



**NICKELODEON, 133 VENTER ST, CAPITAL PARK, PTA**

**Tel: (+27 12) 1111 082, e-mail: [uys@nickelodeonfilms.com](mailto:uys@nickelodeonfilms.com)**

**Website: <http://nickelodeonfilms.com>**

### **SPEECH BY MASTER OF CEREMONIES**

Malcolm Gooding: Detailed information about this production can be obtained from [www.afireinafrica.com](http://www.afireinafrica.com). I am here to offer you just an outline of how the movie developed from a student project to where it is now, taking its place among professional films at international film festivals. The making of *A Fire in Africa* reminds me of the Horatio Alger myth. The story of this project is, it so happens, not unlike the plot of the film itself. The project succeeded because of the tenacity – some would call it foolishness – of the cast and crew, who worked on this low-budget film as if it were a super high-budget Hollywood epic.

The project developed as follows:

- 1) In 1987 Emil Kolbe wrote a screenplay as the practical component of Gerhard Uys' Master's Diploma at the Pretoria Technikon Film School.
- 2) The topic of Gerhard's study was *Full-length feature film production in South Africa – from concept to distribution*, and it was essentially about the now defunct Government B-subsidy Film Scheme.
- 3) The practical component of the study required the production of a feature film, and that is what gave birth to *A Fire in Africa*.
- 4) Four years later, just as the 400-page thesis – the most comprehensive in the history of the Film School – and the movie were ready to be submitted for evaluation, the government film subsidy scheme was unexpectedly terminated. This rendered the study irrelevant, so it too had to be terminated.
- 5) Although the study had to be abandoned, the film still qualified for a subsidy, so, in the hope of making some profit, it was distributed to cinemas in Gauteng townships. In the end it received subsidy to the amount of R80,000, which is exactly what it had cost to produce.
- 6) Eager to pay something to students who had worked on the film for nothing but the promise of a share in the profits, the producer licensed the film to the SABC, who demanded that it be cut down to 59 minutes to fit into their available slots.

- 7) The SABC paid R15,000, which was exactly what the re-editing and final sound mixing of the abridged version had cost.
- 8) All further efforts to distribute the film in South Africa and Namibia drew no interest from any distribution agent or TV station, with the result that it only just broke even.
- 9) The film lay dormant for 27 years, until 2017, when two AFDA lecturers, Laura van der Merwe and Marc Buyskes, asked if they could restore, re-edit and re-colourise the film as the practical component of their Master's studies.
- 10) This was agreed to, and on 24 November 2017 the rejuvenated film was previewed during AFDA's annual graduation festival, and both students received their Master's Degrees.
- 11) Seeing the potential impact of the film on the big screen in a commercial cinema persuaded the director, who had never obtained his own Masters' Degree, that the movie could be transformed into a professional production.
- 12) After two years of striving towards this utopian goal, hard reality prevailed; all hope was abandoned and the plug was pulled – until a very talented editor, Neels Smit, re-created several shots from the movie via CGI (computer generated imagery), to convince the director that his objective could still be attainable.
- 13) After three years of unrelenting hard work, the film started looking less and less like a student movie, which encouraged the producer to spend even more money to make the weak original ending of the film more convincing.
- 14) The original scriptwriter was located in Australia, and the original principal actors, Japan Mthembu and Rod Alexander, though 33 years older, were still available. So a new, plausible, ending was shot and added to the original movie.
- 15) The film, with substantial re-editing and the addition of specially created visual effects, was finally completed on 1 March 2022 and offered to more than 15 distribution agents and TV stations in South Africa – but 90 per cent of them did not even ask to preview the film, while the two that did never responded.
- 16) Thanks to this lack of interest on the part of the South African film industry, the film was registered at international film festivals, where it went on to win 33 accolades to date, including 10 awards for Best Feature Film in Germany, England, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Croatia.
- 17) Filmhub in Los Angeles, California, took note of these accomplishments and conducted a quality control test. The film passed the test, and Filmhub proceeded to deliver it to three VOD (video on demand) distribution channels, including *Amazon Prime Video*, which has more than 200 million subscribers and distributes movies to 133 countries, including South Africa.
- 18) Some film festivals refused to show the film, ostensibly because of nudity and violence, while others simply did not think it was good enough. We're going to watch *A Fire in Africa* now, so, to quote TV presenter Judge Dennis Davis, "You be the judge!"