

Films boost a country's economy

ANDRE BAGOO Sunday, March 12 2017

THOUGH he studied biology at university, Ludo Smolski was drawn to other things.

"I was interested in many fields but the English system forces you to choose a lot earlier on," he says. "I was around people who were producing theatre and making short films. I was just interested in entertainment." Smolski, 42, is leading a five-day workshop being put on by the British Council in partnership with the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival designed to strengthen the local film industry.

A similar exercise was done in early March in Jamaica, in partnership with film bodies there.

"I feel quite lucky that I have managed to carve out some kind of existence in the creative industries," Smolski says during a break.

His five workshop sessions have featured 16 local participants: writers and script editors.

"Even in a country as big as the UK it can still be a challenge." Smolski was born in 1974 in London. His father Olgeird was a physicist, and his mother Adrienne, a model and a tourist guide. (His paternal grandfather fled Poland at the outbreak of World War II.) "While my parents were good liberal parents I think my dad probably tried to steer my sister and me towards science degrees because it is felt there are more opportunities, in terms of career, to do things after graduation," the script consultant says.

"Too often people don't see or understand the economic benefits of the arts. And artists don't want to see their work as functioning within an economic context, and that's understandable to an extent." Smolski has worked on a range of projects – most recently the James McAvoy film *Filth* – and has conducted workshops in countries such as Sweden, Poland, Israel, Bulgaria, Latvia, Singapore.

His favourite films include *ET the Extra-Terrestrial* and *Moonlight*.

He is in awe of Charlie Chaplin's films, including *The Great Dictator*. But he complains about the difficulty involved when it comes to accessing films produced by the Caribbean region.

"That's what this workshop aims to change," he says. "To make films that look outwards as well as inwards; to inspire and remind storytellers that their audiences are global." Smolski further states, "I think the obligation for a government is if you agree you need to stimulate a film economy, even if it cannot be fully funded you can provide a space for that to start.

You can create a film fund to fuel local production. You can offer tax incentives." His message to aspiring and established filmmakers is to use the talent that is here to make films that speak to audiences across the world.

"If that is the approach, there will be thousands of flights booked to TT ; there will be a spike in interest in Trinidadian culture and business," he says.

"Yes, films should be made for film's sake but they also function to open up our understanding of the world. New Zealand has gone nuts tourist-wise over *The Lord of the Rings*." He adds, "There may come a time when Trinidad has its own *Lord of the Rings*, its own *Harry Potter*. It may feel quite some distance away but why not?" For Smolski, the Making Development Work workshop initiative can lead to changes.

"It is not just about developing work, it is about making work for people to do," he says.

"It's about finding writers, nurturing writers and developing them. Writing is hard work.

Ultimately you have to own it and make it."