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September premiere for
Green Days by the River

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Michael Mooleedhar discusses a scene with cinematographer Andressa Cor.

Eleven years ago, Michael Mooleedhar and Christian James met at the University of the West Indies. It was the first time the institution offered a degree in film. By 2014, armed with film degrees and a Masters in Creative Design Entrepreneurship (Mooleedhar) and a Fine Arts in Creative Producing (Christian James), the creative minds reconnected to work on their first feature length film—Green Days by the River—an adaptation of the 1967 novel by renowned Trinidadian author, Michael Anthony.

A Caribbean classic, Green Days by the River is a coming of age story. The plot revolves around a Trinidadian boy named Shellie who goes through all the emotional challenges of adolescent life and having an ailing father. Shellie moves to Mayaro, meets Rosalie, and is instantly

smitten. But when he meets Joan, he finds himself in a bit of a love triangle.

"We tried to stay true to the book and create something that Trinbagonians can be proud of," said Mooleedhar, the 32-year-old director of the film, known for his critically-acclaimed short films, including *City on the Hill*, which won People's Choice Award at the 2015 T&T Film Festival.

"This film is unique because this is a T&T story by a T&T director and producer. It's being told by us for us."

Pulling off a production of this magnitude wasn't easy—or cheap. Mooleedhar and James, the film's producer, spent all of 2015 pounding the pavement in search of funding to get the 102-minute film in motion. They approached over 100 companies appealing for financial help. Most declined: "Imagine making a creative product and telling a business person that you need them to contribute some amount of money towards the total cost, especially in an economic downturn. So yeah, we got turned down a lot," commented Mooleedhar.

That is, until bmobile stepped in as the film's title sponsor.

"They were our biggest supporter from day one," Mooleedhar said. "We really have to thank bmobile for all they have done to make this film a reality. Even during production when we ran low on money and we went back to them for more, they gave."

TSTT's vice president of Marketing, Camille Campbell, explained the appeal of having bmobile support local filmmakers, working with a celebrated

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local author to produce one of his most celebrated local stories.

She said: "bmobile is a 'can do', enabling brand that works to give people the means to bring out the best that T&T has to offer. We are very proud of our country and our people and by investing in this production, we wanted to give support for telling local stories via film. In the process it is our hope that it would also give a boost to the local film industry by letting people and businesses see that our young creatives can deliver great quality films when you give them the chance. We at bmobile are happy to be an integral part of this project and are excited to see such a timeless classic brought to life on the big screen."

Mooleedhar and James were later able to secure other corporate sponsors including First Citizens, NALIS, bpTT and Look Opticians.

Throughout the entire process, from financing right through production, the duo faced challenges. From as early as casting, they faced the prospect of not getting a suitable lead actress.

"We just were not finding the right person to play Rosalie," said James, 29.

"We knew what we wanted and we were so driven that we basically took to the streets, scanning for the ideal persona, giving out call cards, trying to find our vision of someone that looked like a Rosalie."

James would find his Rosalie when he least expected—at the airport.

"My wife and I were heading to Tobago when we saw a girl who just looked the

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part. We said to ourselves, 'She can be a Rosalie.'

That girl was Nadia Kandhai, who, despite having no prior acting experience, impressed both the director and producer with her natural on-camera talent.

The crew spent 26 long days shooting throughout T&T. Recreating country life of 1952 in the hustle and bustle of 2016 wasn't easy.

"It was a very challenging thing to find accessible, pristine locations without traffic and cars, so we really had a task getting quiet, unspoiled locations to shoot. We even found an old cocoa house that we rebuilt as the setting for Shellie's home. We shot in remote locations in the bush, which meant mosquitoes," Mooleedhar recalled. "But that's what filmmaking is. Sometimes you have to recreate a world that's no longer there."

Green Days by the River fans are eagerly awaiting the film's release. Its Facebook page has garnered thousands of likes and shares, and James—who first tasted the rewards of film as a St Mary's College student when he and his peers won the inaugural Secondary School's Film Competition with a story he penned called My Scarlet Letter—hopes people will enjoy the movie and be proud that it was a local production.

"I want people to walk away feeling that they just watched a state-of-the-art production that was well directed and produced, with good acting. A lot of people love the book, so I hope the film meets their expectations. No actually, I hope it surpasses their expectations."

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His director said: "I'm really proud of this film. Everything we went through was worth it in the end, and that's a good feeling."

Green Days by the River will be shown at cinemas nationwide on September 27.
