

Minnesota Cuban Film Festival Presents Double Feature March 8; Post-film discussion led by two masters of Afro-Cuban religion and dance

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MINNEAPOLIS – This Thursday evening, March 8, the 2012 Minnesota Cuban Film Festival will present a unique pairing of two Cuban films, with a post-film discussion led by two Cuban experts in Cuban music and dance and Afro-Cuban religion.

True masters of their traditions, Ofunshi Oba Koso and René Thompson will offer a uniquely Cuban view of how music, dance and spirituality form an integral part of life in Cuba. The commentators are both residents in Minnesota who have by no means left their homeland behind. Indeed, they are both known for their committed work of bringing their special knowledge to many Minnesotans, as well as to people nationally and internationally. The discussion is particularly timely as international attention focuses on the pope's upcoming visit to Cuba. According to the March 4 *Chicago Tribune*, although Santería adherents outnumber Catholics by 8 to 1, on the last papal visit, the pope "flatly refused" to meet with any santeros.

The first film, *Alabbá* (2010; 40 minutes) looks at the fascinating history of Santería and how its historic roots have transformed into a contemporary religion in modern day Cuba. *Alabbá* focuses on three women of African descent who arrived in Cuba in the 19th century, tracing their influence on the development of Santería. The documentary includes interviews with current practitioners and historians.

Nosotros, la Música (We are the Music) (1964; 66 minutes), is a stunning look at the music of 1960s Cuba, a synopsis of Cuban musical styles and stylists, as well as not-to-be-missed footage of Cuba and the Cuban people in the decade of the 60s.

Ofunshi Oba Koso is a traditional healer and spiritual diviner known as a Babalawo (or "baba") from the Yoruba religious tradition. Trained from an early age by both Lucumi and traditional Yoruba masters, Ofunshi brings a unique perspective of African spirituality through his broad knowledge of Afro-Cuban syncretic religious practices.

In addition to his work as a spiritual guide, he is also actively involved in global movements to improve the lives and conditions of Africans and African descendants. Ofunshi's most recent activities include serving as a member of the International Coordinating Committee and panelist for the First World Summit of Afro-Descendants held in Honduras (August 2011), presenting a paper on spirituality and tradition at the International Meeting of Writers and Poets of African, Indigenous, and Sino Descent in Costa Rica (October 2011), and serving as delegate to the United Nations for the General Assembly high level meeting on the 10th Anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (September 2011).

Baba Ofunshi also serves as a member of the steering committee for the new Department of Afro-descendent, Indigenous and Sino-descendent Studies at the National University of Costa Rica. He holds a degree in Cultural Analysis and Promotion from the University of Havana, where he also earned undergraduate certificates in Public Relations and Marketing, and a graduate level certificate in Social Anthropology and Religious Studies.

René Thompson has been a professional Latin dancer for 27 years, 20 of those years as an instructor and choreographer. He began his career in Cuba in 1973 as an actor in the popular Theater company "4 de Abril" and

continued with other theater and dance companies in Cuba. In the early 1980s he began specializing in Afro-Cuban dance, performing with several well known choreographers, directors and dance companies, further developing his unique style. In 1986 he began performing at the most prestigious clubs in Cuba such as the Tropicana. Now living in the U.S., Rene brings a wealth of knowledge of music and dance and its cultural context to his audience. He teaches the uniquely Cuban steps of salsa, cha cha cha, rumba, mambo, Afrocuban dance, rueda de casino, as well as bachata, merengue, cumbia and other dances at René Dance Studios. His generous work in Twin Cities communities, including free dance classes open to all at the Midtown Global Market, has recently been recognized by WCCO-TV with its "Making a Difference" Award.

These films, on the third night of the six-Thursdays festival, will be shown starting at 7:00 pm, Thursday, March 8, at St. Anthony Main Theatre, 115 SE Main Street, Minneapolis. They are in Spanish with English subtitles. The bilingual post-film discussion will be held at Pracna on Main adjacent to the theater.

The film festival is presented in partnership with the Film Society of Minneapolis St. Paul and co-curated with Cuba's world renowned film institute, ICAIC (*Instituto Cubano del Arte y la Industria Cinematográficos*).

Screening copies of the films are available on request. For more information about the festival and the Minnesota Cuba Committee, visit [.www.minnesotacubacommittee.org](http://www.minnesotacubacommittee.org)