



"Africa through African lenses"

The Bride Price (2025, West Africa/USA, 70 min.), directed by Ime N. Etuk; written and produced by George N. Faux; cinematography by Evan Gandy; with Amie Sowe (Awa), Clifford Owusu (Paul Mwamba), Michael Blackson (Papa Mwamba, his father), Abibat Olayemi (Rita Mwamba, his mother), Teressa Patterson (Esther Mwamba, his sister), James Otiocha (Awa's father, Papa Alahji), Sonia Tucker (Fatima), Ruthee Doti (Kenya), Gbenga Adejile/"Sugar Beast" (Mr. Mufasa), Robert Woodson (Dr. NY, his son). In English.

Paul and Awa are a young couple in an unspecified West African village. They are deeply in love and eager to marry. But they are also very much attached to their families and their community traditions. And tradition holds that Paul and/or his family must be able to pay the "bride price" required by his future father-in-law. Ideally, payment of the bride price is a way to show seriousness, respect, and commitment, and to bring the two families closer together. As we learn in one of the film's opening titles, "This exchange is not a purchase but a gesture of respect, gratitude, and the uniting of families."

Ideally, the price is set at a reasonable level, and negotiations over it end up with a happy outcome and a happy marriage. But in *The Bride Price*, as in any good romantic comedy, the happy couple must first undergo a series of obstacles that threaten to keep them permanently apart.

The first obstacle here is that Paul is a teacher, which means that he doesn't have much income. Still, he has scrimped and saved, and has at last come up with \$1,000 to show his seriousness. The second is his father, Papa Mwamba, an extremely difficult (if often hilarious) curmudgeon with nothing but contempt for his son's choice of a low-paid profession. (His nickname for his son is "Minimum Wage.") He's not inclined to offer much of anything but his usual insults. The third, and biggest challenge, is that Awa's father, Papa Alahji, has set an impossibly high bride price of \$100,000, one hundred times what Paul can afford on his own.

All of which come together in a hilarious fashion when the two families meet for the first time, after which Paul is given two weeks to come up with the bride price.

At the same time, of course, there are forces that could eventually come to the aid of the young couple. There is the support of Paul's mother, devoted to her son and very much capable of holding her own in their tempestuous household. There is the inherent decency of Awa's father, a widower equally devoted to his child. And ultimately, there is the influence and support of the community as a whole, embodied in the restaurant Akadi, which serves as a kind of community center (whose owner, Fatima, will come to play a particularly critical role).

Which side will win out in the end? You can probably guess. But not before lots of hilarity and many tender moments.

WRITER/PRODUCER GEORGE N. FAUX

We are especially happy to be opening the 36th Cascade of African Films with *The Bride Price*, not only because it tells a delightful, heart-warming story, but because of its close connection to Portland, Oregon, and its African expatriate community. Its writer/producer, George N. Faux, and its director, Ime Etuk, live in Portland and most (all?) of the movie was filmed here. Akadi, the restaurant that becomes a refuge in the film, is in fact the celebrated Portland restaurant of the same name that George Faux created with his wife, the acclaimed chef Fatou Ouattara and which *USA Today* recently named one of America's best.

George served as the driving force in the creation of the film. As we learn from his artistic statement, written for the film's premiere in August 2025, he was essentially self-taught and driven by a desire to tell stories that captured and honored elements of his traditional culture and communicated them to a larger audience in a way that expressed larger human truths:

My journey began in Portland's public library, where I immersed myself in books on character development, dialogue, and dramatic structure. Though I never attended Portland State University, the library became my sanctuary and sparked my passion. I wrote and performed my first skit for African Culture Night, then embraced larger productions at the Winningstad Theatre.

Captivated by film's magic, I sat in theaters predicting plot twists and dissecting creative choices. Over time, I realized storytelling was my true calling—visions God communicates to me, meant to uplift, inspire, and provoke thought.

As founder and executive producer of George Faux Films, I transform these visions into authentic narratives that honor African cultures and resonate universally. I'm excited to apply my self-taught expertise and theatrical experience to ensure The Bride Price premiere is unforgettable. (<https://georgefauxfilms.com/>)

And apply his expertise he did. As you can see in the gallery of photos from the premiere on *The Bride Price* website (<https://georgefauxfilms.com/>), the premiere on August 14, 2025, at the Regal Fox Tower in Portland was indeed both successful and unforgettable.

IME N. ETUK - DIRECTOR

Fortunately, George Faux was able to engage the services of veteran director Ime Etuk in making his first film.

Ime N. Etuk is a Nigerian-American filmmaker, born and raised in Portland. He has a long career in media and journalism. In 1999, while field producing for ABC News (*World News Tonight, 20/20*), he was selected for the prestigious Directors Guild of America's training program, leading to a fulfilling career directing and producing for film and television.

