Assistant Professor, Graduate Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania, Stuart Weitzman School of Design; Meg Onli, Andrea B. Laporte Associate Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania

*The Giverny Document (Single Channel)*

Dir: Ja'Tovia Gary

Filmed on location in Harlem, USA and in Claude Monet's historic gardens in Giverny, France, *The Giverny Document* is a multi-textured cinematic poem that meditates on the safety, bodily autonomy, and creative virtuosity of Black women.

Jury Comment: *A timely work that will be discussed well into the future.*

## Best Short Documentary

Jurors: Damani Baker, Filmmaker; dream hampton, Filmmaker & Writer; Chris Hastings, Executive Producer/Editorial Manager, WORLD Channel WGBH

*The Heart Still Hums*

Dir: Savanah Leaf & Taylor Russell

A documentary short, following five women as they fight for their children through the cycle of homelessness, drug addictions and neglect from their own parents. Unique, yet undoubtedly familiar to many; a story on fear, sacrifice and the unconditional love between a mother and her children.

Jury Comment: *The Heart Still Hums is cinematic, intimate, attentive, and empathetic, covering issues of restoration, abolition, and support with deep respect.*

\*Special Mention

*Man of the People*

Dir: Amir George

*Man of the People* is a political thriller centered on the legacy of the first black mayor of Chicago, Harold Washington. A complex unfolding of his two campaign runs and the moments leading to his sudden and mysterious death during his second term. Commissioned by Chicago Film Archives.

Jury Comment: *Man of the People is an original approach to biopic. It takes delicate craft to make a story out of archival footage.*

### **Best Short Narrative**

Jurors: Lynnée Denise, Artist, Scholar, Writer; Raafi Rivero, Writer/Director; Tourmaline, Artist, Filmmaker, Activist

*Rosa*

Dir: Suha Araj

While working at her aunt's flower shop, Rosa takes her job underground when she begins a side business of shipping undocumented bodies to their home countries for burial.

Jury Comment: *The filmmaker handles the punitive burdens faced by immigrants with wit, spectacular performances and unlikely connections between characters. It's a film that moves through politically charged emotions with cinematic grace.*

### **Best Feature Documentary**

Jurors: Monika Navarro, Filmmaker and Senior Director of Artist Programs, Firelight Media; Tracy Rector, Managing Director of Storytelling, Nia Tero; Chihui Yang, Senior Program Officer, JustFilms, Creativity and Free Expression

*Stateless (Apátrida)*

Dir: Michèle Stephenson

Through the grassroots campaign of electoral hopeful Rosa Iris, director Michèle Stephenson's new documentary reveals the depths of racial hatred and institutionalized oppression that divide Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Jury Comment: *Stateless is ambitious and innovative in form, telling an important story of borders and national identity with strong characters. The director's artistry collapses time for stateless Dominicans with Haitian heritage caught in limbo.*

\*Special Mention

*ROCÍO*

Dir: Dario Guerrero

After a sudden cancer diagnosis, an undocumented mother of three must choose between seeking treatment in her native Mexico and awaiting certain death in the US.

Jury Comment: *Special jury mention goes to ROCÍO, a love letter and tender ode to the power of family, connection, and intimacy, told through a rich home video archive that documents an immigrant family's joy and grief.*

### **Best Feature Narrative**

Jurors: Elissa Blount Moorhead, Artist, Curator, Producer; Ashley Clark, Director, Film Programming, BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music); Rajendra Roy, The Celeste Bartos Chief Curator of Film, MoMA

*Miss Juneteenth*

Dir: Channing Godfrey Peoples

A former beauty queen and single mom prepares her rebellious teenage daughter for the "Miss Juneteenth" pageant.

Jury Comment: *We really love this film: the languid but sure pacing, the performances (and the casting of the locals), the feel for community and tradition, the intergenerational theme, the humor.*

## Special Prizes:

### BlackStar Pitch Winners

Jurors: Opal Bennett, POV/DOC NYC/Athena Film Festival; Jamila Farwell, Netflix; Chloe Gbai, IF/Then; Alex Hannibal, CNN Films; Chris Hastings, WORLD Channel; Jihan Robinson, Quibi; Poh Si Teng, Al Jazeera; Chloe Walters-Wallace, Firelight Media; Chi-hui Yang, JustFilms.

#### *By Water*

Dir: Iyabo Kwayana

A brother's journey into his own memory becomes a vehicle for reconciliation and healing for his family.

#### Runner Up

#### *Fighting for the Light*

Dir: Yeelen Cohen

That moment when you're making a film about the Godfather of African Cinema who gave birth to your name but lose sight of who's making the film.

### Lionsgate/STARZ Short Film Award Winners

#### *Black Boy Joy*

Dir: Martina Lee

*Black Boy Joy* is an introspective slice of life story about two generations of Black men, living within the same household, juggling the demands of raising a young son with autism while adapting to their new normal after the death of a loved one.

*Echoes of a Winter Sunshine*

Dir: Oniffe White

A 16 year old and her 10 year old brother find themselves homeless in Harlem, NY.

*HONEYMOON*

Dir: Amy Aniobi

*HONEYMOON* tells the story of a newlywed couple on their first night together, made all the more awkward, romantic and honest, because they only just met.

*Rosa*

Dir: Suha Araj

While working at her aunt's flower shop, Rosa takes her job underground when she begins a side business of shipping undocumented bodies to their home countries for burial.

*tender*

Dir: Felicia Pride

After an unexpected one night stand, two women at very different stages of their lives, share an even more intimate morning after.

**Shine Award Winner**

*Daughters Of*

Dir. Shantrelle Patrice Lewis

*Daughters Of*, powered by GirlTrek, examines the immediate and critical importance of self-care and healing for Black women through the lens of their mamas' mamas' mamas. So we call their names to reclaim their stories.

*Legendary: 30 Years of Philly Ballroom*

Dirs. Raishad Hardnett, Lauren M. Schneiderman & Cassie Owens

An inside look into the effort to preserve Philadelphia's ballroom scene, a Black and Latinx LGBTQ safe-space that has endured for 30 years.

Vimeo Staff Pick Award

*ALLUMUAH*

Dir: Curtis Essel

*ALLUMUAH* explores the way the internet enables a lineage of aesthetics passed between African diaspora artists. Expounding on the concept of African identity and the influence technology has had on it over the decades.