

Films can help drive change in Africa: UK actor Ejiofor

OXFORD, England, April 15, (RTRS): Films telling the stories of innovators in Africa have the power to transform the way people see the continent and drive social change, Oscar-nominated actor Chiwetel Ejiofor has said.

Ejiofor's comments came as he appeared at Britain's leading conference on social entrepreneurship, the Skoll World Forum, to discuss his latest film, "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind".

The film, which he directed, starred in and for which he wrote the screenplay, is based on the true story of William Kamkwamba who helped save his Malawian village from drought by building a power-generating windmill from scrap.

Highlighting young people who identify and find solutions to local problems was important to encourage social businesses, said Ejiofor, who won a BAFTA award and Oscar nod for playing Solomon Northup in the Oscar-winning film "12 Years a Slave".

"Telling authentic stories about who people are, not just what they are, will enrich the cultural space in a very radical way," he said on the final day of the four-day forum in Oxford.

"The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" was partly financed by Participant Media, a US film company that aims to advance social missions through movies, and launched on Netflix in 2019.

Participant was founded in 2004 by billionaire and former eBay president Jeff Skoll, who set up Skoll World Forum, and is behind the

Academy Award-winning film "Roma" which tells the story of an indigenous Mexican domestic worker.

Social entrepreneurs typically tackle social and environmental problems with commercial strategies.

The sector has grown significantly in the past decade although there is no comprehensive data to show the size of the social enterprise sector across Africa.

There are about 26,000 social enterprises in Ghana and 40,000 in Kenya, according to 2016 estimates by the British Council, a partly state-funded body that promotes British culture overseas.

Ejiofor, 41, who was born in London to Nigerian parents, said he believed the film industry was at a tipping point where more movies that aim to change perceptions and deliver social impact will be made.

"It has taken a bit of time to get to a point whereby we can really start to engage with stories like this, but I feel like we are really on the cusp of being able to do that in an aggressive and a more open way," he said.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: "Project Gutenberg" took home all of the big prizes at the Hong Kong Film Awards on Sunday, including best film, best script and best director for writer-director **Felix Chong**. In total the counterfeiting thriller collected seven prizes, having been nominated

in 17 categories.

The film's star **Chow Yun-fat** was beaten to the acting prize by **Anthony Wong**, who was a third time winner, this time with "Still Human", a film about the relationship between a disabled man and his helper. "Still Human" also earned prizes for **The Philippines** actress **Crisel Consunji** as best new performer, and for **Oliver Chan** as best new director.

The best actress prize went to mainland Chinese performer **Chloe Maayan** for her role in **Fruit Chan's** sex-filled "Three Husbands". The prizes for best supporting actor and actress went to **Ben Yuen** and **Kara Wai**, respectively, both for "Tracey", a coming out transgender film.



LOS ANGELES: The Hollywood Women's Film Institute will launch its Hollywood Women's Film Festival with "Why Not Choose Love? A Mary Pickford Manifesto" as its opening title, Variety has learned exclusively.

The Mary Pickford biopic, starring **Sophie Kennedy Clark** as the iconic actress, will screen on June 13 at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in **Beverly Hills, Calif.** Written and directed by **Jennifer DeLia**, the film also stars **Cary Elwes, Balthazar Getty, Luke Arnold, Josephine de La Baume, Jane Stiles, Summer Phoenix, Adam Fergus, and Scott Haze.**

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This image released by Warner Bros shows Zachary Levi in a scene from 'Shazam!' which dominated the international chart again with \$35.9mn. (AP)

Film

Film treats male ensemble as heroes and victims

Gripping survival drama in 'Mine 9'

By Guy Lodge

A modestly budgeted, cannily made survival drama centered on a fictional coal mine explosion in Appalachia, "Mine 9" plays a little like a humble blueprint for a more extravagant Hollywood exercise in high-octane heroism: Squint a little, and you can see how Peter Berg and Mark Wahlberg, say, would muscle out the solemn, simple narrative devised here by writer-director-producer Eddie Mensor. That's not a criticism of "Mine 9", which is most interesting for the ways it avoids the standard gung-ho dramatics of a disaster movie, treating its male ensemble as heroes and victims in equal measure.