He has worked as an assistant director on many film projects, working with some of Hollywood's top directors, including Antoine Fuqua (*Training Day*, 2001), Paul Haggis "Crash", The Coen Brothers (*The Man Who Wasn't There*, 2001), Paul Haggis *Crash*, 2005, and David Lynch (*Twin Peaks*. 2017), among many others.

He has also directed and produced music videos and commercials, as well as documentary films and features. His first feature *Hurricane in the Rose Garden* (2008) screened at the Pan African film festival and Slamdance film festival before being picked up for distribution.

In addition to *The Bride Price*, he has recently directed two other films filmed in Oregon, both of them set in the context of our long-standing Outdoor School program, which provides all sixth-graders with the experience of a week-long camp in the woods. It's a particularly unique experience for city kids who might otherwise have little direct contact with nature or who do not generally mix socially with kids from different ethnicities and backgrounds. The documentary *Angel Outside* (2025) was produced for the Oregon State University Extension Service, which runs the program for the state. The film follows young Angel Oliva Hernandez, whose parents are first-generation immigrants, through his Outdoor School experience, his initial self-consciousness and trepidations giving way to camaraderie, learning, and personal growth. You can read about it and watch it online at

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/new-documentary-brings-oregons-outdoor-school-experience-life>

The second film, also released in 2025 (though much of it filmed in 2022), is the full-length feature film *Outdoor School*. It is based on the real-life experiences of writer-actor Vin Shambry, made famous in the story he told on *The Moth Radio Hour*, which has appeared multiple times on public radio stations. As a Black kid growing up in Portland, he found himself without a home, living with his mother and younger sister under a tree in NE Portland's Irving Park while attending middle school. Ironically, his experience with Outdoor School (which for most kids is their first time "roughing it") becomes for him a truly transformative time, an opportunity to sleep in a bed and just be a kid. You can read about it in this story from *The Oregonian* written while it was being filmed:

<https://www.oregonlive.com/entertainment/2022/09/outdoor-school-movie-brings-together-a-diverse-portland-creative-team-for-a-story-of-homelessness-and-hope.html>

Outdoor School is currently making the rounds of film festivals, where it is having a lot of success. It was named Best Feature Film at the 2025 National Black Film Festival and was nominated for Best Narrative Feature and Best Editing at the 2025 Woodstock Film Festival.

For a deeper sense of Ime Etuk's filmmaking philosophy, here is his director's statement from his website (imeetuk.com):

I believe the first step in storytelling is listening—deeply, openly, and without assumption. Whether I'm directing a documentary, a narrative film, or a hybrid work that blends cinema and live performance, I begin with real stories rooted in lived experience. Some remain in the nonfiction space; others evolve into narratives that explore emotional truths through fiction. My aim in either case is to honor what's real and bring visibility to what's often overlooked or unheard.

As a first-generation Nigerian raised in Portland, I've spent my life moving between cultural worlds—often translating myself in spaces that didn't fully see me. That sense of in-between shaped how I view identity, belonging, and transformation. It also drives the kinds of stories I tell: ones grounded in resilience, tension, and the quiet power of becoming. I am inspired by oral traditions, community histories, and the collective memory of those whose stories have too often been erased or ignored. My work draws on these influences and fuses them with my training in journalism, film, and theater.

Over time, my practice has evolved from simply directing films to creating spaces for others to share their stories. I lead [Lion Speaks](#), a nonprofit that mentors historically

excluded Black and BIPOC creatives in media. Collaboration, mentorship, and access are central to my creative process. I often begin new work by listening: conducting interviews and gathering narratives that can be transformed into film, theater, or multimedia pieces.

Currently, I am exploring how technology and interactive media can deepen audience engagement and create more inclusive storytelling spaces. My goal is to build a body of work that is emotionally grounded and culturally expansive—films, series, and collaborative projects that foster reflection, empathy, and connection, while widening the circle of who gets to be seen and heard.

My latest feature film, *Outdoor School* (<https://outdoorschoolthemovie.com/>), premiered at the American Black Film Festival in 2025 and is currently on the festival circuit. Based on true story, first shared on *The Moth*, and featured in the New York Times Bestselling book *How to Tell a Story*, the film explores themes of resilience, homelessness, and transformation in 1990's Portland.

As the director's statement tells us, one of the key manifestations of Etuk's commitment is the organization Lion Speaks, whose office is located in the heart of N/NE Portland, just a block away from PCC-Cascade. Its mission statement can be found on the Lion Speaks website (lionspeaks.org): *We believe that for equality of opportunity and freedom from oppression to be realized, it is essential for BIPOC people to control our own narrative.* The name Lion Speaks was inspired by the African proverb, "Until the lion learns to speak, the tale will always glorify the hunter."

This same proverb has inspired many of the filmmakers that CFAF has featured over the years and is at the heart of our commitment to "Africa Through African Lenses." We are so proud to be opening this 36th Festival with the work of this remarkable community-based filmmaking team.

--Notes by Michael Dembrow
Cascade Festival of African Films
Africanfilmfestival.org