

...The coolest film festival in Nigeria

By Steve Ayorinde



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[Steve Ayorinde - Wikipedia](#)

EXCEPT for the first edition, which I couldn't attend because I was out of town, I have been privileged to have attended all the other eight editions of IREP Film Festival.

As a journalist and newspaper manager with a special inclination for the arts and moving pictures, IREP is always your ideal fertile ground for contacts and content.

But three times out of the eight editions I have attended, I have had the honour of playing a role, courtesy of the kind invitations from Mr. Femi Odugbemi, the festival's executive director. First was in 2013, I believe, as the Managing Director/Editor-in-Chief of *National Mirror*, when I was asked to give an address of welcome at the opening cocktail night.

I am a film festival freak and I've always held the opinion that film festivals in Africa should be as high in social networking as they are in film screenings and round-table discussions. IREP offers a good blend of this to festival goers, especially after it moved from Terra Kulture to Freedom Park, which is more spacious and arguably more tolerant of the type of boisterous, late-into-the-night socialising that almost always serves as the needed encore for the film screenings at the festival.

Which was why in 2016, I had no hesitation whatsoever to welcome the same opportunity to deliver the welcome address at the opening night of the festival, in my capacity as the Commissioner for Information and Strategy in Lagos State.

I respond to documentary films passionately because they tell stories in a more personalised point of view. Subject matters are oft-times clear and direct in documentaries and; IREP, as perhaps, the only niche festival of its type in West Africa, does offer a good dose of documentaries each year.

As a member of the Jury for African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA), which has categories for documentary films for Nigerians and for those in the Diaspora, IREP has become a good catchment area for AMAA submissions.

So, having declared open the festival in 2016, my promise was to look in every day of the festival to at least see the last two screenings, because the festival did select a good array of films that spoke to the theme of "documentaries as *agent provocateur*" that year.

The 9th edition in 2019 also had a role for me. This time it was the privilege of giving the closing remarks at the grand finale, as the Commissioner for Tourism Arts and Culture in Lagos. Aside seeing good films, including *"Skin"* by Beverley Naya, it was an edition that achieved two important things: it celebrated the lives of artistes who had departed the earth. Bisi Silva, Pius Adesanmi and Okwui Enwezor had all transited, living good legacies of artistic and literary accomplishments. IREP celebrated them.

More importantly, the festival honoured a woman that I also had the privilege of working closely with while I served in Lagos State Government – Mrs. Bolanle Austin-Peters. In handing over the plaque on behalf of IREP to "Madam Terra Kulture", I believe I achieved two things - - honoured her for providing shelter for IREP in its first two years; and to express gratitude on behalf of Lagos State; for she was the inspiration and moving spirit behind the four 500-seater community theatres that the administration of Governor Akinwunmi Ambode delivered for Lagosians in 2019. All were modelled after Terra Kulture Arena but in a slightly bigger fashion so that platforms can be created in Badagry, Epe, Igando and Oregun for art performances to flourish and for other ideas like IREP to emerge in those locations where the theatres are sited.

I must emphasise the good relationship my office had with iREP during my tenure as a Commissioner in Lagos State. We listed the festival in our Calendar of Arts and Culture events for 2018 and 2019 because of our endorsement and support for this great initiative that is painstakingly doing its bit in lifting the profile of the state not just as the motion picture capital of the continent but also as a regional hub where discourses on the arts and matters pertaining to culture, show business and tourism are evidently important.

More importantly, I personally owe iREP a debt of gratitude on the landmark book project -- a travel anthology -- which I initiated and co-edited for the Lagos State government in 2019. Titled *"The Coolest City on Earth"*, the book had 30 non-Nigerian professionals across every continent who have had encounters with different aspects of cultural life in Lagos contributing an article each about their experiences in this city. The contributions were as revealing as they were riveting in confirming how *Vogue* magazine in 2017 described Lagos as the 'Coolest City On Earth' after covering the *ThisDay* Fashion Festival in Lagos. Two of the contributors to that landmark book are filmmakers that have participated at *iREP Documentary Film Festival* and had been recommended by Messrs Femi Odugbemi and Jahman Anikulapo, two of the strong pillars behind the festival.

It is a satisfactory validation that just few months after the publication of that book, Onikan area of the Lagos metropolis was listed by CNN's publication, *Time Out* magazine as the

"coolest neighbourhood" to visit in Africa and third in ranking in the whole world. The reasons were for its attractiveness in the concentration of art centres, galleries, restaurants and "where the past, present and future collide pleasantly."

IREP undoubtedly is one of the key and consistent offerings of this cool Onikan-Marina-Broad Street neighbourhood that is giving Lagos a positive vibe.

As it clocks 10 this year, it must be celebrated, and its handlers applauded for providing a worthy platform for documentary filmmakers and for expanding the scope of aspiration for younger generation of filmmakers and students who are hungry for greatness. In sum, the synergy that this cute festival creates with its host venue, Freedom Park, on Broad Street most persuasively makes it the coolest film festival in Nigeria.

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