Neither is it a stringent exercise in docu-realism, however, as a streak of heartland sentimentality runs through its gritty tragedy. Dedicated to the hard-up coal-mining community in the closing credits, Mensor's film aims chiefly to highlight the typical plight of an American underclass that rarely gets big-screen attention. That it does with honesty and conviction, if not a great deal of inspiration. "Mine 9" will surely resonate with audiences in the US coal belt, where its limited theatrical release is being concentrated; elsewhere, it's a niche, streaming-bound item.

Though it hasn't been drawn from specific real-life events, Mensor's script keeps characterization and dramatic complication to a bare minimum, as if to stress how easily what transpires on screen could be true. Every man here is an everyman, and the harrowing ordeal they endure across a very lean 83-minute runtime – including a full ten minutes of credits – is portrayed in such blunt, straightforward terms as to suggest this is hardly a remarkable incident in a troubled, dangerous industry. It's effective enough in that regard, but still, "Mine 9" could stand more human nuance and environmental detail: Its evocation of the real lives and families imperiled by irresponsible authorities is cursory at best.

Mensor sets the claustrophobic mood immedi-

ately with a tense false alarm, as hazardously high methane levels in one mine cause a nerve-jangling flare-up. The grimy darkness and tight framing of Matthew Boyd's cinematography play up the panic and confusion felt by the miners affected, in a space hardly conducive to clarity and communication in the face of danger.

Debate

Afterwards, the men debate how to follow up on this near-catastrophe: Team leader Zeke (Terry Serpico) wants to report the incident to safety monitors, but his colleagues would rather take the risk and let it slide, fearful that an investigation could shut down the mine and cost them their livelihood. Slightly declarative, on-the-nose dialogue maps out the men's differing positions in a cruel working-class bind: One even points out that, from an economic perspective, they're more use to their families dead than unemployed.

No prizes for guessing that this gamble backfires sooner rather than later – on the very day that Zeke's teenage nephew Ryan (Drew Starkey) reluctantly joins the crew for his first day down the shaft. Mensor sketches in the dire socioeconomic circumstances that have narrowed Ryan's life choices down to following in the soot-trailing footsteps of his uncle, as well as his callous father Kenny (Mark Ashworth), though the scant above-ground action in "Mine 9" would benefit from a little more observation and texture: There's little sense of who these men really are, beyond their arduous labor.

Soon enough, at least, we get to see their most visceral individual instincts, when a full-on methane explosion occurs – collapsing the mine and killing several men instantly. The survivors, meanwhile, have less than an hour's worth of air left while they figure out their escape, making some grisly life-or-death decisions along the way. Playing out nearly in real time, it's a tension exercise rightly shorn of any sense of macho exhilaration, anxiously realized

with limited means. Production designer Tim Barrett and visual effects coordinator Anaitte Vaccaro (both of whom also take executive producer credits) work around evident budget constraints to convey a vivid sense of murky, crumbling space, as escape routes are shed and sealed off by the minute.

The actors do what's required of them with appropriately clenched jaws, though Mensor's script isn't designed to let any of them especially shine. Rather like the crisis depicted on screen, this is an all-for-one-and-one-for-all affair, inviting viewers not to identify with particular characters as such, but to place themselves in the men's heavy steel-toed boots, sweating it out with them to the bitter, throat-closing end.

Also:

NEW YORK: **Jon Favreau** gave fans their first look at the "The Mandalorian" at the Star Wars Celebration in **Chicago** on Sunday, previewing the most anticipated series yet from the galaxy far, far away.

