

For me, the strongest impression at the Berlin Film Festival was KINSHASA SYMPHONY, no doubt about it. I left the cinema groggy with emotion and joy and wandered alone through the city streets hugging that impression, just like I used to after extra-special movies I saw when I was a youngster. I immediately thought of Christoph Schlingensief. At last I understood what he was getting at. For us, culture is so lifeless, a consumer article just like any other, available everywhere, live or digital, at the flick of a switch. It makes us forget how life-enhancing something as simple as a musical instrument can be – and how difficult to come by.

A hairdresser spends the whole day slaving away by the sweat of her brow, or rather of her whole body, in a little salon on a dusty street, miles away from her hut. And after work she goes off to rehearse with the orchestra. It's something she would never miss, even if she falls asleep over the music. On a purely phonetic basis (German is hard!), teenage boys and stout mummies learn to pronounce all the tongue-twisters in Schiller's "Ode to Joy" AND to sing them at the right pitch. It makes you laugh and it moves you to tears, one after the other.

The hub of a wheel produces just the right sound for the percussion, a tree-trunk the right wood for a cello modelled on an original instrument, traced from it like the pattern for a dress. Shopkeepers on the square where the rehearsal takes place tone down their loudspeakers in sympathy with the conductor's despairing tears.

When the concert begins, everyone is suddenly galvanised, pride and joy suffuse all those whose daily bread is humiliation. Something grips them, infuses them, transforms them. Something written with a scratchy quill pen in Germany two hundred years ago really does affect them like the divine spark that Schiller invokes. And suddenly we too are proud because our culture has produced something that shines out far away, in all the dust and the misery, literally IN THE HEART OF DARKNESS.

And how astute our audiences are! The two showings were immediately sold out, hundreds of people had to be turned away. They had all sensed from a long way off that this was an experience not to be missed on any account.