

First CAR film focuses on Pygmy group

The first film to come from the Central African Republic and featuring Cameroonian actor Eriq Ebouaney will be screened in Cape Town on Tuesday, 13 March 2012.

Le Silence de la Foret (The Silence of the Forest) will be screened at the Labia on Orange and is presented by the African Arts Institute in collaboration with the MNet African Film Library, as part of the Institute's ongoing Learn Africa Love Africa initiative.

At the time of its release in 2003 Le Silence, directed by Didier Ouenangare and Bassek ba Kobhio was widely billed as the country's first film. One international reviewer speculated that the film might never be seen in its home country due to the then recent closure of the only remaining movie theatre in the country.

A beautifully composed film

Other reviewers recognised a brave, dramatic film, beautifully composed and with its strength in its authenticity. Le Silence explores the relationship between the Baka people, a Pygmy group, and an idealistic young French-educated African, Gonuba, who believes that he can use his experiences in Europe to aid his fellow citizens.

The end result includes a highly acclaimed authentic portrayal of Pygmy life, with Baka participants 'acting' in their mother tongue and refusing to be involved in scenes that would compromise their traditions and beliefs. On the other hand the lead, Eric Ebouaney had to learn the Central African language, Sango, to play his role.

The film grew from an initial idea by Ouenangare to draw attention to the Pygmies of Central Africa. After ten years as a television cameraman in France, Ouenangare was ready to return to his country of birth. He found a willing partner in Bassek ba Kobhio at a time when no other filmmaker would venture into the Central African Republic where no resources were available and all equipment and even cast had to be imported.