Favreau's eight-episode series will debut on the Disney-Plus streaming service on Nov 12. It's set in the aftermath of "The Return of the Jedi", taking place five years after the Rebellion's victory.

Favreau premiered behind-the-scenes clips and some finished footage to attendees.

The series stars **Pedro Pascal** as the title character, a lone gunfighter the actor compared to a Western or samurai hero. It co-stars **Gina Carano** as a character named **Cara Dune** and **Carl Weathers** as a bounty hunter named Greef. **Werner Herzog** and **Giancarlo Esposito** also co-star.

Favreau called himself "a product of a Star Wars imagination" who was eager to plunge into the post-"Jedi" landscape.

"You have vestiges of the Empire. You have only the strong surviving. You have chaos taking over the galaxy," Favreau said.

On Friday, Lucasfilm debuted the trailer for next theatrical "Star Wars" film, "The Rise of Skywalker". (Agencies)

LOS ANGELES: Warner Bros' "Shazam!" dominated international box office charts again, generating \$35.9 million from 27 overseas markets.

The superhero tentpole was the No. 1 movie globally for the second weekend in a row. It added another \$25 million in North America, taking ticket sales past \$258.8 million worldwide. Internationally, "Shazam!" has earned \$163.9 million. It saw the best showing this weekend in **China**, where it pocketed \$4.9 million. Other top territories for DC's latest masked hero include the **United Kingdom** (\$2.9 million), **Mexico** (\$2.7 million), and **Brazil** (\$2.6 million).

Disney's "Dumbo" swooped in behind "Shazam!" with \$22 million from 55 foreign markets. **Tim Burton's** live-action remake of the classic cartoon has now crossed \$266 million globally, with \$177 million of that haul coming from international territories.

Elsewhere, Paramount's remake of **Stephen King's** "Pet Sematary" made \$12.6 million from 56 markets, taking its international grosses to \$35.7 million. (RTRS)



LOS ANGELES: "Bohemian Rhapsody" isn't done rocking just yet. Fox and New Regency's Queen musical has officially surpassed \$900 million in ticket sales across the globe, continuing its mighty run as the highest-grossing music biopic of all time.

As of Sunday, the Oscar-winning movie has generated \$685 million internationally, along with an impressive \$216 million at the domestic box office. Though it has been out of North American cinemas for weeks, the film is still playing in theaters in **China** and becoming a huge hit among Japanese audiences, where it grossed \$114 million. It also resonated in **South Korea**, earning \$76 million, and the **United Kingdom** with \$71 million.

"Bohemian Rhapsody" uses the legendary catalog of Queen music to chronicle the life of **Freddie Mercury** and the band's rise to glory. Fox spent a modest \$50 million to produce

the movie, making its surprise success all the sweeter.

It wasn't just moviegoers who rallied behind "Bohemian Rhapsody." The film also received love from the Academy, scoring four Oscars, including a win for **Rami Malek's** portrayal of the iconic frontman **Freddie Mercury**. (RTRS)



Malek



Burton

LOS ANGELES: **Hong Kong's** "P Storm" continued to wash over the **China** box office during another lackluster weekend. The film enjoyed an \$18.5 million haul in its second weekend, down 55% from its \$39.8 million opening, according to data from Artisan Gateway.

The thriller is the fourth installment of a franchise that follows

actor **Louis Koo** as a corruption investigator rooting out crime, this time within the confines of a prison. The film has already brought in a total of \$89.4 million, enough to already crown it the most lucrative in the series yet. The franchise record was previously held by last year's "L Storm", which made \$66 million. The Maoyan online ticketing platform predicts that "P

Storm" will bring in \$114 million overall. A fifth film in the series is set to shoot in August.

Indian black comedy, "Anhadhun" pulled ahead of Warner Brothers' superhero film "Shazam!" into second with \$10.3 million over the weekend, more than double the Hollywood blockbuster's earnings of \$4.8 million. (RTRS)