

Celebrate Africa Day by exploring the continent's rich film history on Showmax

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Africa Day commemorates the founding of the Organisation of African Unity, and it's coming up this Tuesday, 25 May 2021. While pan-African travel remains a distant dream for now, it's never been easier to explore our beautiful continent, thanks to Showmax's catalogue of record-breaking and award-winning local content. There's no single story that captures the diversity and wonder of Africa, but whatever you're in the mood for, Showmax has a movie or a show for you:

Feel like seeing Africa rule the world?

Noughts + Crosses S1 | Alternative history series

Noughts + Crosses was named one of “the 10 best British TV shows of 2020” by *Mashable*, who called it: “crucially important... a kind of drama/thriller/romance hybrid, mixing *Game of Thrones*-style political backstabbing with a very human story of discrimination and systemic oppression. The end result? A stunningly-crafted epic that's every bit as tense as it is impactful.”

South African Masali Baduza (*Trackers*) and Bafta-winner Jack Rowan (*Born To Kill*, *Peaky Blinders*) play Sephy and Callum, two star-crossed lovers in the tradition of *Romeo and Juliet*, in an alternate universe where Africa colonised Europe, rather than the other way round.

Based on Malorie Blackman's multi-award-winning novel and shot largely in Cape Town with Film Afrika, the series also stars South African actress Bonnie Mbuli (*Invictus*, *Wallander*) as Sephy's mom, Jasmine. Koby Adom - who is from Ghana, was born in Cote d'Ivoire, and grew up in London - is one of the two directors, while South African costume designer Dihantus Engelbrecht earned a Costume Design – Drama nomination from the 2020 Royal Television Society Awards in the UK for his work on the show.

Time to celebrate Africans on a global stage?

Yvonne Orji: *Momma, I Made It!* | Nigerian comedy special

In her first HBO comedy special, Nigeria's Yvonne Orji, better known as Molly from *Insecure*, has the audience rolling with laughter as she brings her razor-sharp wit and confidence to the stage. Both celebrating and poking fun at her strict, formative Nigerian-American upbringing, Orji shares her unique journey from pre-med to comedy, talks about parental pressures to get married, and takes us along to Lagos to meet her family and friends.

Entertainment Weekly calls *Momma, I Made It!* "an hour of joy", *IndieWire* hails it as "a rip-roaring standup special," and *Fast Company* says it's "the laugh the black community needs right now."

In 2020, Orji also recently earned her first Emmy nomination and her fourth Black Reel nomination in a row as Molly in *Insecure*, while *Momma, I Made It* was nominated for a 2021 Image Award for Outstanding Variety Show (Series or Special).

Been sleeping on Africa's next superstar?

Is'thunzi | South African teen drama

South Africa's Thuso Mbedu is making headlines globally right now as the star of *The Underground Railroad*, an adaptation of Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, directed by Oscar winner Barry Jenkins (*Moonlight*, *If Beale Street*

Could Talk). Even Oprah is a fan, saying on [Instagram](#) that, “@thuso.mbedu gives the performance of a lifetime. Great things are coming for her and everyone will be saying her name after watching her as the superhero that is Cora.”

But celebrating Thuso Mbedu is stating the obvious for Mzansi Magic fans, who’ve already seen her earn back-to-back Best Actress nominations at the International Emmy Awards in 2017 and 2018 for her role as Winnie in the isiZulu teen drama *Is’thunzi*. The show also picked up South African Film and Television Awards (Saftas) for Best Actress and Actor for Mbedu and S’Dumo Mtshali (*Isibaya*, *iNumber Number*) respectively, not to mention nominations for the all-star cast of Pallance Dladla (*Dam, Shadow*), Thulane Shange (*Uzalo*, *iNumber Number*) and Zikhona Bali (*DiepCity*).

So, if you’ve been sleeping on Mbedu, rather than wait for her next starring role, opposite Oscar winner Viola Davis (*Fences*, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*) in *The Woman King*, jump into her back catalogue on Showmax, which also includes roles on *Isibaya* S3 and *MTV Shuga: Down South* S2.

In the mood for love?

Rafiki | Kenyan romance

Wanuri Kahiu’s *Rafiki* was named Outstanding Film - Limited Release at the 2020 GLAAD Media Awards, which recognise and honour media for their fair, accurate and inclusive representations of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) community and the issues that affect their lives. *Rafiki* beat out the likes of Pedro Almodóvar’s *Pain and Glory*, nominated for both Oscars and Golden Globes; 2020 Golden Globe and Bafta nominee *Portrait of A Lady On Fire*; Sundance audience award winner *Brittany Runs a Marathon*; and South African favourite *Kanarie*, starring Schalk Bezuidenhout.

