

The woman that beguiled Quentin Tarantino is the face of Tofifest 2012.

Pam Grier is the face of the 10th edition of the International Film Festival TOFIFEST that starts next Saturday, on 20th October. Her talent has beguiled Quentin Tarantino so much that he has dedicated his *Jackie Brown*, as a tribute to Pam Grier. Grier used to be the most distinctive figure of the Blaxploitation genre that will be presented at Tofifest, as the first European retrospective.

Blaxploitation films will be presented in the Phenomena of International Cinematography section. This retrospective section of Tofifest will feature the first film of the genre, i.e. **Sweet Sweetback's Baad Asssss Song** (1971), directed by Melvin Van Peebles – a colourful and controversial figure – who also played the main character. The Blaxploitation section will also present **Shaft** (1971) by **Gordon Parks** – the most famous film of the genre. The scale of the film's success was sealed by Oscar for the Best Original Song awarded in 1972 for the main music theme, composed by Isaac Hayes.

However, the most important achievement of the Blaxploitation genre was the advancement of black women in the American society. And it was Pam Grier, who has become the icon of that change. Films of the genre created an image of black woman, as independent from the "wealthy white master" and full of sex appeal. Black women have become true "superwomen". Pam Grier's performances in **Coffy** (1973) and **Foxy Brown** (1974) – both of which will be presented in Torun – have made a particular impact on the forging of that image. According to Pam Grier's own words in an interview: *"It makes me proud to know that people see me as a strong black woman."* In her book *Women of Blaxploitation*, Yvonne D. Sims makes an observation that one could not imagine the figure of Lieutenant Ellen Ripley played by Sigourney Weaver (the *Alien* series), had it not been for blaxploitation films featuring strong women.

The Blaxploitation genre came to life as part of the African-American cinema that reached its peak popularity in 1970s. The name of the genre is a combination of two words, i.e. *blax* (meaning "blackness") and *exploitation* (abuse). Blaxploitation films were low-budget and quickly made, which brought them dangerously close to the verge of becoming "the worst films of all time". It was black cinema made by the Black people for the Black people and it presented tens of pimps, gangsters, pushers, prostitutes and tough black women, who fought white policemen, in the backstreets of Harlem. The films of the genre were always very eager to comment on events of the time, e.g. the war in Korea or Vietnam. They were blatantly literal and celebrated eroticism. They became the favourite genre of the African American community. American film expert Jeffrey Sconce classified the "exploitation" genre as an element that belongs to "paracinema", i.e. something that is not exactly a film and breaks with the standard definition of a film.

The blaxploitation genre cannot be analysed without the context of the fight for the rights of black Americans, in 1960s and 1970s. The most radical faction was the **Black Panther Party** – an American political organisation, established to protect the black minority in the USA. Its supporters appealed to black filmmakers to take interest in the subject of the African American society, which became the starting point for the birth of the blaxploitation genre. Rumour has it that after the film was released, P. Newton, one of the founders of the Black Panther Party made every candidate for the organisation watch the film by Melvin Van Peebles very carefully, before they were accepted for the organisation.

In 2000, this film genre saw its peculiar tribute with the making of a remake of **Shaft**, starring Hollywood star **Samuel L. Jackson**, as detective Shaft. The original *Shaft* made in 1971 was officially listed in the American National Film Registry, also in 2000.

The **10th IFF Tofifest** festival will take place in Torun, from **20th to 26th October 2012**.

Information about Tofifest: www.tofifest.pl

Tofi on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/tofifest>

You will find information about Torun at www.torun.pl or www.visittorun.pl

Send us a return email message, if you do not want to receive Tofifest Newsletter in your mailbox.

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