

08 TORONTO
INTERNATIONAL
FILM
FESTIVAL
SEPTEMBER 4-13

SOUL POWER

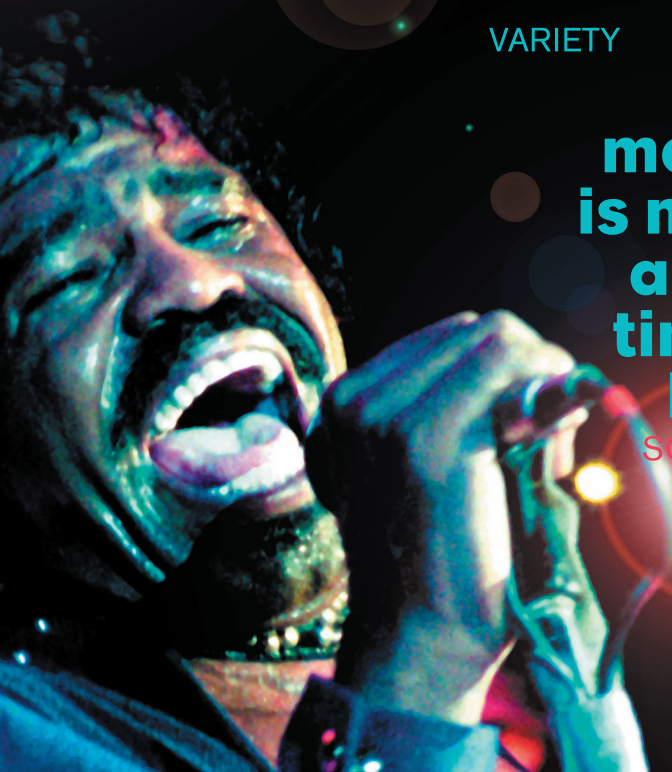
a film by Jeffrey Levy-Hinte

**"Joyously funky...
An instant classic."**

VARIETY

**"A unique
moment in time
is now on record,
an invaluable
time capsule...
Knockout."**

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Presents

SOUL POWER

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A film by Jeffrey Levy-Hinte

USA - 93 min - 2008 - Color - Dolby SRD - English/French

the directors label



World Sales

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Synopsis

In 1974, the most celebrated American R&B acts of the time came together with the most renowned musical groups in Southern Africa for a 12-hour, three-night long concert held in Kinshasa, Zaire. The dream-child of Hugh Masekela and Stewart Levine, this music festival became a reality when they convinced boxing promoter Don King to combine the event with “The Rumble in the Jungle,” the epic fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman, previously chronicled in the Academy Award-winning documentary **WHEN WE WERE KINGS**.

SOUL POWER is a verité documentary about this legendary music festival (dubbed “Zaire ‘74”), and it depicts the experiences and performances of such musical luminaries as James Brown, BB King, Bill Withers, Celia Cruz, among a host of others. At the peak of their talents and the height of their careers, these artists were inspired by this return to their African roots, as well as the enthusiasm of the Zairian audience, to give the performances of their lives. The concert has achieved mythological significance as the definitive Africa(n)-American musical event of the 20th Century.

SOUL POWER is crafted from the extensive “outtakes” that remained after making **WHEN WE WERE KINGS**, which documented the epic title fight, but relegated the music festival to a small, supporting role. The “outtakes” have remained vaulted for the past 34 years, until now. Lensed primarily by celebrated cinematographers Albert Maysles, Paul Goldsmith, Kevin Keating and Roderick Young, **SOUL POWER** finally provides today’s audience the opportunity to experience this historic musical event in all of its magnificent, filmed glory.

Directors Statement

In 1995, I was brought on to do editorial work for *WHEN WE WERE KINGS*, a documentary chronicling the renowned fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman (aka “The Rumble in the Jungle”) held in Kinshasa, Zaire in the Fall of 1974. As that film neared completion, I became fixated on the notion that there was a tremendous wealth of material that was being sent back to the vault. This went beyond the typical situation where beloved scenes are left on the proverbial cutting room floor; rather, there was an entire aspect of the footage that was only superficially explored.

The neglected footage was the extensive coverage of “Zaire ‘74”, the legendary three-day music festival featuring scintillating performances by, among others, James Brown, BB King, The Spinners, Miriam Makeba, Celia Cruz, and the most popular groups of Zaire. Besides the concert itself, there was extensive coverage of the efforts to organize the festival, prepare the stadium, and the experiences of the artists who made the life-changing journey to Africa. Knowledge of this footage created a burden: I felt that if I didn’t work to bring this material to the public that I would be complicit in obscuring these events, depriving people of the opportunity to “see” and “hear” what had transpired.

