



BLACK BURNS FAST – Production Notes

URUCU

Presents

A film by Sandulela Asanda

BLACK BURNS FAST

Starring

ESIHLE NDLELENI

MUADI ILUNG

MILA SMITH

KHENSANI KHOSA

NTSIMEDI GWANGWA

BASETSANA MOTLOUNG

Writer and Director

SANDULELA ASANDA

Producers

CAIT PANSEGROUW

ELIAS RIBEIRO

Executive Producer

HELEN KUUN

Casting

CAIT PANSEGROUW

Cinematography

PIERRE DE VILLIERS

Production Design

TIRATH BHOOLA

Editor

KALYA KAHAN

Sound Design

MICHAEL BOTHA

Visual Effects

NICOLAI GROUDEV

Music

SNE DLADLA

SPECIFICATIONS

Genre: Coming of Age Comedy

Running Time: 96 mins

Language: English / isiXhosa

FPB Rating: 13 DLP

Format: 4K

Country: South Africa

SYNOPSIS

Logline

Adorkable and studious Luthando is on track for a normal academic year at the prestigious boarding school she attends on scholarship. The arrival of a new girl in her class ignites Luthando's suppressed desires which threaten her relationships and everything she thought she knew about herself.

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Seventeen-year-old Luthando, adorkable, bookish, and forever drifting between reality and her vivid inner world, returns for another year at a prestigious South African all-girls' boarding school. Behind its manicured lawns and bright, busy corridors, the school hides a deceptively conservative culture where reputation is everything, and nonconformity is quietly disciplined. As the lone scholarship girl, Luthando has learned to keep her head down, her marks up, and her mother's strict expectations close to heart.

Her world tilts when Ayanda, a bold and effortlessly magnetic new student, arrives. Their connection sparks into something that Luthando has only ever daydreamed about. As they begin a secret romance, Luthando is ushered into Ayanda's orbit of confident, carefree friends, tasting freedom she's never experienced within the school's rigid walls. But juggling her old life, new friendships, and first love becomes too much. When jealousy pushes Ayanda into a reckless decision, intimate photos of the two girls spread through the dorms and dining halls. Being outed threatens not only Luthando's scholarship, but also her future and her relationship with her conservative single mother.

Faced with public scrutiny and her mother's outrage, Luthando finds unexpected courage. She stands firmly in her truth: she is queer, and she will no longer shrink for anyone. Taken aback but supportive in her own way, her mom asks for time to process the news. Though her romance ends, Luthando discovers something steadier: the friend who never left, the community of girls who choose to support her, and the joy that comes from owning her story.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I came into my sexuality at a relatively late stage compared to a lot of my peers. One, because sexuality wasn't something that was ever discussed in my home and secondly, because the Anglican all-girls' private school that I went to didn't present anything other than heterosexuality as a default setting, and queerness was something that didn't exist in that world. Despite having a progressive Constitution, South African society is still very conservative and homophobia is still prevalent in our communities. BBF serves as a love letter to my teenage self to fill in all the silences and voids that I felt, but never actually knew existed.

Female sexuality also isn't as extensively explored on screen, especially for Black girls. I want to subvert the idea that girls aren't interested in sex and their bodies. Luthando's exploration is bungling and awkward, but a natural and necessary part of self-discovery and becoming comfortable with oneself.

Each girl in Luthando's friend group represents a facet of what it is like to be a teenage girl. It's in how Anele's boyfriend is pressuring her to have sex; Zenande's obsession with her looks and the unique bond Luthando has with her best friend, Jodie. Through them we see what it is to be young and naïve in a world that doesn't allow them to be.

Ultimately, BBF is a honest coming of age narrative for young girls and queer people to share in experiences and to feel seen and heard in the challenges they face. . There are few narratives in South Africa that fit this bill, while at the same time, offering a lighter approach to the coming out experience for queer youth. With this in mind, BBF is purposefully not a queer story that is steeped in trauma. This is a film about a girl who is trying to discover who they are and to be seen and heard for who they are. Isn't that what we all want for ourselves?

Q&A WITH DIRECTOR

This is a personal story for you. Discuss the development process?

