

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

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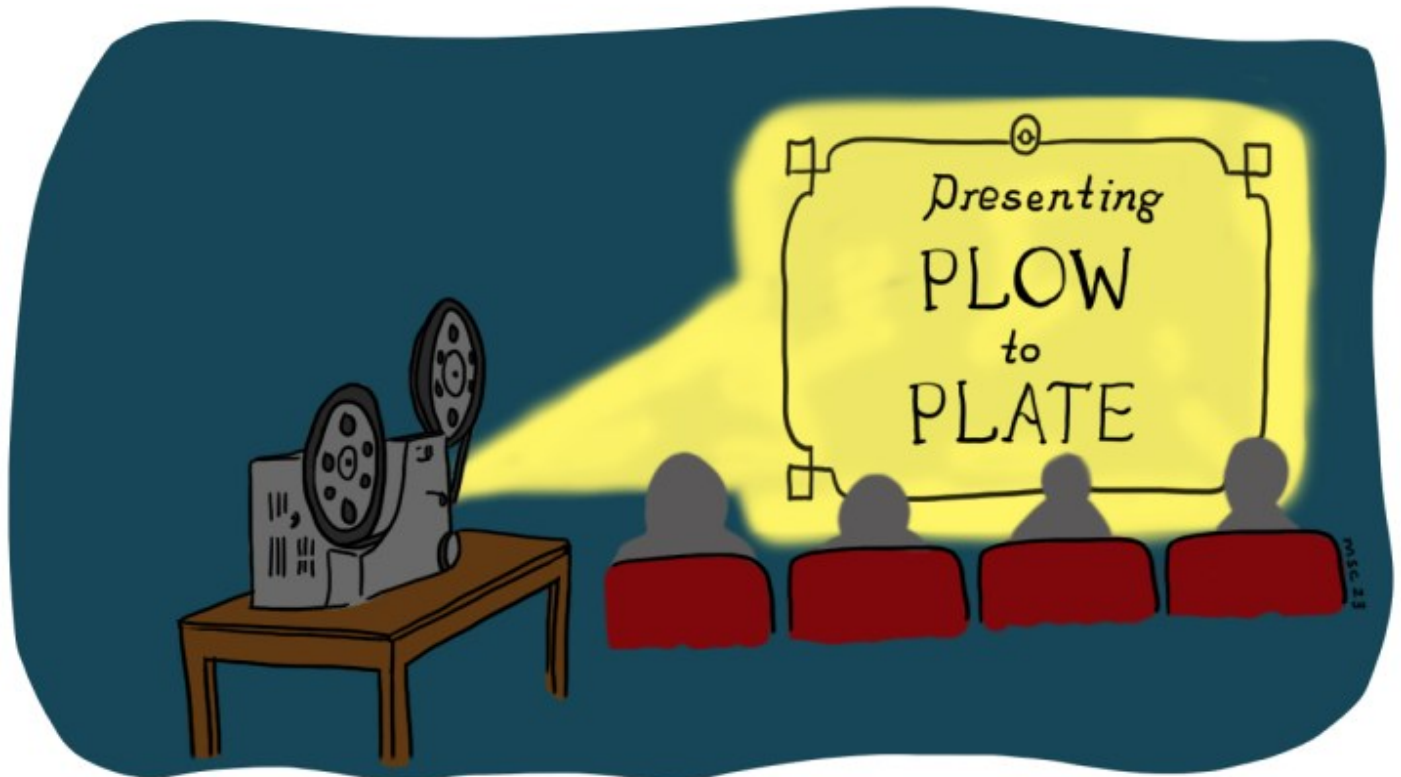


Illustration by Maggie Carson

Sweet Dreams

By Adam Rabiner

The 2012 documentary *Sweet Dreams* is about the people of Rwanda who in 1994 experienced a genocide in which over 500,000 Tutsi were killed and the country severely traumatized, including members of the first and only female drumming troupe, Ingoma Nshya, which means “new drum” or “new kingdom.” Ingoma Nshya’s founder, theater director Odile “Kike” Katese, intended the troupe to usher in a new chapter of support, healing, and reconciliation. Traditionally, women were not allowed to touch drums, an instrument performed by men for kings, not for any sacred reason but because they were deemed to be “too heavy.”

Ingoma Nshya’s members are both Hutus and Tutsis. Some are widows whose husbands have been murdered; others are wives of husbands who have been impris-

oned. There are rape victims, children of imprisoned parents and orphans who are the sole surviving members of their family. But these differences are secondary to each musician's insistence on commitment, such as showing up on time for rehearsals. All find drumming healing and cathartic.

More broadly, Kike feels her countrymen and women are broken, empty bodies moving in space, but dead inside. They need to re-learn life, re-experience joy, smile, cry and feel again, create new memories and traditions. When, in 2009 Kike meets the two proprietors of Brooklyn's Blue Marble Ice Cream, Jennie Dundas and Alexis Gallivan, it occurs to her that this delicious, fun and joyous dessert could help Rwandans discover how to live happily again. She asks if they can help her open Rwanda's first local ice cream shop, to be named *Inzoni Nziza-Sweet Dreams*-a cooperative to be founded by the drummers.

THE WOMEN HAVE A LOT RIDING ON THIS VENTURE, A MEANS OF FINANCIAL SECURITY HARD TO COME BY IN RURAL RWANDA.

You share the troupe's enthusiasm as they excitedly set out to visit a neighboring bee-keeping collective in the Nyungwe Forest, inspect a dairy cooperative, locate a retail space (where they post a handmade cotton sign proclaiming, "coming soon, ice cream, coffee, and dreams"), form committees and start taking English lessons and basic business classes.

Yet inevitably various dramas and obstacles ensue, such as which ten lucky women will be selected for the coveted positions of store employees. Can the women afford the monthly dues required of them, and will the essential ice-cream maker, donated by South Africa, be fixed in time for the grand opening? The suspense, tension, pain and hope in that final one week countdown to opening day is palpable. The women have a lot riding on this venture, a means of financial security hard to come by in rural Rwanda.

The women show they learn a lot from their marketing lessons. At the grand opening they rent a truck and drive it through town shouting slogans worthy of a professional PR firm:

“Ice cream is here! It’s the New Thing.”

“It’s hot, it’s very cold, it’s good.”

“If you’re old, it’ll make you young again.”

At the ribbon cutting ceremony they give out free samples, pound on their drums all day and are deliriously happy. Their sweet dreams are coming true.

The story of Ingoma Nshya shows how friendships can thrive even among those who have every reason to fear or hate one another. It demonstrates that we have more in common with one another, in this case artistic freedom and expression, passion for music, dance and song, and liberation from sexist taboos, than artificially constructed reasons that divide us.

The engaging business tale chronicling the creation of Inzoni Nziza is also one of persistence in the face of adversity, of cooperation and compromise, of taking classroom learning and applying it with concrete planning and action and ultimately, the reason Plow to Plate has chosen to present this film, the power of ice cream to transform a nation.

THEIR SWEET DREAMS ARE COMING TRUE.

Together these organizations give the women so much confidence and empowerment that they later partner with male drummers from Rwanda and their brother country, Burundi, to put on a joint collaborative celebration of festive drumming, dancing, sing-

ing and joy making.

When they board a plane for an international tour in Holland—many for the first time—they are not intimidated at all but rather excited for what the future holds. They have come a long way in putting their past traumas behind them as they move towards a more optimistic and peaceful future.

SWEET DREAMS

A FILM BY ROB AND LISA FRUCHTMAN



Sweet Dreams, April 18, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and two children, Elan and Ana.