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“15 YEARS & COUNTING!”

The People’s Film Festival Wraps Up The 15th Edition

NEW YORK, NY – June 3, 2026 — The People's Film Festival (TPFF), presented by The People's Media, Music & Arts Foundation, successfully concluded its landmark 15th Anniversary Festival on May 31, 2026, at Maysles Cinema in Harlem, New York. The four-day celebration showcased the power of independent storytelling, featuring more than 50 films representing five countries, including 17 films produced in New York, five directed by Harlem filmmakers, and an impressive 24 World Premieres.

Centered around this year's theme, "**Who Are You?**", the festival explored identity, self-acceptance, truth, resilience, and transformation through the lens of cinema and storytelling.

"Fifteen years ago, we set out to create a platform where underrepresented voices could be seen and heard on the big screen," said Veronica Keitt, Founder and Executive Director of The People's Film Festival. "Today, we celebrate not only the filmmakers whose stories inspire us but also the community that has sustained this festival year after year. Reaching fifteen years is a testament to the power of independent film and the people who believe in it."

The festival experience extended beyond film screenings with masterclasses, workshops, technology talks, networking events, after-parties, and community activations. A major highlight was TPFF's inaugural **Harlem Taste & Sip | Stop & Shop** initiative, encouraging attendees to "**Hit Da Block!**" and support local Harlem businesses that champion the arts, culture, and creative economy. Participating establishments included **Harlem Nights Bar, Silvana, Winnie Said, Harlem Tavern, Shrine World Music Venue, The Fox Harlem, Yatenga Bistro, Dinosaur Bar-B-Que, The Victoria, The Nephew Supper Club, Bo's Bagels, CopperLeaf Bakery & Coffee, NiLu Gift Boutique**, and several other neighborhood businesses.

Opening Night Celebrates Harlem Storytelling

The festival opened with four independent filmmakers whose works reflected the diversity and strength of contemporary storytelling. A special collaboration with **Voza Rivers and New Heritage Films** featured a screening of the Academy Award-nominated song "**RAISE IT UP**" from *August Rush*, directed by Mike DeCaro and Malik Beckford and performed by Harlem's IMPACT Repertory Theatre. The evening continued with the documentary "**THIS IS VOZA**", directed by Jamal Joseph and Mike DeCaro, celebrating the life and legacy of Harlem cultural icon Voza Rivers.



Award Winners Highlight Excellence in Independent Film

Among this year's top honors, filmmaker **Arterlik Miller** received **Best Film** for **93' TIL**, a love story about new couple who choose to try for love even when the outcome is uncertain. **Akbar Majeed** received **Best Documentary** for "**CAN WE KICK IT**", a compelling exploration of the disconnect between Black communities in the United States and the world's most popular sport—soccer. Harlem filmmaker **Shawn Antoine II** won **Best Short Film** for "**THE SIGHT UNSEEN**", while actor **Jarrad John** earned **Best Actor** for his performance as "**Melvin Tapley**" in the same film, which revisits the extraordinary events surrounding the famous 1971 Bronx "Glowing Cross" phenomenon. **Elizabeth Rodriguez** received **Best Actress** for her portrayal of "**Maddie Ortiz**", while **Damon Jamal** won **Best Director** for "**PRESIDENT MUST DIE: TIME ZERO**" about an unfulfilled engineer who wakes up next to a ticking nuclear bomb in an underground chamber with only a phone and one instruction to save millions of people: she must convince the

US President to kill himself. **Jamal Hodge** was recognized for **Best Cinematography** for **"TAKE IT TO THE GRAVE"**, about a couple —on the eve of their big wedding, reveal how their one-night stand turned into a lifelong love. International honors went to Colombian filmmaker **Iván Darío Alba**, who received **Best International Film** for **"MURALMENTE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERPRETING GRAFFITI – THE KISS OF THE INVISIBLES"**, which tells the story of the mural created by the Vertigo Graffiti collective and inspired by a photograph of two homeless people. The **Audience Award** was presented to **Stephanie Annette** for **"2 STORY HOME"**, about how a wife's attempt to spice up the marriage backfires severely, drew one of the festival's largest and most enthusiastic audiences. The **Radical History Makers Award** was awarded to director **Matthew Solomon's** **"SEEDS FOR LIBERATION"**, a documentary connecting Palestinian voices and experiences to broader struggles for justice among Black, Chicano, and other marginalized communities. Brazilian filmmaker **Spartakus Santiago** received **Best Music Video** for **"FREE ON BAIL"**, a groundbreaking visual album that combines poetry, music, spirituality, and self-discovery into a cinematic experience. Santiago later performed the English version of his music at the Harlem Nights Club.

Closing the festival, **Christopher Paul Horne** earned **Best Documentary Short** for **"UNHEARD VOICES: A MOTHER'S QUEST FOR FREEDOM"**, a powerful story following a mother whose son's 40-year prison sentence leads her to connect with families nationwide impacted by the criminal justice system. The festival also honored **LaVerne Cody Gittens** with the **Lifetime Achievement in Public Media Award** in recognition of more than 50 years of service and leadership in independent public media. (see full list of winners below)

Foster Care Awareness Month Spotlight

In recognition of Foster Care Awareness Month, TPFF honored comedian, actress, author, and advocate **Tiffany Haddish** and her nonprofit organization, **The She Ready Foundation**, for their commitment to improving the lives of foster youth. Haddish's advocacy and openness about her own experiences in foster care continue to inspire young people to embrace their truth and reclaim their narratives.

