

WITASWAN Update: Women Acting Together for Positive Change!

By Jan Lisa Huttner

Theater number four at the Landmark's Century Center complex on Clark Street was filled to capacity on Saturday, March 31, as women from five different organizations (plus their guests and significant others) took their seats for the third annual WITASWAN program. Based on articles in numerous local publications including the *Daily Herald*, *Skyline*, *Streetwise*, and *TimeOut Chicago*, we also had an unusually high number of walk-ins.



2007's Special Guest
Felicia Middlebrooks

This year's special guest was Felicia Middlebrooks, the creative force behind *Somebody's Child: The Redemption of Rwanda*. Middlebrooks, a well-known journalist for CBS Radio/WBBM Newsradio 780, received accolades for her groundbreaking special report on the 10th anniversary of the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, so she decided to take her work to the next level: producing and directing her first documentary film. Unlike most films about Rwanda which focus primarily on the horrors of 1994, *Somebody's Child* not only explains the events leading up to the genocide but also examines how survivors are coping today. AAUW Chicago Branch President Lori Switzer summarized the feelings of many when she said later: "I couldn't stop thinking about it all week."



Kim Benziger, AAUW-IL's
Immediate Past President

As in prior years, IWPA served as a primary co-sponsor for this program along with AAUW-Illinois (the American Association of University Women). This year, we were also joined by three additional Illinois-based women's organizations: AWJ (the Association for Women Journalists), IWA (International Women Associates), and WIF/C (Women in Film/Chicago).

This program was the third in WITASWAN's annual series of events celebrating Women's History Month. The first program was a screening of *A Jury of Her Peers*, the Oscar-nominated feminist classic written and directed by Sally Heckel, which was held in 2005 (with Ms. Heckel as the featured guest). The second program was a screening of *Look Both Ways* written and directed by Sarah Watt, which was held in 2006 (with Ms. Watt as the featured guest). The 2006 screening was co-sponsored by the Australian Consul-General for Chicago, who had copies of three of Ms. Watt's award-winning animated shorts sent from Melbourne via diplomatic pouch especially for the occasion.

Kudos for the success of this year's program go to our committee chairs. Karen Kring from AWJ served as PR Coordinator for General Media and Jeanette Beauregard from WIF/C served as PR Coordinator for Specialty Media. Barbara Spiegel from AAUW-Illinois was our superlative Reservation Coordinator (with support from AAUW-Illinois Treasurer Kathleen Mallow), and IWPA's incomparable Cecilia Green served as Fund Raising Coordinator (managing the sales of swan pins and pendants). IWA came onboard after the planning phase, but brought many enthusiastic members to the actual event.

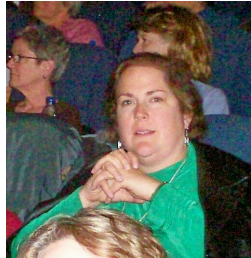
IWPA's Jane Canepa contributed a youthful element, with strong onsite and behind-the-scenes support from several of her Columbia College Chicago students including Elizabeth Anhalt, Ashley Aspiranti, Caitlin Fitzpatrick, Maureen Gombas, Ashley Plaetz, Megan Quinn, and Whitney Widmer. Thanks are also due to Brian Ross and the staff of the Landmark Theatres chain, as well as Steve Kraus of Filmtechnik (who arranged a screening in advance for members of the Chicago Film Critics Association). Several CFCA members attended thanks to Pam Singleton of www.reelmoviecritic.com who made a special effort to get the word out.



Jane Canepa (right)
with Whitney Widmer

In addition to the admission fee, voluntary donations were solicited for Rwanda’s genocide widows and children through Middlebrooks’ 501-c3 organization “Hollywood Comes to Chicago.” According to Middlebrooks, she raised over \$1,600 from the audience on March 31; she is deeply appreciative of our efforts on her behalf, and she wants us to know that one hundred percent of these tax deductible donations will be sent to those in need.

WITASWAN (“Wit-uh-Swan”) stands for “**Women in the Audience Supporting Women Artists Now.**” For more information about the March 31 program (including reviews, photos, etc), please visit: <http://www.films42.com/witaswan/march-07.asp>



IWPA Secretary
Elizabeth Dickey



IWPA President Suzanne Hanney



IWPA Member
Sel Yackley



Jan Lisa Huttner

Chicago-based film critic Jan Lisa Huttner serves as IWPA’s “special projects coordinator,” responsible for annual events such as the WITASWAN program and the Printers Row Book Fair. Huttner is a two-time recipient of IWPA’s “Silver Feather” award for superior achievement (in 2005 & 2006). She also received a first place certificate for “Best News Writing for the Web” from the National Federation of Press Women (NFPW) in 2005. For more information, call Jan @ 312.663.5832 or e-mail her at Jan_Huttner@msn.com.

Photo Credits: Jan Lisa Huttner.
Huttner Head Shot: Jennifer Girard © 2007

PenPoints Publication Date: July, 2007
PenPoints Editor: Terry Haycock