

THE 25TH ANNUAL NEW ORLEANS FILM FESTIVAL

NOFF IN REVIEW

Black or White producer Todd Lewis and wife Claire Lewis



Actor Jay Huguley makes an opening night appearance.



Black or White actor Anthony Mackie



STORY BY HALEY SUMMERS

“We really want to celebrate the rich history of the last 25 years,” said Jolene Pinder, executive director of the New Orleans Film Festival.



Although simple, the statement made on opening night best illustrates the atmosphere of the entire 2014 festival. The last two and a half decades have given the event—described by *MovieMaker Magazine* as “a happy blur of daiquiris and alligator nuggets, passionate, intelligent filmmaking and bizarre bouncy castle encounters”—time to establish itself as one of the most reputable regional film festivals in the country.

Held every October by the New Orleans Film Society, the New Orleans Film Festival (NOFF) allows for new and established filmmakers to debut their latest works. Mike Binder’s New Orleans-shot film *Black or White* shows why the city, so rich in history, creates a dynamic backdrop desirable to a lot of filmmakers. The film, which was screened on opening night, stars Kevin Costner, Octavia Spencer and New Orleans native Anthony Mackey.

Binder spoke about New Orleans and his original feelings about filming in the city. “At first, I wasn’t sure about the location, but after a lot of cajoling by the producer, Tom Louis, I realized that New Orleans truly was the best choice and I’m very happy that we ended up here.”

Moments before the *Black or White* screening began, Pinder voiced the New Orleans Film Society’s appreciation for directors like Binder. “We realize that the willingness of filmmakers to film in our city allows for better festivals,” she said. “We couldn’t be happier or more proud of the growth in our city’s film production because, without it, the NOFF would cease to exist.”

The Big Beat: The Story of Fats Domino and His Band is best described by director Joseph Lauro as a documentary about “how Fats’ music became rock ‘n’ roll and how it effectively broke down the color barriers that paved the way for racial integration through music.”

Pinder expressed enthusiasm about the project during the festival’s closing night. “Tonight, having the world premiere of *The Big Beat* is a dream come true for us. We’ve worked very hard at producing a great festival that honors 25 years and we believe that screening a documentary that’s



so indicative of New Orleans is the best way to do that.”

The theme of Lauro’s film, in conjunction with Binder’s *Black or White*, made the opening and closing nights symmetrical, rounding out the festival in a very cohesive way.

Alexa Georges, president of the New Orleans Film Society, thanked everyone by making an unorthodox, but well received announcement. “In 2007, the society created something called the Celluloid Hero award, which was given to an outstanding member in the New Orleans film community. This year, the award goes to everyone in the community, because without them, none of this would be possible.”

New Orleans Film Festival is a nonprofit, cultural organization dedicated to providing all audiences access to a diversity of local, national and international film and video. The festival also presents a series of mentor sessions, workshops and panel discussions featuring industry leaders. **LFV**