



The Legacy of Katha Cato: Uniting the Queens Community Through Theater Arts

The Director of the Queens World Film Festival continues to lead in the arts as New York reopens.

Queens, New York

FilmFestivalFlix.com

By Amber K. Davis Johnson



Photo courtesy of Queens World Film Festival

Katha Cato feels big feelings. This is apparent as she leads dynamic conversations over Zoom with a group of over 100 independent filmmakers, and as she meets with the small team of experts leading the virtual portion of the 11th Annual Queens World Film Festival. Her passion is her touchstone. In the tangle of logistics that is inherent in producing an event of this scale, Cato comes back to this:

“What an incredible opportunity it is to bring these voices forward, to be part of a system that makes sure they are heard. I consider myself very fortunate.”

The 2021 QWFF theme is HOPE: Healing Opportunities Promote Equity. The theme stands in alignment with Cato’s decades of work in the Queens community: first pioneering long-form improv comedy and leading as an award-winning director and improviser in the New York theater scene, then taking that momentum and using it to champion after-school and youth development programming first as the Arts-in-Education Coordinator at the

Henry Street Settlement and then as the Director of After-School and Camp services. Cato has been recognized by NY State Education for exemplary after-school programming, and in 2015 she received the PASEsetter Award for her leadership in the field.

As a Film Festival co-founder, with her husband Preston Cato, Katha continues to create opportunity for youth and underrepresented groups in the film arts. The 2020 QWFF screened 191 films from 31 nations, 28 from Queens, 81 by women, 11 by young people under the age of 11 and garnered over 30,000 views. *

In 2021, Cato was not about to let COVID-19 derail those opportunities for the global filmmaking community, or for Queens. Working with tentative, hopeful, “maybe” plans for in-person screenings and event gatherings, adapting and adjusting as public health guidelines changed from month to month, Cato also partnered with platform host Film Festival Flix to create a Virtual Film Festival. With the virtual addition, QWFF was empowered to accept more films from around the world, connect filmmakers to a greater, more diverse global audience, and have the security of knowing that no matter the COVID situation, the show could and would go on.

From the QWFF website:

Congratulations to the 198 films from 33 nations that will be screening with us June 23 – July 3, 2021 across the Borough of Queens! Queens World 11 is a hybrid event. The entire festival will stream live on Film Festival Flix and 133 films will also have live screenings in 5 venues that are ready to welcome the world back to Queens.

Queens World is excited to report that while 29% of the submissions were by women, 42% of the selected films are by female filmmakers and 50% of the final screening schedule are films by BIPOC. We thank the screening committee for curating a collection of stories that will help us bring more hope into the world.

And partnering with Film Festival Flix gave QWFF and Cato another opportunity to bring more hope into the world. Each year, the Queens World Film Festival designates a community member or organization to receive the Spirit of Queens Award. For the 2021 festival, and in perfect alignment with the theme of HOPE, the Spirit of Queens Award goes to the entire staff of Elmhurst Hospital— the Heroes of Elmhurst.



Photo by Gabriele Holtermann for QNS
<https://qns.com/2021/05/queens-world-film-festival-salutes-elmhurst-hospital-workers-with-spirit-of-queens-award/>

“When New York City closed non-essential businesses,” Cato says, “Elmhurst General Hospital in Queens, NYC, otherwise known as Ground Zero, took on a deluge of pain and suffering. The eerie silence underneath the constant sirens was interrupted only by the 7:00 pm bells. For months the Heroes of Elmhurst treated patients in every available space and risked their own lives to provide hope to those suffering alone.”

QWFF is committed to providing every Elmhurst Staff member with a complimentary Full Festival Pass. Film Festival Flix has helped to make that possible by reserving deeply discounted passes for the Heroes of Elmhurst honorees. For only \$10 (\$150 value), anyone can purchase a season pass for an Elmhurst Staff Member.

“Purchasing a Hero ticket is an incredibly easy and effective and beautiful way for our community to thank our healers for standing between us and the horrors of the pandemic.” -Katha Cato

With film blocs titled “Coloring Outside the Lines,” “Therapy This!” and other catharsis-focused monikers, Cato is *hoping*, once again, to unite a recovering community through storytelling art.

The Queens World Film Festival opens June 23 and runs through July 3.
Tickets and a schedule of events can be found at FilmFestivalFlix.com.

*<https://queensworldfilmfestival.org/about-the-queens-world-film-festival/>