

Edouard Bamporiki    Cassandra Freeman    Cleophas Kabasiita

# Kinyarwanda

Kennedy Mpazimpaka    Hassan Kabera    Abdallah Uwimana

and introducing Hadidja Zaninka



written & directed by alrick brown

Produced by Darren Dean, Tommy Oliver, & Alrick Brown

Executive Producer Ishmael Ntihabose

Official Selection: Sundance 2011, World Cinema  
Dramatic Competition

TRT – 96 min|2011

Visigoth Pictures

In Association with

Cineduc Rwanda Presents

A Film by Alrick Brown

Edouard Bamporiki

Cassandra Freeman

Cleophas Kabasiita

# Kinyarwanda

Kennedy Mpazimpaka

Hassan Kabera

Abdallah Uwimana

Hadidja Zaninka

Marc Gwamaka

Jean Mutsari

Kena Anae Onyenjekwe

Writer/Director

Based on a Story by

Producer

Producer

Producer

Executive Producer

Director of Photography

Editor

Composer

Production Designer

Casting Director

Costume Designer

Supervisor Sound Editor

Co-Producer

Co-Producer

Alrick Brown

Ishmael Ntiabose

Darren Dean

Tommy Oliver

Alrick Brown

Ishmael Ntiabose

Danny Vecchione

Tovah Leibowitz

John Jennings Boyd

Sibomana Omar Mukhtar

Simon Rwema

Emmanuel Ngoye

Matt Rocker

Joshua Rodd

Deatra Harris

# Kinyarwanda

## Synopsis

During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the Mufti of Rwanda, the most respected Muslim leader in the country, issued a fatwa forbidding Muslims from participating in the killing of the Tutsi. As the country became a slaughterhouse, mosques became places of refuge where Muslims and Christians, Hutus and Tutsis came together to protect each other. Kinyarwanda is based on true accounts from survivors who took refuge at the Grand Mosque of Kigali and the Imams who opened their doors to give refuge to the Tutsi and to those Hutu who refused to participate in the killing.

The story interweaves six different tales that together form one grand narrative, providing the most complex and real depiction yet presented of life and human resilience during the genocide. With an amalgamation of characters we pay homage to many, using the voices of a few. We follow the young lovers, the child, the couple, the soldiers, the Imam, and the priest as they are swept up by the chaos of the world around them.

## Director's Statement

Kinyarwanda is a feature length film spawned from the very real stories of Rwandans who survived the 1994 Genocide, many of whom lost family and friends. These stories and the research of Executive Producer Ishmael Ntiabose resulted in this very unique way of telling a part of Rwandan history yet unknown to most of the world. Ishmael's research focused on the how many Hutu and Tutsi Muslims in Rwanda worked with Christian Hutus and Tutsis to protect and save lives. While many previous films focused on the politics and death during the genocide, Kinyarwanda is a movie about life, faith, forgiveness, and reconciliation. However we use the genocide as a backdrop and a context to tell our character's very personal stories. As one Rwandan said, "Even during the genocide, life still went on." My hope is that audiences will come to know Rwandans as ordinary people, individuals, lovers, friends and not merely heroes, villains, victims or perpetrators.

In order to create a film that would be both educational and entertaining the film uses storytelling structure much like popular artistic films like *Pulp Fiction*, *Amores*

*Perros* and *Crash*. There are a series of short stories that intertwine to create one energetic, engaging, and entertaining 90-minute narrative.

This is a film as much about process as it is about the final product. As a team we have set out to work with as many Rwandans in front of and behind the camera as possible. In this vain, most of the Rwandan crew on the film, who had worked on previous films as assistants to assistants headed up their own departments on this film. In front of the camera, Rwandan actors from previous films are accompanied by a cast of mostly first time actors. This film is collaboration like no other I have ever experienced. It changed my life and the lives of our cast and crew and it will change the life of our audience.

## Press Notes

What inspired this film?