My original intention was to create a set of concert DVD’s. However, as I waded through the hundreds of camera rolls and sound recordings with my gifted editor, David Smith, I was struck by the awesome strength of the material: from the small moments of intense humor and insight to amazing set pieces, the material was even more vibrant and compelling than I had remembered it, and there were entire sections of material that I had never viewed because they were not relevant to the work on *WHEN WE WERE KINGS*. I soon concluded that a feature was warranted. However, given the success of *KINGS*, I was nervous that “another” documentary would be viewed as derivative and parasitic, and it would be judged harshly against its very accomplished elder sibling. Though still afflicted by this anxiety, I was convinced that I could make a film quite distinct – in terms of the focus, themes, style, and, most critically, the footage actually used – from *KINGS*.

I recalled that the greatest difficulty in making *WHEN WE WERE KINGS* was how to deal with the overabundance of worthwhile material. At bottom, the fight and the music festival was just too much for one film to contain. Ultimately, the decision was made to place the primary emphasis on the fight, and Muhammad Ali’s seemingly impossible quest to regain the title. Given that the definitive film about the fight had already been made, I was released from the burden of having to balance these elements, and I could focus my efforts exclusively on the music festival, the artists, their entourage, and the process of pulling off this extremely complex venture. With the support and encouragement from David Sonenberg and Leon Gast, the producer and director of *WHEN WE WERE KINGS*, I embarked on making *SOUL POWER*.

Viewing the material for *SOUL POWER* was an unmitigated joy – day after day a beautiful, vibrant world came alive before my eyes. However, actually working with the material was daunting – between the hundreds of hours of film and sound and the expectations of *WHEN*






WE WERE KINGS fans, I was keenly aware the difficult path upon which I had chosen to travel. Additionally, I decided that I would not include any retrospective interviews or archival materials; anything not part of the original film shoot was off limits. I wanted to make a film that would fully immerse the audience in all aspects of the music festival: the anticipation, frustration, joys, disappointment and, above all, the sheer pleasure of the musical performances. I wanted the filmed material – and the people and events it portrayed – to speak for itself.

We set about building scenes of everything and anything that that piqued our interest, without regard for how it would all hang together. Needless to say viewing the first assembly, which ran for several hours not including the concert, was a painful experience. That is when I printed out a graphic of trail leading to the summit of Mount Everest. I relabeled the graphic “Mount Zaire ‘74” and used a sticky note to trace our progress up the mountain. Knowing that the “summit” awaited us at the end of the long and arduous journey helped us persevere; it also reminded us to be prepared, careful, and not to be led astray by hubris, which is the surest path to failure for mountaineer and filmmaker alike.

After a few months of editing we felt happy with the shape of the film. That is until we screened it for an audience. Though there were many who appreciated what we were trying to achieve, the majority were perplexed, and urged us to provide more narrative signposts, to incorporate more information about the event, its meaning, context, and the consequence of the event. They suggested new interviews and archival materials to clarify the narrative. One audience member stated flatly that **SOUL POWER** was “not even a documentary!” Such responses were quite sobering.

Instead of following these prescriptions, I sought to respond to the feelings behind them. Many people became lost in the ambiguities of the material, so I attempted to craft a tighter more connected structure; others wanted to hear people speak about the meaning of the experiences, so I mined the footage for moments of reflection; some demanded more information on the context of the festival, so I placed explanatory cards at the beginning of the film. On a slightly different tack, a large number of people encouraged me to deemphasize the behind the scenes machinations of organizing the festival and to get right into the music. This was the most difficult note to tackle hear as it ultimately entailed cutting a number of scenes that I found absolutely fascinating. Ultimately I am grateful for the passionate criticism that people all too freely heaped upon the film, as it undoubtedly helped me to make a better film than would have emerged if I worked in isolation.





The diligent and perceptive on-the-ground direction of Leon Gast, and the phenomenal camera work of Paul Goldsmith, Kevin Keating, Albert Maysles, and Roderick Young, among a half dozen others, provided me the opportunity to make this film in the vérité tradition. Their camerawork was reliably patient, economical, insightful, and aesthetically sophisticated. Many of the camera rolls struck me as near-perfect short films, where each moment beautifully flowed into the next, while weaving in ample coverage so that scenes could be condensed at will. In a very literal sense, these cameramen are great filmmakers, and my approach to this film was wholly dependent upon their superlative ability to walk into situations and to dynamically convey what was going on.

