



A woman looks at posters for upcoming Films on Fourth movies.

# The big screen is bringing big crowds to heart of downtown

BY T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

Don't look for the latest Hollywood shoot-'em-up to be screened as part of the Films on Fourth series. The movies shown at the Stevens Center as part of the series don't feature Schwarzenegger, special effects or battles between starships.

And that is just fine with George Simmons.

"I think for the most part it has been an excellent series," said Simmons, who along with Jackie Taylor has seen several Films on Fourth movies since the series began in January. "(Films on Fourth) is a cut above what you get in the other theaters."

Simmons and Taylor were back at the Stevens Center last Friday and Saturday to see the latest Films on Fourth movies, "Nowhere in Africa," which won the Oscar this year for best foreign film, and "Amanda: A Documentary in Four-Part Harmony," which chronicles the evolution of grassroots African music.

Films on Fourth features first-run independent and foreign language films. Taylor admitted that at first she was thrown for a loop by the subtitles for the foreign-language films, but it did not take her long to cross that hurdle. "Having (subtitles) definitely makes you keep your attention on what is happening on the screen," she said.

In a city known for its artistic muscle, it is not surprising that Films on Fourth has struck a chord with locals and developed a fan base that includes folks of all colors and walks of life. Series coordinator Richard Emmett said he thinks the films are only part of the appeal. He also credited the grandeur of the Stevens Center, a place usually reserved for live symphonies and ballets. The fact that movies are being offered downtown for the first time in several decades is appealing as well, Emmett said.

"This is really a community event," he said. "It is something that adds to the revitalization of Fourth Street. It is another step in the right direction for Winston-Salem."

Films on Fourth is the result of a union between the Winston-Salem Cinema Society and the N.C. School of Arts School of Filmmaking. The 20-year cine-

ma society — which aims to find a home and audience for art house films — used to screen movies at the North Point Cinema before the theater shut down last year. Dale Pollock, dean of the NCSA School of Filmmaking and a former Hollywood producer of such films as "Set it Off," let members of the society screen their films on the NCSA

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— Renata Jackson, president of Winston-Salem Cinema Society

campus.

But Renata Jackson, president of the cinema society, said the society often ran into scheduling conflicts on the NCSA campus. The Stevens Center was suggested as an alternative, but it needed some work. Pollock helped raise money to upgrade the projection and sound systems.

Jackson is pleasantly surprised by the success of the series — which has screened a variety of films from the recent summer sleeper hit "Bend It Like Beckham" to critic favorite "Far From Heaven."

"It is delightful and fun to see so many people downtown, and everyone seems to be pretty happy about it," Jackson said.

Films are screened on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, and on average draw about 500 or 600 people. On occasion, moviegoers have sold out the Stevens Center, which holds about 1,200. Jackson said the society is breaking even or making a small profit each night a film is screened. But no one can put a cost on what the series has meant for downtown vitality.

The Films of Fourth series has put a whole new spin on the dinner and a movie concept. Many of the thousands of people who have flocked to the Stevens Center to watch movies also have taken advantage of nearby restaurants and other attractions.

Last Saturday, shortly before the screening of "Amanda," employees at neighboring eateries set up

chairs and tables along the sidewalk, preparing for the crowds that they have grown to expect as a result of the films.

Kent Smith, one of the owners of Cats Corner Café, said many people have stumbled into the café on their way into or out of the Stevens Center.

"We have had a lot of people who have never been here before who stop by as a result (of the films)," Smith said.

The film series will take a break in early August so that the National Black Theatre Festival can use the Stevens Center. It will resume in the middle of the month. Organizers hope to continue the series as long as movie lovers will have it. The films may be relocated once the theater at planned Unity Place (a mammoth housing, business and entertainment development that is slated to be built at the site of Modern Chevrolet) opens.

For up-to-date schedules on films, log onto [www.cinemasociety.org](http://www.cinemasociety.org).

# Festival gala is a quick sellout

## Seats still available for Lillias White kickoff show

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

National Black Theatre Festival officials are already celebrating a great success and the 14th anniversary festival doesn't start until Aug. 4. Officials announced this week that tickets to the swank opening night gala had sold out. It is the earliest sellout for the gala, which will be held at the Benton Convention Center, in the festival's history.

Gala tickets were \$200 and included dinner and a performance of "From Brooklyn to Broadway II," a musical trip down memory lane with Tony-winning talent Lillias White. The gala also will feature an awards ceremony that will pay tribute to some of the giants of stage, screen and television. Scheduled to be on hand Aug. 4 to receive accolades is Diahann Carroll, who will receive the Sidney Poitier Lifelong Achievement Award for her decades of work. Producer Philip Rose also will receive that honor. "Jeffersons" star Sherman Hemsley and Ben Vereen are among those who will get Living Legend Awards during the gala.

Although gala seats are no longer available, there is still space left for White's performance, which will be held at 9 p.m. (immediately after the gala) at the Stevens Center.

Tickets for the performance, which will be attended by a star-studded crowd, including many of the gala honorees, are \$75 per person. A ticket stub from the performance also will allow people entrance into a celebrity reception that will be



Cicely Tyson addresses the crowd after receiving the Sidney Poitier Lifelong Achievement Award at last year's gala.

held after the performance at the Adam's Mark Hotel.

Tickets to the Aug. 4 performance of "From Brooklyn to Broadway II" cannot be purchased online. To order tickets, call 723-7907.

