

Specialty Film Festivals Bring Stories to Silicon Valley Screens

By Jeffrey Edalatpour

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HOOKED In 'The Fisherman,' screening at the Silicon Valley African Film Festival, a Ghanaian catches a talking fish and sets off to realize his dream of owning a boat. PHOTO: Courtesy SVAFF

October is a big month for cinephiles in Silicon Valley. In chronological order, this film festival season includes the following: Silicon Valley African Film Festival (Oct. 9–12), San Jose International Short Film Festival (Oct. 16–19), Silicon Valley Asian Pacific FilmFest (in person Oct. 17–19, online Oct. 20–26) and Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival (Oct. 19–Nov. 2).

Originally from Nigeria, Chike Nwoffiah, the founding director of the SVAFF, started the festival in a classroom 16 years ago. After living in the United States for several decades, Nwoffiah continued to be met with two myopic stereotypes about Africa. In a recent telephone interview, he described them as the “Tarzan” and the “National Geographic” narratives. Encountering them in the infotech capital of the world was a shock.

Those Western, colonial-eyed narratives bore no relation to his experience of the place. From his perspective, they presented a flattened view of a continent with 54 countries and 1 billion people. While Nwoffiah was teaching at the Community School of Music and Arts in Mountain View, he asked his students where they were receiving their ideas about Africa. Media, whether in film or via the news, was the most common response. To counter the misinformation, one Saturday morning he curated a handful of films from different parts of the continent.



BREAKING THE NEWS The documentary 'Beyond the Headlines,' screening at the Silicon Valley African Film Festival, tells the story of the National Association of Black Journalists. PHOTO: Courtesy SVAFF

About 50 people showed up. “We had food and we watched these films,” Nwoffiah recalled. “The conversations were so rich and literally everybody asked, ‘When can we have this again?’” From that humble beginning, this year’s festival will showcase 92 films from 32 countries. They tell stories of Africa through African lenses. “One of the major criteria for a film to be in our festival is that somebody of African ancestry must be in a creative, decision-making role,” he explained. “Whether they are seasoned or emerging filmmakers, we’re creating a platform and inviting our community to see Africa differently.”

On Saturday, Oct. 11, the African Film Festival’s centerpiece film is the documentary *Beyond The Headlines: The NABJ Journey*. Nwoffiah described the doc as, “a 50-year story of the founding and the journey of the National Association of Black Journalists.” After the screening, there will be a town hall conversation with members of the NABJ and the community. “The film couldn’t have come to us at a more opportune time with what is going on now in America,” he said.

Nwoffiah noted that in addition to being a film festival, the event also has “all the trappings of an African celebration.” There will be live entertainment, a fashion show, a marketplace and an arts exhibition. “Because African cultural expression is not in silos, we are mimicking that, inviting people to see films but they also get to taste, feel, touch and see Africa.”

For more about the Silicon Valley African Film Festival (Oct. 9–12), visit svaff.org.



FAMILY PORTRAIT Tadashi Nakamura’s ‘Third Act’ pays tribute to his late father, the pioneering filmmaker Robert Nakamura. PHOTO: Courtesy Silicon Valley Asian Pacific FilmFest

Exploring the Pacific Rim

In 2015, the Silicon Valley Asian Pacific FilmFest was founded as the San Jose J-Town FilmFest. Cindy Toy, the festival’s current managing director, told me they changed the name after a couple of years because “everyone thought it would be Japanese films but it really wasn’t.” Because they receive so many submissions, SVAPFF continues online after the in-person screenings end. “A lot of them are really good but we have to decide which films will bring more people,” Toy explained.

Third Act by Tadashi Nakamura opens the film festival on Friday, Oct. 17 (tickets include a bento dinner and a T-shirt). Nakamura’s documentary pays tribute to his late father, the pioneering filmmaker Robert Nakamura. Known as “the Godfather of Asian American film,” *Third Act* pays homage to his career but also unfolds as a father-son narrative. Throughout his work, Nakamura père asked the question, “How do we use media to serve the people?” His son highlights the fact that his father was “using film as a form of resistance.” Tadashi will be in attendance for a post-screening Q&A.

Toy also recommends two short films commemorating “the lasting aftereffects of the Vietnam War.” Both shorts screen on Saturday, Oct. 18. *Making Waves*, *The Rise of Asian America* is “about Asian Americans and activism,” Toy said. The doc presents a model for students today to have their voices heard and to offer a strategy to contend with anti-Asian hate. Also playing on Saturday, *MĀHŪ: A Trans-Pacific Love Letter*, a short film about the transgender hula dancer Patrick Makuakāne. Makuakāne will also attend the screening and will give a live performance after the screening.

For more about the Silicon Valley Asian Pacific FilmFest (Oct. 17–26), visit svapfilmfest.org.



SPIRIT OF ALOHA The Asian Pacific FilmFest screening of 'MĀHŪ: A Trans-Pacific Love Letter' will include a live performance.

Other Coming Attractions

The United Nations Association Film Festival takes place Oct. 16–26 in the South Bay, San Francisco and the East Bay. UNAFF will present 60 documentary films from around the world, including four world premieres and a dozen U.S. premieres. Screening in the South Bay are *A Little Fellow: The Legacy of A.P. Giannini*, which explores the the first-generation Italian-American who revolutionized banking; *Who Killed Shireen?*, an investigative documentary looks at the death of a Palestinian-American journalist; *Nice Girls Don't Ask*, which excavates footage from vintage educational films directed at women and explores whether old constraints are creeping back, and *Soaking the Ground*, about agricultural workers in the Amazon Rainforest.

For more about the United Nations Association Film Festival, visit unaff.org.

The 17th annual San Jose International Short Film Festival kicks off four days of screenings that will feature 150 short films covering every possible flavor on the entertainment spectrum. Fantasies, documentaries, comedy bits, romantic moments, suspenseful shorts, lyrical animation, hair-raising action, imaginative science fiction, spine-chilling horror—if it can be filmed, it will be on view at this annual cinematic cornucopia. Opening night is Thursday, Oct. 16, with a red carpet ceremony at 6pm followed by the screening at 7:30pm at CineArts Theater Santana Row. The after-party will follow at Meso, also on Santana Row. Screenings begin again at noon on Friday, Oct. 17 and 11am on Oct. 18-19, with screenings continuing into the evening.

For more about the San Jose International Short Film Festival, visit sjsff.com.

Starting on Sunday, Oct. 19, the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival begins a hybrid schedule of 30 screenings that includes some in-person events and other virtual watch parties. A [YouTube trailer](#) gives a taste of what's to come in this festival, which runs through Nov. 2. Opening night begins with a 7pm screening at the Oshman Family JCC (3921

Fabian Way, Palo Alto) of the film *Tatami*, set during the World Judo Championships and representing the first film co-directed by an Israeli director and an Iranian filmmaker. Other highlights include *My Neighbor Adoph*, a comedy set in a quiet South American village in which a Holocaust survivor leads a reclusive life until a German-speaking neighbor moves in next door, and *Charles Grodin: Rebel with a Cause*, about the actor's long comedic career.

For more about the Silicon Valley Jewish Film Festival, visit svjff.org.