"Good Kenyan girls become good Kenyan wives," but Kena (Samantha Mugatsia, who won Best Actress at Carthage 2018 and FESPACO 2019 for the role) and Ziki (Sheila Muniyiva) long for something more. When love blossoms between them, the two girls are forced to choose between happiness and safety.

Winner of 17 international awards, the Kenyan romance has a 93% critics rating on *Rotten Tomatoes*, with *Variety* calling it “impossible not to celebrate”; *RogerEbert.com* “a lyrical ode to finding a kindred spirit amidst an uncaring majority”; *AV Club* “bursting with life”; and *Washington Post* “a small revelation, not least because it marks the breakthrough of a filmmaker of such exhilarating, cheerfully courageous vision.”

Want a reminder of the power of story?

Liyana | Kingdom of Eswatini documentary

Winner of 35 awards, *Liyana* is a genre-defying documentary that tells the story of five children in the Kingdom of Eswatini who, with some guidance from South African storyteller Gcina Mhlope, turn past trauma into an original fable about a girl named Liyana, who embarks on a perilous quest to save her young twin brothers. The film weaves Liyana's animated journey together with poetic documentary scenes to create an inspiring tale of perseverance and hope.

Liyana is the directorial debut of Swaziland-born and raised Aaron Kopp, with his wife Amanda. Before moving into directing, Kopp shot the Oscar-winning documentary *Saving Face* and the Oscar-nominated *The Hunting Ground*.

Liyana is executive produced by Emmy winner Thandiwe Newton (*Westworld*), produced by Oscar winner Daniel Junge (*Saving Face*) and edited by Davis Coombe (*Chasing Coral*, *Chasing Ice*). Nigerian Shofela Coker created the stunning animated artwork, while South African Philip Miller composed the score.

Entertainment Weekly hailed *Liyana* as “Gorgeous. Unlike any documentary you’ve ever seen,” while *The Hollywood Reporter* praised it as “A lyrical work, as bright and captivating as it is poignant.”

Feel like a sharp satire and feminist allegory?

I Am Not A Witch | Zambian satire

After a minor incident in her village, nine-year-old Shula is exiled to a travelling witch camp where she is told that if she tries to escape she will be transformed into a goat. As she navigates through her new life with her fellow witches and a government official who exploits her innocence for his own gain, she must decide whether to accept her fate or risk the consequences of seeking freedom.

Winner of 15 international awards, including the Bafta for Best Debut for Zambian-born, Wales-raised director Rungano Nyoni, *I Am Not A Witch* has a 96% critics rating on Rotten Tomatoes. As *Variety* put it, “It’s rare and exhilarating that a new filmmaker arrives on the scene so sure of herself and so willing to take bold, counter-intuitive chances... Invigorating, intriguing and provocative.” *I Am Not A Witch* is at number five on *The Guardian*’s list of *The 20 Best African Films, Ranked*.

Nyoni was inspired by a spate of witch accusations aimed at women, which took place over a particularly dry summer in Zambia, and by her month-long stay at a 200-year-old witch camp in Ghana.

Ready for a holiday in the mountains?

The Forgotten Kingdom | Lesotho-set drama

Atang (Zenzo Ngqobe from *The River, Tsotsi*) returns to a mountain village in Lesotho to bury his father. Expecting to return to the city quickly, he instead befriends an orphan herd-boy, is stirred by memories of his youth, and falls for a childhood friend, Dineo (Nozipho Nkelemba).

The Forgotten Kingdom won 15 international awards, including seven Audience Awards from American festivals, and Best Cinematography, Sound and Child Actor (Lebohang Ntsane) at the Africa Movie Academy Awards, where it earned another six nominations, including Best Film and Best Actor for Ngqobe.

The Guardian called *The Forgotten Kingdom* a “pleasingly cinematic mini epic... combines classic realism with colourful characters, breath-taking vistas and a light dusting of the supernatural” while *Radio Times*, in their four-star review, praised the film as “heartfelt and touching... so genuine it’s hard to resist.”

Getting to know ‘the father of African cinema’?

La Noire De... (Black Girl) | Senegalese drama

Ousmane Sembène's debut 1966 film, *La Noire De... (Black Girl)*, is the story of a young Senegalese woman who is employed as a governess for a French family in Dakar and moves with them to the Riviera, where her comfortable duties as a nanny in a wealthy household are replaced by the drudgery and indignities of a maid.

Black Girl won the Tanit d'Or at Carthage in 1966, among other prizes and was hailed by Oscar winner Martin Scorsese (*The Irishman*) as "an astonishing movie". It's at number three on both the Tarifa-Tangiers African Film Festival's list of the 10 best African films of all time and *The Guardian's* list of *The 20 Best African Films, Ranked*.

Black Girl has a 97% critics rating on Rotten Tomatoes, with *The Village Voice* saying its "dense with cold fury" and *NPR* adding that the film "feels as timely today as it did half a century ago".

