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Bin Yah: There's No Place Like Home

Bin Yah takes a matter-of-fact look at the Gullah-Geechee community

By Eugenia Payne

In Bin Yah, a documentary about the plight of the Gullah-Geechee community around the Charleston area, you meet a 101-year-old sweetgrass basket maker, an animated chiefess, succinctly speaking activists, and a good humored reverend. The range of characters are intimately developed, while conscientious editing maintains a good pace. Informational doses are lifted along by charged jazz, aerial shots, and historical photos.

The filmmakers cover a lot of ground and relationships, winning invitations into living rooms and kitchens throughout Mt. Pleasant and Scanlonville. Directed by Justin Nathanson, who started the Charleston Documentary Film Festival last year, and produced by Cara White and Nancy Cregg, this film has already been chosen to premiere on SCETV next Thursday.

Certainly slavery in the South has been well documented, but this film illuminates the lives of today's descendants who still call the plots of land adjacent to old plantations home. Even if you grew up here and think you have a basic understanding of Gullah-Geechee history and landscape, Bin Yah fills in the gaps you didn't realize you had.

While the film looks at the traditionally Gullah-Geechee practice of basket making, it isn't done in the overly precious style favored by some documentary filmmakers when profiling a culture not their own. Of course, this approach is helped along by the matter-of-fact tone of the basket makers themselves.

One of the most jolting moments in Bin Yah comes when Jane Laureau of the Coastal Conservation League explains that the African-American communities have been bearing most of the burden for the development of largely white communities and the traffic woes these new developments bring.

Aside from a minor complaint that the narrator's voice is a bit too old-school PBS, the film will be an effective educational tool for wide audiences.

Bin Yah • SCETV series Southern Lens • June 12 at 10 p.m



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