Throughout the editorial process I was informed and guided by the masters of vérité cinema: Barbara Kopple, Albert Maysles, D.A. Pennebaker, and Frederick Wiseman. I was also emboldened by the great concert films of the era: GIMME SHELTER, WOODSTOCK, MONTEREY POP, WATTSTAX, and SOUL TO SOUL. Ultimately I hope that SOUL POWER is worthy of this heritage, but of course this is something that can only be decided by the audience. Ironically, having completed SOUL POWER, there is still a tremendous amount of material that has been left out. Fortunately, with the advent of DVD extras and the Internet, I anticipate ample opportunity to give this material a public life separate from inclusion film. Most importantly, I plan to make the entire concert available, but that is another mountain.

About The Filmmakers

Jeffrey Levy-Hinte, Director

President of Antidote Films in New York, Jeffrey Levy-Hinte currently completed several documentaries, including SOUL POWER (produced and directed by Levy-Hinte) and DUNGEON MASTERS, both of which premiered at the 2008 Toronto International Film Festival. He is also preparing production for THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT, written and to be directed by Lisa Cholodenko.

Most recently Levy-Hinte produced ROMAN POLANSKI: WANTED AND DESIRED, the widely acclaimed documentary feature by director Marina Zenovich, which enjoyed premieres at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival and 2008 Cannes Film Festival. The film was broadcast on HBO in June 2008, and released in U.S. theaters by Think Film, with international release coming soon from The Weinstein Company.

Additionally, Levy-Hinte produced the critically acclaimed eco-horror thriller, THE LAST WINTER, (released by IFC Films) and the documentary BOMB IT, a comprehensive investigation of graffiti, covering street art from all around the world. THE LAST WINTER premiered at the 2006 Toronto International Film Festival while BOMB IT premiered at the 2007 Tribeca Film Festival's World Documentary Competition.

Selected as one of Variety's "Producers to Watch" in 2003, Jeffrey has also produced many other critically successful and award-winning films, including THE HAWK IS DYING, MYSTERIOUS SKIN, THIRTEEN, and LAUREL CANYON. Additionally, Jeffrey edited the 1996 Academy Award-winning documentary WHEN WE WERE KINGS, has served as a juror for the Independent Spirit Awards, and is Board Chair for Independent Features Project (IFP) of New York.

Born in Santa Monica, California, Jeffrey Levy-Hinte is a graduate of Cal State, Northridge and the University of Michigan.

Leon Gast, Producer

Leon Gast is a director, producer, screenwriter, cinematographer and editor. He is known for making such seminal documentaries as HELL'S ANGELS FOREVER and the Oscar-winning chronicle of the 1974 landmark fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman, WHEN WE WERE KINGS. During the 1960s and 1970s, Gast became famous for his still photography and his work appeared in such magazines as Vogue, Esquire, and Harper's Bazaar. Other works include 1 LOVE, SALSA: THE FILM and CELIA CRUZ AND THE FANIA ALL-STARS IN AFRICA.

OUR LATIN THING, which he directed and did cinematography for, won the Truer Than Fiction Award and WHEN WE WERE KINGS won the Independent Spirit Award. Gast is currently directing PAPAZZO: THE UNWELCOME ART OF RON GALELLA, produced by Adam Schlesinger and Linda Saffire, written by Roger Rosenblatt, photographed by Don Lenzer, and edited by Doug Abel.

David Sonenberg, Producer

A Harvard Law School graduate, David Sonenberg, began the music management label DAS communications. He has managed Meat Loaf, Jim Steinman, The Fugees, the Spin Doctors, Keke Palmer, Joan Osborne, John Legend, The Black Eyed Peas, Fergie and many other successful acts. Sonenberg has produced several films, most notably the 1996 Academy-Award winning documentary, WHEN WE WERE KINGS.

David Smith, Editor

In his 10 years in post-production, David has worked on many features, including THE KID STAYS IN THE PICTURE, ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND, VANITY FAIR, and THE NAMESAKE. He is currently working on Mira Nair's biopic of Amelia Earhart, featuring Hilary Swank. SOUL POWER is David's feature editorial debut.



FEATURING

**“Godfather of Soul” James Brown
Festival / Fight Promoter - Don King**

“The Greatest” - Muhammad Ali

The Spinners

B.B. King

Bill Withers

Celia Cruz and the Fania All Stars

George Plimpton

Stokely Carmichael a.k.a. “Kwame Ture”

Miriam Makeba

Sister Sledge

The Crusaders

CREW

Produced & Directed By Jeffrey Levy-Hinte

Produced By David Sonenberg

Leon Gast

Edited By

David Smith

Cinematographers

Paul Goldsmith

Kevin Keating

Albert Maysles

Roderick Young

Production Manager

Barrie Singer





the directors label

