

Film festival treasury

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NOW nearing the end of its annual two-week run, the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival 2017 has once again brought to light more than 100 fabulous works of the creativity and the artistry of Caribbean peoples on screen, demonstrating the great capacity for story-telling across this region.

Among this year's offerings were three features on the importance, the relevance and the meaning of this country's national instrument, the steelpan, to communities where they exist.

To Be A Renegade, a documentary directed by film-maker James O'Connor and produced with significant sponsorship and involvement of bpTT, is a story about the birth, the beginnings and the endurance of the band, known for decades now as BP Renegades.

From its birth in the heartland of the depressed East Port of Spain district, the band grew into a compelling force for positivity, headquartered on upper Charlotte Street.

Great focus was placed in this story, on the work of the band in nurturing young talent, with the existence of a junior band, which has captured the Junior Panorama title on four successive occasions.

It is the band management's philosophy in action, of playing its part in coming between the energy of the area's youth, and the possibility of falling into the society's social cracks.

The members and the leadership of this “young Renegades” outfit tell their own tales, in their own words, about acknowledging the challenges, and equally about helping to provide alternatives for their peers. They learn the elements of leadership, of organisation, of social structure and of focus and discipline.

The film also highlights the rise and the acceptance of the band's first female captain, and of the sense of self-worth, of dignity of the self-worth and of the development of a positive world-view by many of its members, from a constant stream of overseas tours and engagements over decades.

The story demonstrates the grit and determination which have been behind the fact that this band has captured the coveted national steelband Panorama title on nine previous occasions.

It was at the launch of this film, in a private showing in Port of Spain on September 16, that bpTT's head honcho, Norman Christie, announced the establishment of a scholarship fund for one deserving member of the “Juniors” for the pursuit of tertiary education.

A second steelband entry in the tfff this year was a focus on another champion steelband, the virtual next-door neighbour to Renegades, the Massy Trinidad All Stars. And in a portrayal of the Birdsong Steel Orchestra, located in Tunapuna, this film focuses on the band's female arranger, still a rarity in this industry.

Focusing more fully on women, other entries in this year's festival look closely at the power and the portrayal of women in film, drawing on experiences across the region's language groups.

There are entries, such as Wetlands and Us, and Nariva—An Under-recognised Treasure, which examine the condition of our environment and their importance to our ecosystem.

One entry, by a female Barbadian researcher, tells the story of the hundreds of thousands of West Indians who sought a better life by going to work on the building of the Panama Canal a century ago.

And then there is the adaptation of Trinidad's prolific novelist Michael Anthony's Green Days By the River, a tale of love and longing in rural Trinidad in 1952.

We must find a way to have these annual treasures become a more enduring aspect of our regular celebration of the region's enduring spirit of creativity, of story-telling and, most importantly, of our collective histories.