Showmax is also home to Sembène's Cannes winner *Mooladé*; his Venice winner *Camp De Thiaroye*; and his Berlin winner *Emitai*.

Feel like a crime classic?

Cairo Station | Egyptian crime film

In the 1958 classic *Cairo Station*, Youssef Chahine both directs and stars as Qinawi, a crippled newspaper vendor who falls for a lemonade seller, Hanouma, who is engaged to another station worker, Abu-Serih. As Abu-Serih tries to unionise the station workers, Qinawi's fixation on Hanouma crosses the line from innocent crush to dangerous obsession.

Cairo Station screened in competition at Berlin and was included in *The Story of Film*, the definitive history of cinema, while Chahine went on to receive a Lifetime Achievement Award from Cannes in 1997. The movie has a 100% critics rating on *Rotten Tomatoes*. *Time Out* praised it as "a great overlooked masterpiece", *The Guardian* as "unmissable", *The Hollywood Reporter* as "a jewel of a film" and *BBC* as "an excellent thriller, and one that anticipates the serial killer genre that Hitchcock's *Psycho* kick-started a few years later... a cinematic triumph."

It's at number four on both *The Guardian's* list of *The 20 Best African Films, Ranked* and *Taste of Cinema's* list of *20 Essential African Films You Need To Watch*. Showmax is also home to Chahine's *Alexandria Why?*, which took home the Special Jury Prize and the C.I.D.A.L.C. Diploma at Berlin in 1979.

A trip back in time?

Yaaba (Grandmother) | Burkina Faso drama

Late Burkina Faso filmmaker Idrissa Ouedraogo – hailed by *Variety* as "a towering figure of African cinema" – came to international attention in 1989 with *Yaaba (Grandmother)*, the story of two children who make friends with an old woman who has been outcast as a witch by her village.

At Cannes that year, *Yaaba* shared the FIPRESCI Critics' Prize with Steven Soderbergh's *Sex, Lies and Videotape* and also took a Special Mention from the Ecumenical Jury. *Yaaba* has an 86% rating on Rotten Tomatoes, with *The Los Angeles Times* saying: "Yaaba's power sneaks up on you... Flawless... Told in terms of the greatest elegance and simplicity."

Yaaba is at number 12 on both *The Guardian's* list of *The 20 Best African Films Ranked* and *Taste of Cinema's* list of *20 Essential African Films You Need To Watch*.

A treasure trove of African classics

Of course, this one film per country approach is just a sampling, and misses out on Showmax originals like the record-breaking Nigerian reality show, *I Am Laycon*, and the critically-acclaimed Kenyan crime drama *Crime and Justice*, not to mention classics like:

