



Young actors shine in 'Green Days by the River'

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Even before Green Days by the River is released on the big screen, the film has already scored big.

Two weeks ago, the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival (TTFF) announced that the production will open next month's premiere - making it the first feature film, directed and produced by Trinbagonian talent, to achieve such a feat.

Title sponsor, bmobile, has supported the film from its inception and Vice President, Marketing, Camille Campbell, explains why that decision was easy.

"Investing in this film was a win-win. We were able to use our resources to assist the filmmakers, both graduates of the Film programme at UWI, to realise their dreams of creating a first-class production. We take our responsibility to give back to Trinidad and Tobago very seriously and we have a perfect track record to prove it." Green Days by the River stays true to the coming-of-age 1967 novel of the same name by local author Michael Anthony and showcases young budding talent. Its main characters - Sudai Tafari, (Shellie), Nadia Kandhai (Rosalie) and Vanessa Bartholomew (Joan) - are all first-time actors.

Tafari, a student of Mt. Hope Secondary, who was only 15 at the time, was encouraged by his school's Theatre Director to check out the film's Facebook page, as he was always interested in acting. Tafari decided to 'shoot his shot' and left a comment stating, "I can do this" referring to the role of Shellie.

His comment caught the eye of director Michael Mooleedhar, who invited Tafari to audition for the part the very next day.

"I didn't tell my parents anything and when I saw the reply I was jumping up and down. I ran and told my mom: 'Remember the time you told me not to study this acting thing and to look for something more practical? Well, I got through!'" Tafari's mother soon had a change of heart and his sister, Tamika, accompanied him to his first audition.

Although nervous, Tafari nailed it.

A few days later, he was called in for a second audition and told to come dressed in 1950s wear.

"My sister and I went to Port-of-Spain and bought some church looking kinda stuff," he recalled. "I went in and did my best." Tafari impressed Mooleedhar and producer, Christian James, with his passionate and clear delivery and landed the role. And although he hadn't read the book before, he later committed himself to studying the novel to perfect his craft.

"I didn't know until after the audition that Shellie was the main character so I was really excited. In primary school when I said I wanted to act, my friends would laugh but working on this film made me realise that it's my passion and I want to take it further." Bartholomew, 19, who plays Joan - one of Shellie's love interests - was full of praise for Tafari, with whom she shared "awkward" kissing scenes.

"The first two or three takes were very uncomfortable," she confessed, laughing. "Sudai was a bit shy but very professional and we were able to work our way through the scenes." The UWI Sociology student had first auditioned to be Rosalie but while acting the part of Joan, she discovered she had more in common with that character. "She's just like me," she said. "We're both headstrong and go after what we want in life. It was a pleasure playing her." Unlike Tafari and Bartholomew, Kandhai had studied Green Days by the River in high school and had always admired Rosalie.

"I read it when I was 11 and Rosalie was my favourite. I always wanted to be her. She was beautiful, rich and confident and the 11-year-old me wanted that. Ten years later, I am Rosalie and that's really amazing!" Kandhai, a second year medical student at UWI, was the last person to be added to the cast as the role proved to be the most difficult one for the director and producer to fill. By chance she was spotted at the airport by the film's producer and invited to read for the part, mere days before filming began. "It was a moment that felt like destiny. It was meant to be," she said.

The film also features some experienced actors like Anand Lawkaran, who plays Mr Gidharee. The former school teacher and radio broadcaster has appeared in several films and noted that his childhood days spent in the cocoa and coffee estates with his father prepared him for this role.

"I grew up in the countryside in Tableland and then Rio Claro, and almost every weekend we would go Mayaro to lime on the beach. When I read that book, I saw everything Michael Anthony described about Mayaro - that rustic

life. The language itself I could identify with because it's how my father and his friends would talk to each other. It was as if I was coming with something in me and it didn't take much to bring it out on screen." For veteran actor, Che Rodriguez, who plays Shellie's father, Pa Lammy, the film also brought memories of bygone days.

"I studied this book in school so it was like coming back home. I also understood the period because I was born in that preindependence era and so I was able to bring that knowledge to the plate." An actor for most of his 60 years, Rodriguez is well-known for his first acting role in the 1970s classic - Bim - and brought a wealth of experience to the set.

He described working alongside the young actors as "fantastic" and shared the close bond he developed with his on-screen son.

"I loved Sudai, everything about him.

We really took to each other. Even now we remain like father and son. Sometimes if he has a lil' problem, he'll call me and say: 'Pa, tell me what to do.'" Rodriguez was also in high praise of bmobile for its support, saying, "It's time for corporate Trinidad and Tobago to realise that we need to invest in local arts and culture and in this regard, bmobile is continuously leading the way."

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