

THE FRENCH JUST LOVE TO SAY NO AT CANNES

I came to the 2005 Cannes Film Festival & Marketplace with a lot of enthusiasm and optimism of being a journalist, filmmaker and screenwriter. I found after my first day at Cannes that I was neither in the eyes of the powers that be that run Cannes. Before I even get to my experiences registering at Cannes I have to say that anyone traveling to Cannes should do whatever and spend whatever you can to stay in the city. The producers I came with booked a hotel for our group thirty miles or let's say thirty kilometers outside the city. Since no one really speeds on French highways—they kinda just cruise here and there. The French are not aggressive drivers like in the states or the UK or Germany. So that meant a thirty-minute trip back and forth was always an hour. The money one thinks one saves in low hotel rates outside Cannes is lost on high gas prices and the amount of business lost not making appointments on time or having to miss late night events because you know you have an hour drive waiting for you.

Now once I did get to the main Cannes registration building that's where all the fun began. Before I left the states to send in our hiphopbattle.com Cannes 2005 press accreditation request, and before I left the good press people at Cannes sent us a note saying they never got it and thus we were denied a press pass. After a few terse e-mails I decided to just deal with the matter when I got to Cannes. I was coming there after the Black International Cinema Berlin Festival 2005 no matter what. There was a way to get press accreditation on site at Cannes, but you must really be a big deal and name recognizable journalist to do that. I spoke with several friendly people in the Cannes press staff for over ninety minutes who found ever excuse imaginable to tell me why Hiphopbattle.com could not have a press pass.

Somebody wanted to know what was I going to be covering. Someone did think our Web site was a film site. Someone said that I should not get a press pass just to cover global black cinema stories. Someone said that he did not want to just give me a press pass just because I was at Cannes. Someone tried to tell me that there are so many Internet sites apply they have to limit the ones that could get accepted. Someone said that Cannes had given a press pass to the minority publication Upscale, so they were not racist. Someone spoke with their boss and the boss of another boss before finally saying we could not get a press pass. I heard a lot of excuses and I realized that you have to already have a hook up in the Cannes press hierarchy to get an approved press pass.

Despite being denied a press pass at Cannes there was quite a number of important black filmmakers, producers and actors to interview. We will post interview highlights from Cannes 2005 with Danny Glover at the South African Film Commission party. Danny was soaking in Cannes as not so much a big time Hollywood actor, but as a student studying the nuances of the festival. He very low key and people actually walked past him and entered the party. They then had to do a double take and come back out because they could not believe

their eyes of seeing Danny chilling on a couch talking to my producer friend Mary Alice Jackson. She was there promoting her company Dove International Entertainment and its slate of initial theatrical projects. Danny was at the party because he is a huge fan of the many great South African films. One film in particular that captivated Danny was *U-Carmen-Khayelitsha*, which was the reinterpretation of the Carmen opera set in a modern South Africa township. Danny had actually helped screen *U-Carmen* for local kids in a South Africa township. When I went to the premiere Cannes screening of *U-Carmen* I got a chance to meet its talented director, Mark Dornford-May. Mark told me the cast of *U-Carmen* had toured doing the *U-Carmen* play for three years before the film was made. The cast had even toured with the musical a few times in the states. Shot in Super 16 *U-Carmen* was truly a vibrant and lively picture that after seeing it would surprise no one why it was highly acclaimed by critics and won the Golden Bear at this year's Berlin Film Festival. I was fortunate to be the only member of the unapproved press or the approved Cannes press that came to the screening of *U-Carmen*. I got a chance to interview the film's talented lead *U-Carmen* actress Pauline Malefane. I hope she gets a chance to act in the states in films or TV shows because she has true star potential.

While at Cannes I also interviewed Rashid Bahti, who is one of the principal organizers of the annual Africa Day At Cannes. This year was special for Rashid because his group was celebrating at Cannes the 50th year of African Cinema. The guest of honor for the event was the godfather of African cinema Sembene Ousamane. We will have more interviews posted of short film director Kirby Ashley whose urban murder mystery *Blast On* was in competition at Cannes. I met a black British screenwriter, independent producers, African film festival promoters, the Bahamian film commissioner and new actresses from London, Chicago and New York. I interviewed Detroit director Marc Casey promoting his indie film *Forbidden*. I even met great veteran actor Richard Gant. There were lots of black folks at Cannes and the whole point is that I covered them as reporter whether I was granted permission by Cannes or not. The presence of black creative folks, minority views and global afro-centric cinema cannot be ignored by Cannes. One brother from Upscale cannot cover it all and maybe truth be told Upscale did not cover a damn thing except glitzy A-list parties.

After awhile I accepted after a long time that I could not get approved on the spot, for a press pass. I then tried to get a producer/filmmaker/artist pass because I am a producer. I am a filmmaker and I am a screenwriter. I gave these new accreditation people my bio, a news article about me writing a Walt Disney film called *Max Keeble's Big Move*, a DVD trailer of my hiphopbattle.com MC Battle films that I have produced and even a DVD of my German hip-hop documentary. I was in Cannes for six days and it took the Cannes folks five days of careful soul searching to tell me that I could not be credentialed as a producer as a filmmaker or as a screenwriter. I could let the producer and filmmaker diss slide, but not being accepted as a screenwriter for Cannes was a beyond joke.

So without already burning two days in Cannes not getting a press pass or an artist pass I bought a Cannes three day all-access pass. But one must understand that to even buy a three-day or a two-week pass in Cannes it is still subject to approval. The point is that Cannes remains and continues to be the world's premiere film festival and film marketplace because you just cannot walk off the street and go to it. Cannes forces you to be somebody or your ass is not getting in. It is not about the money. You cannot buy your self an entry pass. Of course it is far easier to get in if you make your case months in advance than when you get there. But the overall tone of all the Cannes workers and it is not a mean or disrespectful tone—it is to let you know always that Cannes is bigger than you.

A few other major film events, like Sundance, AFM or Venice can attempt to act as important as Cannes, but they really cannot. First, it costs way too much to be at Cannes on a whim. If you are there you better have brought some money. It is not the place to go on the cheap. There are some fancy hotel or beach parties that you could eat and drink your life way. But that's if you can even get into the parties in the first place. There is a high level of scrutiny on at Cannes and it is not about security concerns. How you act is as important as what you do. If you act like you belong and act like you need to be wherever you are going you will get inside even the most A-list party. But if there is even a slight doubt or hesitation in your demeanor when you stare down a guard at an entry point, party entrance or a theater screening, then forget it and turn around. Because if you challenge the aura of impenetrability at Cannes you will undoubtedly lose. And the reason is quite simple and one should memorize before going to the festival: The French Just Love To Say No At Cannes!