

## **Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival Returns, Championing Authentic Storytelling and the Power of Joy**

**ESPN 30 for 30 returns as the Presenting Sponsor, and New York Magazine The Cut, debuts as the Official Media Partner**

**The festival kicks off with an extraordinary opening lineup featuring industry legends and standout talent, including Aldis Hodge, Ilfenesh Hadera, Mara Brock Akil, Spike Lee, and More!**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Martha's Vineyard, MA – July 3, 2025...** The Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival (MVAAFF) is proud to announce its 23rd annual celebration, taking place from August 1 to August 9, 2025. As an Oscar-qualifying festival, MVAAFF continues to showcase the best of Black cinema, including independent films, celebrated documentaries, panel discussions, and exclusive events. ESPN returns as the Presenting Sponsor for this nine-day celebration with *New York Magazine*, The Cut as the Official Media Partner.

“This year, MVAAFF radiates with Joy—spotlighting an extraordinary *Color of Conversation* events, interactive fan engagements, and a standout roster of must-see documentaries and shorts, said Floyd and Stephanie Rance, Founders of MVAAFF and Co-Founders of Run and Shoot Filmworks. “We are continually amazed by the positive economic impact the festival brings to the island as we look forward to celebrating another year of Black Excellence in film.” MVAAFF remains committed to building diversity in the film industry and providing a platform for Black and Brown filmmakers to share their stories.

Over the past 23 years, the festival has evolved into a premier event, attracting A-list talent and audiences worldwide. Brian Lockhart, ESPN SVP of Original Content, shared, “It’s a true privilege for ESPN’s *30 for 30* to serve as a presenting sponsor of the Martha’s Vineyard African American Film Festival. This remarkable festival champions storytelling that is bold, authentic, and culturally resonant — values that are at the heart of everything we do. Supporting a space that uplifts diverse voices and sparks meaningful dialogue is both an honor and a responsibility we embrace. We’re excited to be part of this dynamic community and to celebrate the exceptional creativity of the artists highlighted at this year’s festival,” and for the first time, MVAAFF welcomes The Cut as its Exclusive Media Partner for a Bold Celebration of Black Storytelling.

Opening the Festival on **Friday, August 1st** is the acclaimed documentary “**UNRAVELING GEORGE.**” Narrated by Marlon Wayans, [who played George in the celebrated movie *AIR*], this

documentary traces the remarkable journey of Hall of Fame basketball coach George Raveling, who has always been considered more of a teacher and a mentor than a coach. Raveling has guided the careers of a stunning array of all-stars in his decorated career, and the extraordinary cast in the film is testament to Raveling's enormous influence. Charles Barkley is an Executive Producer, and Michael Jordan says simply, "I would not be Michael Jordan without George Raveling!" Multiple Emmy Award-winner **Mike Tollin directs** and will screen at 2:00 pm in the Performing Arts Center with a *Color of Conversation* to follow.

The American Psychological Thriller **THE DUTCHMAN**, produced and directed by **Andre Gaines**, will be presented at 5:00 pm. A successful black businessman, André Holland, haunted by his crumbling marriage and identity crisis, is drawn into a psychological game of cat and mouse with a mysterious white woman he encounters on a New York subway. Starring Holland, Kate Mara, Aldis Hodge, Stephen McKinley Henderson, and Zazie Beetz, the film is penned by Andre Gaines and Qasim Basir, and is based on the 1964 Obie Award-winning play by Amiri Baraka. *The Color of Conversation* will follow with Andre Gaines and Aldis Hodge.

At 8:00 pm, the festival will present a *Color of Conversation* presentation of **HIGHEST TO LOWEST**, presented by **A24** and **Apple Original Films**, and directed by Academy Award® winner **Spike Lee**. When a powerful music mogul is targeted by a ransom plot, he is forced to fight for his family and legacy while jammed up in a life-or-death moral dilemma. Starring Denzel Washington, Jeffrey Wright, Ilfenesh Hadera, and A\$AP Rocky. The discussion will dive into the film's themes, creative journey, and cultural impact with Director Spike Lee and Ilfenesh Hadera.

On **August 3rd** at 1:00 pm, rediscover the magic of first love as Netflix proudly presents **FOREVER** with celebrated filmmaker **Mara Brock Akil**. Join us for an intimate afternoon of love and reflection through the lens of her award-winning series that captured our hearts. We'll revisit an encore screening of *Episode 5: "The Vineyard"*—a powerful reminder of where our joy, pride, and Black brilliance eternally reside. A *Color of Conversation* will follow.

Monday, **August 4th**, join us for the Official Welcome Reception at the acclaimed Martha's Vineyard Museum by Presenting Sponsors **Delta Air Lines®** & **ESPN 30 for 30**. All Festival Pass Holders are welcome to join us in this celebration of music and culture. More panels, screenings, and cultural activations will be announced throughout the week.

Our 2025 sponsors include A24, Absolut, Amazon MGM Studios, Audible, American Heart Association, Apple TV+, Bassett Vance Productions, College Board, Delta, Effie Lions Foundation, ESPN 30 For 30, Everytown Community Safety Fund, FX, Google, Intuition by Aramis, L'Oreal Groupe, Library of Congress, Lincoln, McDonald's, McKinsey & Co, National Museum of African American History & Culture, Netflix, North Carolina A&T, Roku, Starz, The Nature Conservancy, The Walt Disney Company, TV One, Tyler Perry Studios, UWG INC., W.K.

Kellogg Foundation, Warner Bros. Discovery, Water Colors, When We All Vote, and Xfinity. Their generosity and partnership help make the festival a vibrant celebration of film, culture, and community, ensuring that this year's event is memorable for all who attend.

The annual festival schedule is packed with additional screenings, panels, and surprises, all happening at **Martha's Vineyard Performing Arts Center (MVPAC)** and the Vineyard Lounge (VL), 100 Edgartown Road, Oak Bluffs, MA 02557. For the full schedule and more information, visit [www.mvaaff.com](http://www.mvaaff.com).

#### **About the Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival**

Founded in 2002, MVAAFF is an OSCAR®-qualifying festival in the short film category. Over nine days, MVAAFF provides a stage for independent and established African American filmmakers to screen, promote, and celebrate feature films, documentaries, and shorts from around the world. Founded by Floyd and Stephanie Rance, the festival creates a supportive environment for filmmakers and gives sponsors access to a sophisticated community of people of color.

#### **About Run&Shoot Filmworks**

Run&Shoot Filmworks, the team behind MVAAFF and the Color of Conversation Film Festival (COCFF), is known for producing standout visual content for clients like HBO, Martell Cognac, Reebok, NBC Sports, Hallmark Channel, and Footlocker. For over 20 years, Run&Shoot has championed spaces where filmmakers can share ideas and stories.

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