- Akin Omotoso's [*The Ghost and The House of Truth*](#), winner of the Grand Jury Prize at Urbanworld and Best Editing at the 2020 Africa Movie Academy Awards (AMAA). Set in Makoko, Nigeria, the crime drama stars Bafta Breakthrough Brit winner Susan Wokoma (*Enola Holmes*) and AMAA Best Actress winner Kate Henshaw (*Chief Daddy*)
- Mugambi Nthiga's drama [*Lusala*](#), winner of the Rimbaud award at the 2020 Les Rimbaud du Cinéma, held in France at the oldest active cinema in the world, starring Brian Ogola (*Crime and Justice*, *18 Hours* and *Poacher*) and child star Stycie Waweru (Jo in *Supa Modo*)
- Sara de Gouveia's multi-award-winning [*The Sound of Masks*](#), set in Mozambique and described by *POV* as "a wicked cool arts doc about the power of dance."
- HBO's 2019 Emmy-winning documentary, [*Stolen Daughters: Kidnapped By Boko Haram*](#), which follows the story of one freed group of the Chibok Girls, who were kidnapped in Nigeria in 2014 by Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram.
- The heart-rending Kenyan superhero film [*Supa Modo*](#), winner of over 50 international awards, including Best European Film For Children at the 2019 European Children's Film Association Awards and a Children's Jury Special Mention in the Generation 14Plus category at Berlin in 2018
- Njue Kevin's [*18 Hours*](#), based on the true story of a rookie paramedic and his driver who spent 18 hours fighting to save the life of a road accident victim who was denied admission at multiple hospitals in Nairobi. In 2018, *18 Hours* became the first Kenyan film to win Best Movie Overall at the Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards.
- Mbithi Masya's [*Kati Kati*](#), about a young amnesiac who wakes up in the middle of the wilderness with no idea how she got there. The Kenyan film won the FIPRESCI Critics Prize at Toronto in 2016, among other accolades.
- Leila Djansi's [*Like Cotton Twines*](#), named Best Film at Savannah Film Festival in 2016, stars four-time Black Reel nominee Jay Ellis (aka Lawrence in *Insecure*) as an American teacher in Ghana trying to save one of his students from religious slavery
- The Kenyan crime drama [*Nairobi Half Life*](#), which won the Breakthrough Audience Award at AFI in 2012 and four Africa Magic Viewers Choice Awards in 2014. Lead actor Joseph Wairimu also picked up Best Actor at Durban and Most Promising Actor at the Africa Movie Academy Awards.
- The Ghana-set [*The Perfect Picture*](#), winner of Best Director for Shirley Frimpong-Manso, Best Actress for Jackie Appiah and Best Supporting Actor for Adjetey Anang at the 2010 Africa Movie Academy Awards. Also look out for Frimpong-Manso' hit new telenovela, [*Dede*](#)
- FESPACO Grand Prize winners like Mweze Ngangura's [*Identity Pieces | Pièces d'identités*](#) (DRC, 1999), Gaston Kabore's [*Buud Yam*](#) (Burkina Faso, 1997), Roger Gnoan M'Bala's [*Au Nom Du Christ*](#) (Cote d'Ivoire, 1993) and Kwah Ansah's [*Heritage Africa*](#) (Ghana, 1989)
- Dani Kouyaté's Burkina Faso-set [*Keïta! l'Héritage du griot*](#), which won a Special Mention and the OCIC Award at Amiens and the Oumarou Ganda Prize at FESPACO 1995
- Abderrahmane Sissako's Mali-set [*La Vie Sur Terre / Life on Earth*](#), which won 10 international awards, including the Grand Prix at Fribourg 1999, and is ranked joint fifth on the Tarifa-Tangiers African Film Festival's list of the 10 best African films of all time.
- Flora Gomes' [*Po Di Sangui / Tree of Blood*](#), set in a Guinea-Bissau village where the trees planted upon the birth of each child begin falling rapidly and mysteriously. *Tree of Blood* competed for the Palme D'Or at Cannes in 1996 and won a Silver Tanit at Carthage, among other honours.
- Djibril Diop Mambéty's 1992 classic [*Hyènes / Hyenas*](#), nominated for the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1992 and was ranked joint fifth on the Tarifa-Tangiers African Film Festival's list of the 10 best African films of all time.
- Raoul Peck's [*Lumumba: Death Of A Prophet*](#), about the assassination of the first prime minister of the post-colonial Democratic Republic of Congo. Lumumba won the Procirep Award at Cinema du Reel in 1992, among other international accolades, while Peck went on to earn an Oscar nomination for *I Am Not Your Negro* in 2017.
- Moussa Sene Absa's [*Madame Brouette*](#), about a single mother in Senegal who sells goods from a wheelbarrow but dreams of opening a canteen. *Madame Brouette* won four international awards, including Best Music at Berlin. Trailer: <https://youtu.be/5h2b7bOyX0U>
- Flora Gomes' Cape Verde-set [*Nha Fala / My Voice My Voice*](#), which won six international awards, including the Laterna Magic Prize at Venice in 2002, and was the only film from Africa to compete at Berlin that year. Grammy-nominated Cameroonian star Manu Dibango, who tragically passed away from Covid-19 in March 2020, wrote and produced the film's music.

- Haile Gerima's Ethiopia-set [Harvest: 3000 Years](#), which won the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and the Silver Leopard at Locarno in 1976. Oscar-winner Martin Scorsese (*The Irishman*) presented a restored version of *Harvest: 3000 Years* at Cannes in 2006 and at Tribeca in 2008. As he wrote for Tribeca, the film "has a particular kind of urgency which few pictures possess. This is the story of an entire people, and its collective longing for justice and good faith. An epic, not in scale but in emotional and political scope." The Tate Modern also honoured the film with a special screening in 2015.
- Gaston Kabore's Burkina Faso-set [Zan Boko](#), winner of Best Screenplay at FESPACO 1989 and a Special Jury Award at Amiens 1988.

Looking for the next generation of African filmmakers?

Launching on Showmax on Africa Day, the MultiChoice Talent Factory Colours of Africa series features 16 short films made by 60 students from 13 countries across the continent, where you can be the first to discover the next Thuso Mbedu, Wanuri Kahiu or Ousmane Sembène.

For more info on the MultiChoice Talent Factory, visit www.multichoicetalentfactory.com.

" Showmax named Marketing Team of the Year at the 2022 Promax Africa Awards 14 Nov 2022

" Showmax Pro launches promotional offer from R199 a month 19 Oct 2022

" "Every South African needs to watch this." Critics rave about *Steinheist* doccie 27 Sep 2022

" Best reactions from first-time SAFTA nominees 19 Jul 2022

" Trailer alert: first look at Tarryn Wyngaard and Thapelo Mokoena in the Showmax Original survival horror *Pulse* 24 May 2022

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