

## “DEBBAS,” an Eritrean Movie is making its rounds in many major US cities

By Haile Abraham

November 19, 2012

Last week the famous Eritrean movie “Debbas” was premiered at the Eritrean Community Civic Center (ECCC) in Washington, DC as a part of its current nationwide tour throughout the United States. Since I am familiar with Mekonnen Woldeab’s prior film work, I was very anxious to see the movie. And what I saw was a great movie that is well-deserving of the Platinum prize award it received at the International Movie Festival in Houston



So after watching the movie, here are what impressed me the most:

1. **Eritrean movies in the International arena:** As an Eritrean, I was so proud to see “Debbas” not only representing Eritrea but winning the **Remi Winner** award from among 4,500 movies. Eritrean flag was proudly waving from the rafters of the International Film Festival arena and Mekonnen cleverly captured this moment as a part of the intro of the movie. Just watching this moment, it sent goose bumps to see the warm reception and the well-deserving recognition in such a prestigious international arena. Bunch of Kudos to Mekonnen, because every time an Eritrean is able to represent Eritrean flag in such honor in an international arena, he is our hero!
2. **Is there any progress in the Eritrean movie industry?** Since I am an avid Eritrean movies follower, I was waiting curiously to see in “Debbas” if Eritrean movie making skills have made any progress. I decided to measure the progresses in several categories including audio sound; visual effects and the storyline. And despite the limited resources Eritrean moviemakers face, “Debbas” has indeed shown me that our Eritrean moviemakers are indeed making a huge progress in all the categories mentioned above. In my own view, I think “Debbas” has now set the standard on how other Eritrean movies can be measured. Particularly, the visual effects in “Debbas,” such as the phantom barefoot steps and the synchronized sudden appearance and disappearance of the ghost, can be seen as a testimony that our filmmakers can even go a long way with full resources and financial support.

3. **“Debbas” the movie:** My general view about the movie is that it is indeed a great movie. As a viewer, I thank Mekonnen for making himself available for a post-movie-discussion session so the audience could ask questions. During the session, Mekonnen said that the movie was written by a young Eritrean writer, which shows the hidden talent of our young Eritrean writers. “Debbas” the movie is a story about an urban legend by that name, and he is depicted in the movie as a demonic spiritual ghost from the Feudal era in the Eritrean highlands about 300 years ago. And like many other urban legends, the story about “Debbas” is nothing but a fiction. However, in the Eritrean society, many Eritreans have used this fiction to create their own version of horror fiction, and so “Debbas” continued to be viewed as a scary demonic ghost that could harm people. In the movie, however, “Debbas” was brought out from his urban tale life to convince a young writer, who was writing a story about him, to tell the truth about “Debbas.” And this is the greatest challenge the movie had to overcome – the irony of telling the truth about a fictitious demonic ghost. In my personal opinion, the movie addressed this irony beautifully and creatively, and that is why it won the well-deserved prize at the International Film Festival,

I have nothing to criticize about the movie. It is well-made and very engaging till the end. If I have to point out two minor criticism, first “Debbas,” like many other Eritrean movies, continued to engage in a direct translation of the movie credits from English to TgrNa, such as, “Director,” “Costume Design” “Make-up.” I think it is time that a consortium is established in Eritrea to regulate these naming conventions so there will be consistent naming when the credits roll...

Second, as many Eritreans as there are in the Washington, DC area, either due to a lack of advertisement or other creative ways of attracting more audience, too many people have missed out on this great movie.