Education, Innovation & Community Engagement

The festival welcomed back the Harlem Creative Lab and Reel Digital Media's free two-day filmmaking intensive at Aloft Harlem Hotel, offering training in screenwriting and on-set production. Will Roberts of Augmented Pictures presented "Virtually Uncharted," an immersive workshop exploring how artificial intelligence can enhance storytelling and filmmaking. TPFF also welcomed **Tiffany Stoker of The Epic Plan Foundation**, who provided insights into employment and entrepreneurship opportunities within the growing cannabis industry.

Thank You to Our Sponsors and Supporters

The People's Film Festival extends its deepest gratitude to the organizations, businesses, volunteers, judges, and community partners whose support made the 15th Anniversary Festival possible. Special thanks to New Heritage Films, Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN), the New York City Mayor's Office of Media & Entertainment (MOME), NAACP, Sisters Of Wisdom (SOW), UFCW LOCAL 888, MetroPlus Health, Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey, Mooshood Creations, SRK Recordings, Designed by Nature Apparel, ALup International, 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care, VEP Productions, the "And You Don't Stop" Podcast, our dedicated judges, TBS Security, volunteers, volunteer staff, and the many supporters who continue to help keep independent filmmaking alive and thriving.

ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

The People's Film Festival is an initiative of The People's Media, Music & Arts Foundation (TPMMAF)—which is a non-profit corporation whose purpose is to provide venues and promote awareness in independent music, media, technology and art across the globe while encouraging those—particularly in the Harlem New York area, to develop a greater appreciation and understanding for cultural diversity in film.

For More info about the festival visit: www.thepeoplesfilmfestival.com

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HASHTAGS: #tpff2026 #fostercareawarenessmonth #thepeoplesfilmfestival #mentalblock2026

Congratulations to all filmmakers who have been selected this year.
 We also thank our dedicated team, partners and jury for making this year a success!
Winners and Honorable Mentions of the 15th Annual People's Film Festival.



BEST FEATURE FILM	WINNER: 93 TIL Alterik Miller
BEST SHORT FILM	WINNER: THE SIGHT UNSEEN Shawn Antoine II
BEST SHORT FILM	WINNER: NO LABELS Sharna McCullough Jenkins, Alterik Miller
	(HM) Honorable Mention BEHIND A LIE Juliet Ibrahim
BEST DIRECTOR	WINNER: THE PRESIDENT MUST DIE: TIME ZERO Damon Jamal
BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY	WINNER: TAKE IT TO THE GRAVE Jamal Hodge
BEST ACTOR	WINNER: JARED KEMP - THE SIGHT UNSEEN "MELVIN TAPLEY" Shawn Antoine II
BEST ACTRESS	WINNER: ELIZABETH RODRIGUEZ - PRESIDENT MUST DIE: Time Zero - "MADDIE ORTIZ" Damon Jamal
	(HM) Honorable Mention - THEY LIED TO US ANNE JOSEPH - THEY LIED TO US "GLORIA" Jason Labuda
BEST DOCUMENTARY	WINNER: CAN WE KICK IT? Akbar Majeed
	(HM) Honorable Mention THE REBUTTAL: ELIZABETH MEADERS COLLECTION Nataki Fidella Alexander
BEST DOCUMENTARY-SHORT	WINNER: UNHEARD VOICES: A Mother's Quest for Freedom Christopher Paul Horne
BEST INTERNATIONAL	WINNER: MURALMENTE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR INTERPRETING GRAFFITI – THE KISS OF THE INVISIBLES IvÃn DarÃo Alba
	(HM) Honorable Mention - THE BORDER CZAR Raymond T. Williams • Costa Rica
BEST MUSIC VIDEO	WINNER: FREE ON BAIL Spartakus Santiago
BEST ANIMATION/AI	WINNER: SPRAY CAN STORIES Emmitt H Thrower
BEST NEW SOCIAL MEDIA	WINNER: CORPORATE CATFISH Aliyah Jones
	(HM) Honorable Mention 1.19.22 DOCUMENTARY Marxelle. Becton.
AUDIENCE AWARD	WINNER: 2 STORY HOME Stephanie Annette
RADICAL HISTORY MAKERS	WINNER: SEEDS FOR LIBERATION Matthew Solomon
HARLEM CREATIVE AWARD	WINNER: TRUE SEE Jamal Joseph, Mike DeCaro
POWER OF "SHE"	WINNER: SILENT ECHOES: THE INVISIBLE WOMEN Destiny Joy, Joe Hill
YOUNG PEOPLE'S VISIONARY AWARD	WINNER: FOOTPRINTS OF THE FORGOTTEN 14 Earl Wallace, Casey Scott
LIFETIME COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC MEDIA	WINNER: LAVERNE CODY GITTENS

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