

WORDS: STRUAN DOUGLAS

## TAKING ASINAMALI TO THE BIG SCREEN

*Renowned playwright and director Mbongeni Ngema has transformed the well-known play into a movie*

"Asinamali" meaning "we have no money" was a phrase coined by ANC activist Msizi Dube, who founded the rent boycott movement upon returning to KwaZulu-Natal after his release from Robben Island. He was assassinated in 1983.

Mbongeni Ngema, who belonged to the movement, wrote about the events in his play *Asinamali*, which was first performed at the Market Theatre in 1985.

He has now transformed the play into a film, and the conversion walks a fine line between realism and musical drama.

Ngema features as director, scriptwriter, lyricist, composer and actor. He plays a theatre director who has returned from exile with the goal of producing a musical in prison. The prisoners are each linked to Dube's assassination in their own way.

The script functions as a story within a story, as the actors develop their characters through drama and the healing power of song and dance. The antagonist, Sergeant Mgwaqaza, played by Boitumelo "Chuck" Shisana, delivers an outstanding performance. The soundtrack features music from Ladysmith Black Mambazo, jazz arrangements by Brian Thusi and a score by Chris Letcher.

Ngema believes *Asinamali* brings a new vocabulary to South African film. "We South Africans are known to be very musical and

full of expression. We've shown the world what we can do with music and theatre, and film brings those elements together," he says.

*Asinamali* was on Broadway in 1987, paving the way for *Sarafina!*, a play about the Soweto riots, which introduced many Americans to Nelson Mandela's name and was turned into a film in 1992. Ngema believes the USA would be a good launchpad for the movie and plans to get the film to Africans across the diaspora. It will be screened at the Pembroke Taparelli Arts & Film Festival in New York and LA and

the Toronto Black Film Festival this year.

"Perhaps if we reflect on where we come from, it will help us shape the road forward," says Ngema, who hopes the film will inspire future generations.

• *Asinamali* will be screened in Jo'burg and New York from 2 March.



WORDS: SIBUSISO MKWANAZI

Producer Ronit Shapiro's documentary, *Sisters of the Wilderness*, follows five young Zulu women from disadvantaged backgrounds as they venture into the wilderness for the first time, capturing how their experiences affect their lives.

It took Shapiro a year to choose the right women for the film, visiting the communities of Howick, Umlazi, Mpophomeni and Sweet Waters in her quest.

The documentary's premise is that the wilderness has the power to heal even the most broken.

"I chose to use the documentary format as it's the best way to educate, entertain and be engaging, but at the same time tell authentic stories," notes Shapiro.



## WILD HEALING

"This is an observational doccic, which means there's no professional acting and no script. The characters and settings are all real and, therefore, are more believable."

Documentaries, with the thought-provoking, authentic stories they tell, often make a deep impression on viewers, and *Sisters of the*

*Wilderness* is no exception. By focusing on the young women's lives, the film explores issues such as female empowerment and leadership development.

Amanda Ntombela, one of the young women whose story is told in the film, says her interpersonal skills have improved since taking part in the project. "The film taught me that we can all be brave in any situation. I used to be scared of speaking to people and would avoid social interaction at all cost. Now I know that I can gather strength from being out in the wild," she says.

Shapiro used music to help convey the range of feelings the women were experiencing. She worked on the score with renowned British composer Ian Arber (pictured above), whose resumé includes scoring for *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation* and *I Am Bolt*.

"Ian composed music that highlighted critical turning points, such as when wilderness guide Lihle Mbokazi became the first black woman to graduate from the Wilderness Leadership School. The score perfectly underlines her difficult journey and the tremendous challenges she faces on the path she has chosen," says Shapiro.

Women take centre stage in *Sisters*

*of the Wilderness*. "One of the most important characters in the film is Mother Nature and I hope our audiences don't miss the significance of this. From there, we change the focus to the difficulties women face in male-dominated sectors such as conservation.

Then we zone into black women's stumbling blocks and how much more difficult it is for them to be successful in whatever career they have chosen," she says.

"A documentary makes it so much easier for the viewer to identify with the story, as it uses a 'point of view perspective'. This means that the story is not tainted by a director or producer's agenda; it is a far more truthful representation of events or a situation.

"Of course, we have to edit and direct the content, but this is minimal," explains Shapiro.

*Sisters of the Wilderness* is set to "edutain" viewers as it showcases both culture and history. For example, viewers will be drawn in by the expansive Hluhluwe wilderness – once King Shaka's hunting grounds.

*Sisters of the Wilderness* will be available for purchase next month and can be viewed as part of South African Airways' in-flight entertainment in the coming months. For more information, visit: [onenaturefilms.com](http://onenaturefilms.com), Facebook: *Sisters of the Wilderness* or Instagram: [@onenaturefilms](https://www.instagram.com/onenaturefilms)



## THE WAY OF THE FUTURE



South African arts and culture junkies, particularly film lovers, are gradually following in the footsteps of their international counterparts, and increasingly sourcing content online. When Netflix launched in South Africa in 2016, it had little to no content that had been shot or produced locally, or which starred any South African talent.

