

The AFI FEST Interview: KATI KATI Director Mbithi Masya

Description

Without any memories or knowledge of who she is or why she is there, Kaleche finds herself in a field. Soon she finds a group of strangers in the nearby resort who tell her the truth: She is dead and this is the afterlife, not quite heaven or hell, where everyone is waiting to move on. All they have to do to get what they want is write it down and their wish appears the very next day. The only thing they cannot have is escape. The magical realist debut feature of Mbithi Masya, a member of a popular Kenyan alternative house funk group, KATI KATI deploys memorable performances and deceptively simple cinematic techniques to give us a beautiful, dreamlike depiction of life and the possible life after it.

AFI spoke with Masya about the film.

Mbithi Masya
Mbithi Masya

AFI: KATI KATI is your first full-length feature. What inspired you to set the film in the afterlife?

Mbithi Masya: I got the call to work on a project as I was in a time of mourning, having just lost a close friend. The idea for the story came from meditations around that loss.

AFI: The film addresses both personal and political tragedies, some of which are universal and some of which are specific to Kenya. Why did you select these elements, and how did you balance this mix?

MM: Most of the elements chosen were from very personal experiences. The characters themselves were heavily borrowed from actual people I know and situations around our lives. And the outlook on some of the political tragedies that have happened in Kenya was still approached from a very personal point of view.

AFI: Much of the film incorporates ambient noise, with the score and soundtrack used judiciously. As a musician, how did you approach creating the auditory experience of the film?

MM: We made the early decision to focus every single element of the film toward the emotion of each scene. That includes the visuals, the sounds and the performances. We put a lot of work into the sound design because we felt it deserved just as much attention as the visuals to make the film a complete cinematic experience.

AFI: As a production of One Fine Day Films and Ginger Ink, many of your filmâ??s departments had the opportunity to work with mentors. How was that experience?

MM: The mentors were an excellent pool of knowledge and experience that we kept visiting and learning from. They didnâ??t exert themselves over our creative work but were always there if we had questions and wanted to ask advice. Having that safety net was reassuring and allowed us to move through the filming process with confidence in our own ideas.

AFI: The afterlife depicted in the film follows some clearly delineated rules, yet much is left unexplained. Was this ambiguity part of your script, or did it evolve as you were shooting and editing the film?

MM: It was a decision made from the beginning. We were wary of taking moralistic stances with the themes and subjects in the film. We wanted to present characters who made choices, and leave the audience to decide what to make of those choices. And I believe it has really benefitted the film as the audience is allowed to engage with the film as they wish. It has also led to very interesting engagements with the audience as different audiences have drawn different conclusions from the film.

KATI KATI screens at AFI FEST 2016 today, Wednesday, November 16, 7:15 P.M. at the TCL Chinese 5, in the New Auteurs section of the festival.

KATI KATI movie trailer from One Fine Day Films GmbH on Vimeo.

(Source: http://www.blog.afi.com)

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