The film was inspired by real events and true stories of survivors of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. The film's executive producer Ishmael Ntihabose traveled Rwanda conducting extensive interviews with survivors. I used a few stories from some of his subjects, people who I met while there researching, as well individuals represented in the Genocide Museum in Kigali. Many of the nuances of our story also came from our Rwandan cast and crew members. These stories were so bizarre, intense, beautiful, touching, inspiring and painful that I had to write. I knew immediately what was going into the script.

What do you want audiences to take away?

Our audience should walk away with a feeling of hope knowing that in the midst of such tragic events something beautiful can still be found. Because forgiveness, truth and reconciliation are such a huge part of Rwanda's journey, it is also an important part of this film. We hope that audiences can bring some of that "power of forgiveness" into their own journey. Because of the structure of the film the audience will be transfixed by the film as a whole but connect with the individual characters and storylines.

What surprised you as you were working on this film?

We may have went into Rwanda with many of the general stereotypes a country with such a recent tragic history. However, we found one of the most beautiful

countries, with some of the most beautiful people and landscapes we had ever seen. Rwanda, literally means “Land of a Thousand Hills” and its true.

I also did not know that the Hutus, and Tutsis shared the same language, Kinyarwanda or that Rwandans had their own distinct language. It was a simple fact not mentioned in other films, press, etc. I immediately knew the title of the film. *Kinyarwanda* is a unifying word.

What was the hardest part of working on this film?

We shot during grasshopper mating season, rainy season, had about 1,000 extras, limited equipment and a sixteen day shooting schedule. The hardest part, however, about making this film was the emotional impact our scenes had on all of our cast and crew, particularly the Rwandans struggling with their own memories.

What differentiates this film from others that might be in the same genre?

The most distinct thing about KINYARWANDA is its storytelling structure. It is great example of form meeting function. The intertwining stories of the characters should remind audiences of Crash, Pulp Fiction, Babel, & Amores Perros. While many of the other films delved into the politics associated with the 1994 Genocide KINYARWANDA emphasizes the people. While the other showed violence, corpses, and death, KINYARWANDA emphasizes life. In KINYARWANDA the genocide is a tragic backdrop for very familiar human experiences.

## Cast Bios

### Cassandra Freeman (Lt. Rose)

Freeman is an established star of both stage and screen. She has appeared on Broadway in “Seven Guitars,” and on TV in The Guiding Light, All My Children, Shark and Numbers. On the big screen, Freeman came to international recognition with roles in Chris Rock’s I THINK I LOVE MY WIFE and Spike Lee’s INSIDE MAN, where she starred alongside Denzel Washington. She is a graduate of both Florida State University and NYU’s prestigious acting programs.

### Edouard Bamporiki (Emmanuel)

Bamporiki is an award-winning filmmaker, actor and poet. As a young Rwandan artist, he has received national and international attention for his stories of hope,

unity and reconciliation. Bamporiki was born in a small village in the Western province, educated in Rwandan schools, and lives in the capitol city of Kigali. His feature debut in Lee Isaac Chung's MUNYURANGABO yielded him a Best Actor nomination in Cannes. In 2008, he wrote, directed, starred in, and produced LONG COAT, which won first prize in African Film at the Focus Future Film Festival in New York.

#### Zaninka Hadidja (Jean)

A Burundi born Rwandese, Hadidja makes her film debut in the demanding role of Jean in KINYARWANDA. Returning to Rwanda with her family following the Genocide in late 1994, she is currently completing her studies in Travel and Tourism and aspires to take the film world by storm.

#### Cleophas Kabasiita (Francine)

KINYARWANDA is Kabasiita's 4th film. Looking on as an observer, she was accidentally discovered during the casting calls for 100 DAYS. Since then she has been featured in EZRA and SOMETIMES IN APRIL. She is Ugandan/Rwandese by birth and began her life in Rwanda shortly following the Genocide of '94.

#### Marc Gwamaka (Patrique)

Born in Tanzania, Gwamaka made his acting debut on stage at the age of 5. He has since pursued all levels of creative communication, be it as a vocalist, drummer or writer. At 19, he began the Rwandan outreach program Peace and Love Proclaimers. He was briefly featured in the film SOMETIMES IN APRIL, which marked his feature film debut.