This is set to change this year, as Netflix serves up a number of productions that have a proudly South African connection.

### TREVOR NOAH: AFRAID OF THE DARK

South Africa's favourite son takes on a global hit list of subjects in his debut Netflix comedy special. The respected comedian ponders the absurdity of colonialism and tickles funny bones over the challenges a black James Bond might face. *Trevor Noah: Afraid of the Dark* premieres on Netflix on Tuesday, 21 February.



### BLACK MIRROR

Cape Town provides the perfect backdrop for *Black Mirror*, an anthology series that exposes just how uneasy we are with our modern world. Techno-paranoia – whether driven by a smartphone, laptop or smart TV – is discussed in each episode. Try to go a whole day without your phone and you'll see that you could easily star in this series. Visit: [Netflix.com](http://Netflix.com) for more information.

### CINEMA STYLING

Streaming may be booming, but cinema's fighting back. The multi-sensory 4DX cinema format (exclusive to Nu Metro in South Africa) can now be found at six of their cineplexes in Jo'burg, Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria. 4DX makes movies come to life, and pushes the cinema experience to ground-breaking levels of "real".

Stand-out titles that are scheduled for 4DX release in 2018 include Marvel's *Black Panther* (February), *Tomb Raider* (March), *Pacific Rim 2: Uprising* (March), *Avengers: Infinity War* (April) and *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (May). For more info, show times and to book tickets, tel: 0861-CINEMA (246 362) or visit: [numetro.co.za](http://numetro.co.za)





## BLURRING COLOUR LINES

"Ballet in South Africa is simply not transforming fast enough," says Dirk Badenhorst, who runs the South African International Ballet Competition and is the creative force behind the Soweto Dance Project's new ballet school.

"Ballet has previously been taught only in white schools and benefited only white children, but it needs to be more inclusive and easily accessible to everyone. Right now, the world ballet scene has an insatiable appetite for South African stories, but unfortunately, we don't have enough trained dancers to tell these amazing tales. That's why we decided to establish a ballet school," says Badenhorst, who does similar work in townships such as Ennerdale, Geluksdal, Orange Farm and Reiger Park.

The Soweto Dance Project was founded in 1987 by ballet dancer Carly Dibakoane in an effort to increase the shockingly low number of black dancers in the apartheid era.

"We had a lot of traditional and contemporary dancers, but there was a lack of ballet dancers, so I established the Soweto Dance Project at the Bapedi Hall in Meadowlands. Because I had very little backing from anyone, I couldn't concentrate on ballet as fully as I wished to," says Dibakoane, who has trained the likes of celebrity choreographer Somizi Mhlongo and Lulu Mlangeni, winner of local reality TV dance competition *So You Think You Can Dance*.

Armed with his background in classical ballet, Badenhorst approached Dibakoane and the pair launched the Soweto Dance Project's new ballet school in October last year. They train almost 60 children from the township, as well as ballet teachers. Thabiso Pule,

who trained under Dibakoane, is now a choreographer and administrator for the project.

"Mr Dibakoane continues to spread the message of 'each one, teach one' and this is exactly what we are doing. We're giving these future ballet stars the skills they need to fulfil their dreams. Ballet teaches dancers discipline and morals, influencing their entire lives," says Pule, who is currently in Geneva, Switzerland on a two-month residency with the Swiss Art Council, performing his production *Say It As It Is*.

"Ballet is such an important language and it speaks directly about what South Africa is going through right now. So it's critical for all of South Africa's voices to be taught this medium, so that they can poignantly tell our stories," says Badenhorst.

• For more information, email: [carlydibax@gmail.com](mailto:carlydibax@gmail.com)



## TOMORROW'S JAZZ LEGENDS

Jazz is no longer music performed by old timers purely for old timers. Young virtuosos are injecting their unique energy into the genre, creating contemporary sounds that resonate with audiences of all ages.

The hurdle for these up-and-coming artists has always been exposure that will open doors for them to have their music heard far and wide. Enter the espYoungLegends competition.

With almost 20 years in the entertainment industry, espAfrika is best-known for putting on Africa's grandest gathering, the annual Cape Town International Jazz Festival (CTIJF). The company has announced Cape Town's Jarrad Ricketts as the winner of espYoungLegends,

an online competition that searches for the most talented, unsigned, jazz-inspired bands in the country.

"This is such an incredible opportunity to be recognised as one of the most promising bands in the country. espYoungLegends is an important platform that links local artists to an international fan base through one of the world's most recognised and important music festivals," says Ricketts.

Catch him and his band perform their self-penned hits at this year's CTIJF, taking place on 23-24 March, at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. Tickets are available at: [computicket.com](http://computicket.com) Follow espAfrika on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter: @espAfrika.

