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## A Magician's Game: Tricks at the Black Film Festival [PDF](#) [PRINT](#) [EMAIL](#)

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Posted by  
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"The only reason I became a director was to play the roles I wanted to play without waiting for somebody else," says DeAara Lewis. Her feature debut [Tricks](#) kicks off the Black Film Festival at the Hatiloo Theater this Friday, July 10. On the surface, the film is about the lives of a group of black prostitutes working in a massage parlor called Healing Touch. But the themes of identity, deception, and strength that run through the film have a more universal application. "It's about prostitutes, but, as the character Donna, played by Deneka Lashea, says 'It's a magicians game.' They have to create illusions. What you see and who they are are two different people. It's about life, and business and the illusions that we have to create in order to survive."



DeAara Lewis, director of *Tricks*

Lewis had the idea for the film while she was working in the audio booth at WREG-TV in Memphis. "I got the idea from watching some women be arrested in a prostitution sting on the news," she recalls. "At first, it was going to be a musical." The evening after she had the idea, she went to a karaoke bar and heard someone sing "Fancy", Reba McEntire's classic ode to a working girl, for the first time. "I really liked how she told it," Lewis says. "She was very unapologetic. This is just what she does to survive."

Even though the musical idea faded quickly, Lewis strove to keep that same straightforward, nonjudgemental attitude toward

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her characters. Meeting with several actual prostitutes helped her see things from their perspective. "Their struggle was not to get out of it, their struggle was to make peace with themselves and what they had to do. How could I not write about this?" she says "You can't preach to anybody. I think that's why Tricks has successfully crossed over to so many audiences, because I didn't preach. You can't preach at anybody until you've walked in their shoes. The women I met with were bold. They were like, 'To hell with all y'all. You're not going to tell me how to survive.'"

Tricks mixes the drama of its character's struggles with the kind of lighthearted moments that occur among a group of close comrades in arms. This deepens the characterizations, but Lewis says that the mixture of tones and realistic ending violated some audience members expectations. "People have come at me being an African-American woman, saying that they were offended because there was no religious angle, or that I wasn't trying to save these people. Because I am an African-American woman, that's what I'm supposed to do. Some women had a problem with the fact that I wrote it, and that all the women didn't get out of it in the end. But that's who I am. I've always been unconventional. I like to piss people off. I like to tell stories that make people think. When people come to me and say, 'You shouldn't tell this story because you're a woman,' I say, 'Why not?'"

Tricks will screen at 7:30 PM on Friday, July 10 at the Hatiloo Theater as part of the [Black Film Festival](#).



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