

The T&T Film Festival brings Trinidad and Tobago into focus

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A still from Moko Jumbie

The 2017 edition of the Trinidad & Tobago Film Festival gets underway this week, running from Tuesday 19 to Tuesday 26 September across venues in both Trinidad and Tobago. Four T&T features and over 34 local shorts will premiere at tfff/17.

Green Days by the River

Green Days by the River, a film adaptation of Michael Anthony's classic 1967 novel of the same name, will open this year's festival, with a red carpet gala and screening to be held at the National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA) on Tuesday 19 September.

The first local film by a T&T director and producer to open the festival, director Michael Moolleedhar's beautifully shot film is set in the idyllic countryside of 1950s Mayaro and re-tells the story of 15 year old Shell. Newly arrived in the village, he quickly gets caught between his longing to be a man, and his child-like innocence in the face of adult cunning. With adolescent hormones raging, amidst the beauty of the local girls and the Mayaro landscape, the quiet storm

that's brewing may prove more than Shell can handle, and life as he once knew it may never be the same again.

According to Bruce Paddington, founder and festival director of the tfff: "We are thrilled to once again be opening the Festival with a local feature. *Green Days by the River* was one of 15 films in development that participated in our Caribbean Film Mart in 2015. As two graduates of the UWI film school, it is such a joy to see Michael Mooleedhar and Christian James' film come to fruition. We expect it to go from strength to strength and hope people will come out in their numbers to see it."

The red carpet premiere of *Green Days by the River* at NAPA, Port of Spain will be followed by a screening at MovieTowne San Fernando on Monday 25 September at 6:00pm. Tickets for the Port of Spain premiere can be purchased at the NAPA box office, or ordered on line at: tffilmfestival.com.

Feature T+T

As part of the country's celebration of Patriotism Month, tfff/17 film will host *Feature T+T* — a day-long celebration of Trinidad & Tobago through the screening of local short and feature films, followed by Q&A sessions with some of the filmmakers. The screenings will be held on Republic Day (Sunday 24 September) at MovieTowne Port of Spain, San Fernando and Tobago.

Features

Among the feature films to be screened is *Moko Jumbie*, by Trinidadian-American director Vashti Anderson. It tells the story of Asha who, on vacation from England to visit family in rural Trinidad, soon discovers there's trouble in paradise. Drawn to her neighbour, a young fisherman, the strain between the two families — one Indian and one African — is palpable, and as Asha's attraction deepens, she must navigate racial taboos, family disapproval, political turmoil, and mysterious hauntings by ancestral spirits. *Moko Jumbie* — Anderson's feature film debut — was a selection at the 2017 LA Film Festival.

In *Quick Pick*, by Tobagonian filmmaker Miguel K Lashley, young construction worker Travis Duke is out of luck with love, work and money, until a winning lotto ticket changes his fortunes. With no cash in hand yet, he borrows money from a drug lord to kickstart the celebrations and buy a car and a condo. But has Travis put the cart before the donkey?

The third feature film in the T&T line up is Clifford Seedansingh's *The Lies We Tell*, a comedy about a serial adulterer and what happens when the tables are turned.

Shorts

There is also a strong offering of short films in the programme, many from young and emerging filmmakers.

Salty Dog, by director Oliver Milne, features the familiar faces of actors Nickolai Salcedo and Errol Roberts — the salty dog of the title, alongside actress Kandyse Mc Clure. When the rug is pulled from under his feet, Mortimer (Roberts) must navigate the stormy waters of his relationship with his estranged son (Salcedo). As tensions flare between the two and reconciliation seems near impossible, the son starts to check out retirement homes for his father.

In Maya Cozier's ***Short Drop***, Bartholomew — a retired civil servant — is taking a drive downtown when Shanice mistakes his car for a taxi and hops in. Along the way, they encounter a wide range of Trinidadian characters, from cross-dresser Hott Pepper to gang member Tan Tan. It becomes a long day of reckoning with memories, friendships, and revelations.

Director Kevin Bhall's beautiful animation, ***Temple in the Sea***, chronicles the life and work of Siewdass Sadhu, an indentured labourer who laboured for years to build a Temple in the Sea at Waterloo. The story is told through the eyes of a young girl coming to terms with her heritage and identity. Bhall's animated productions have earned critical nominations and local awards, including at the Anima Caribbean Festival in 2005 and 2016 respectively.

In ***Visibly Me*** by Nicola Cross, a 47-year-old woman with no partner and no children finds herself invisible and feels she has no choice but to find the antidote. Exploring memory and perspective, the director's deeply personal reflections will resonate with those who have found themselves "invisible" at some point in their lives.

Steelband documentaries

Three documentaries about steelbands will make their debut at this year's festival.

James O'Connor's film ***To Be A Renegade*** captures the story of the BP Renegades through an examination of the violent beginnings of pan, the era of change, and its present state as a positive influence on communities, with steelbands now travelling abroad as international ambassadors. Featuring players, founding members and supporters, the documentary, funded by BP Trinidad and Tobago, seeks to show what it really means to be a Renegade. As part of its support for the film, BPTT is sponsoring a free screening of ***To Be A Renegade*** on Friday 22 September, 8:30pm, at MovieTowne Port of Spain. Tickets will be available from the box office on a first-come-first-served basis, at the start of the festival.

Birdsong, by Vibert Medford, follows Mia Gormandy — the first woman to be appointed arranger for the Birdsong Steel Orchestra — during one night of steelband practice as she prepares the panside for the 2017 Panorama competition. Founded in 1973 at the UWI, the band

later moved to Tunapuna, becoming an integral part of the community — creating employment, providing music literacy training, and facilitating educational scholarships among other pursuits. The name, Birdsong, was chosen from inception to reflect the band’s desire to make music as sweet and melodic as the sound of birds.

The documentary, *To Be An All Star*, captures the extraordinary energy of one of the big moments of Carnival 2017, when the Massy Trinidad All Stars won the Big Band Panorama finals. From their origins in the 1900s as Hell Yard Boys, the band’s turbulent early beginnings and explosive creativity underscore their music today. The band’s name changed several times over the years, and finally “All Stars” was chosen because of the perceived superior ability of the players. They are credited with pioneering a number of pan innovations and in 1982, their contributions were recognised with a national award — the Hummingbird Medal (Gold).

Over 34 T&T films will be part of the *Feature T+T* Republic Day screenings at MovieTowne with some in competition for Awards — Best TT Feature Film (TT\$10,000) and Best TT Short Film (TT\$5,000). According to Bruce Paddington, founder and festival director of the tfff: “*Feature T+T* will be a day for Trinbagonians to come together to celebrate who we are, through the cinematic stories of some of the nation’s finest filmmakers. Film is a powerful vehicle for strengthening national identity, instilling national pride and preserving local culture in an increasingly globalised world.”