# Police begin new speedy notification system

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

A new high-speed notification system gives the Winston-Salem Police Department the means of quickly alerting residents in the event of an emergency, such as a hazardous spill, that could affect them.

The system allows the police to select an area for notification. It then automatically calls all the households within that area and plays a recorded message.

The system recognizes if an answering machine picks up and records the message onto the machine.

In addition to emergencies, the system can be used for crime prevention by alerting residents, for example, to a rash of break-ins in their

area or to ask residents to be on the look-out for a missing person.

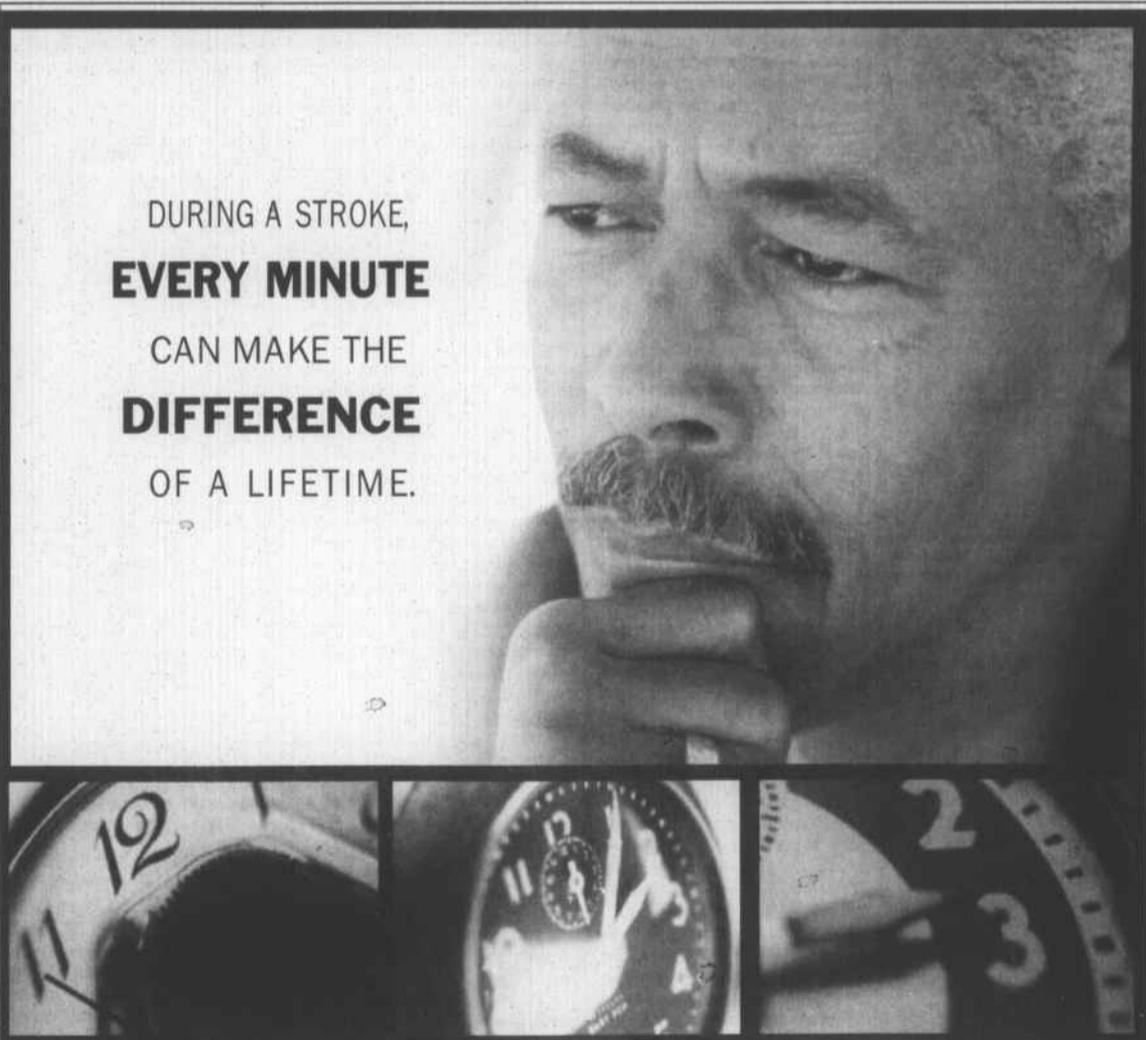
The system was designed by Dialogic Communications Corp. and works with the city's geographic information system to allow police to select exactly the area that they want to reach. It then places calls in order of priority based on their distance to a certain location. The system does not work with unlisted numbers.

For now, the calls are being placed out of the Dialogic headquarters in Franklin, Tenn. This is reflected on caller ID units. However, the call identifies the message as being from the Winston-Salem Police Department. Eventually, the calls will be placed out of the Pub-

lic Safety Communications Center, at which point caller ID units will display "WSPD."

Police began using the system at the end of May. They have used it to alert residents in the Buena Vista neighborhood of a gas leak and in several neighborhoods of a series of car break-ins in their neighborhoods.

The high-speed notification system was purchased with a grant from the Governor's Crime Commission and is improving public safety, said Police Chief Linda Davis. "Instead of assigning personnel to place calls in the event of an emergency, we can now do this automatically and concentrate on addressing the emergency itself," she said.



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