#### Kena Anae (Sgt. Fred)

Anae is making his feature film debut in KINYARWANDA. He holds a B.F.A. in acting from N.Y.U. Tisch School of the Performing Arts. He is reunited here with Director Alrick Brown after starring in his film THE ADVENTURES OF SUPER N. Anae has also been seen on The View and many acclaimed stage performances, most recently in "A Raisin in the Sun" – also directed by Brown.

## Crew Bios

### Alrick Brown – Writer/Director/Producer

Alrick Brown has a MFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. A filmmaker and teacher, he has found his calling writing, directing and producing narrative films and documentaries often focusing on social issues affecting the world at large. For over two years he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Cote d'Ivoire. The interactions with the people of his village and his overall experiences in West Africa have informed his creative expression; an expression first fostered by his birth in Kingston, Jamaica and migration to, and upbringing in Plainfield, New Jersey. A fluent French speaker, he graduated from Rutgers University with a BA in English and a Masters in Education. Since then he has devoted his energy to changing the world by giving a voice to the voiceless and telling stories that otherwise would not be told.

Alrick's collective work has screened in over forty film festivals, national and international, and received numerous awards. He and his Co-producer, received the HBO Life Through Your Lens Emerging Filmmaker Award to produce their critically acclaimed documentary DEATH OF TWO SONS. In 2004 he was one of four NYU students featured in the IFC Documentary series Film School, produced by Academy award nominee Nannette Burstein. In 2007 he addressed the Motion Picture Association of America on C-SPAN. KINYARWANDA marks Brown's feature film directorial debut.

### Darren Dean - Producer

Darren Dean came to film late in life, writing, directing and producing the award-winning short, SLEEP OVER. He followed that up as Co-Writer and Producer of PRINCE OF BROADWAY, which has won 18 prestigious international awards to date. Dean, also a respected journalist, is currently in pre-production as writer/producer on the big screen adaptation of Will Eisner's A CONTRACT WITH GOD.

### Tommy Oliver - Producer

Tommy Oliver began his filmmaking career during his junior year at Carnegie Mellon University resulting in the indie film SOFIA FOR NOW. After college, Tommy co-founded film production company, Black Squirrel Films where he produced several award winning shorts, commercials and the feature film BLANK. He is

currently in pre-production on the big screen adaptation of Will Eisner's A CONTRACT WITH GOD.

Ishmael Ntihakose - Executive Producer

Ishmael Ntihakose is a Rwandan born filmmaker who after working on SOMETIMES IN APRIL, SHOOTING DOGS and SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL as an assistant, decided that he was ready to step out on his own. As Executive Producer he brought together a team of international filmmakers to bring his first feature film, KINYARWANDA, to life.

Danny Vecchione, Director of Photography

Danny has extensive training in the visual arts. After graduating Magna Cum Laude from Virginia Commonwealth University with a major in Communication Arts and Design, he moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career in film. He established himself as a production designer, winning critical acclaim for the indie hit Bubba Ho-Tep.

Danny holds an M.F.A. from the prestigious Tisch School of the Arts at NYU, where he focused on cinematography. While there, he shot over forty short films, winning the Wasserman Award an unprecedented eleven times. The projects that he has worked on have been shown in every major film festival across the world. Over the past several years, he has served as D.P. in every format, including feature films, branded entertainment, television, commercials, music videos, and documentaries.

He recently shot the feature film William Vincent, directed by Jay Anania and starring James Franco, Julianne Nicholson, Martin Donovan, and Josh Lucas, which was an official selection of the 2010 Tribeca Film Festival. His most recent feature, Homewrecker, directed by The Barnes Brothers, won the "Best of Next" category at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival.

Press/PR/Marketing Contact:

Tommy Oliver, Producer  
[Thomaseoliver@gmail.com](mailto:Thomaseoliver@gmail.com)  
267.808.3046