As much as this film is personal to me, it's also a story that resonates with many young Black girls in South Africa. I started the development of this film during 2020, when there was a public discussion by alumni and current Black students of previously white-only schools about the micro and macro aggressions that they experienced. At the same time, I was coming into my queerness, and as a result, I was looking back into my youth for 'the signs', and what I found was that there was never really a space to even explore this part of myself because of the nature of the school environment that I grew up in. Like much of South African society, these schools are conservative and steeped heavily in Christian and class-based traditions.

There was no space for me, or women who look like me, to explore identities outside of the binary or the set standard of what was 'right'. I also went to a boarding school, which made this experience all the more consuming. Despite our democracy, Black students are still the minority in these private schools and are expected to conform to their Western standards. This is what inspired me to build the world of the story and this group of Black girls who navigate the space together. I spoke to old classmates, listened to the experiences of students and alumni from similar situations and realised that there was a very urgent need for this story. For our challenges, but also our joys to be represented in some way - not just for representation's sake, but also for a sense of healing and reclamation of the traumas experienced. This became the guiding light to my development of the film.

Before 'Black Burns Fast', you wrote and directed a short film, 'Mirror Mirror' which was set in the same realm as Black Burns Fast. What connection does the short have to the feature?

In the middle of the development process, I had the opportunity to make a proof of concept that became Mirror Mirror (2022) . This was a short exploration of Luthando as a character, as well as an opportunity for me to test the visual style that I had in mind for the feature. I call it the little sister of Black Burns Fast, because it's a bite sized view into Luthando's journey of exploring her sexuality. I felt that many of the films I'd seen often adultified Black girls in sexual contexts or were in some way attached to trauma. I wanted to show this Black girl exploring her sexuality in a childlike way: awkwardly, bungling and ultimately joyously. I also wanted to give Luthando this drive to do it because it is a such a big part

of her identity - which we take further in the feature as she fully explores her sexual identity as a lesbian. I learnt many lessons from the cast, Luhle Macanda (Luthando) and Buhle Ngaba (Jodie), which I used to further develop their characters in the feature. Visually, I was able to play and test what would ultimately be elevated in the feature to give the film a lot of the youthful verve and feeling that I wanted to embody.

Some of the scenes in the film are quite intense emotionally. How did you work with your actors, get them into the right headspace and providing them the right kind of on-set atmosphere?

The first thing that we actually did was have a movie night with the main cast, where we could all bond as people about to embark on this process together. I really enjoyed working with this group of actors, they are young, passionate and really believed in the film from the word go.

They were all familiar with the world that the story was set in and could share their own experiences that informed their characters. My approach to working with actors is allowing them to bring their own ideas to the character and working together to craft from there. We even went as far as creating a chat group for the main cast to interact as their respective characters, which definitely pushed them to think about who their characters were outside of the context of the film itself. They all had distinct elements that they brought to the table which further actualised their respective characters. For the more intense scenes, I focused on working on the psychology of the character in that moment, talking them through it and then giving them the space to react in the scene. We worked with an Intimacy Coordinator and a Cast Wrangler who helped me make sure that they received the emotional support that they needed. But overall, we had a wonderful crew who were sensitive to the subject matter and the age of the cast and I'm really proud that we were able to create a safe and positive set atmosphere. I'm most excited for the audience to see the dynamic of this ensemble on screen. The best outcome of this process was that the cast became as close as the characters themselves.

Despite the progress that has been made, the subject matter still has an urgent significance today. Did your journey as a writer and filmmaker shift or evolve over the years, in the way you engaged with the material?

I've always felt the weight of this subject, even at times when it was pushed into silence. Growing up in South Africa, anything outside the norm of heterosexuality wasn't acknowledged. At school and at home, queerness was either ignored or spoken about with derision and then quickly moved back into the shadows. There were almost no references

to Black queer girls in the films or TV I watched — only news stories about violence and hate crimes. That absence shaped how I understood myself and my place in the world.

Not much of the social landscape has changed, but I have. As I began “coming in” to myself - rather than coming out - I could look back and understand how that culture of silence shaped my own sense of otherness. I know many queer teens in South Africa still feel this today. Our Constitution may be progressive, but socially, conservatism and homophobia remain deeply rooted.

Now, I feel the urgency in giving young audiences the images and possibilities I never had. While researching this film, it was disheartening to find only two international references with Black cast: *Rafiki* and *Pariah*. There were no South African stories centred on two Black queer girls. That absence is still glaring. *BBF* aims to fill that gap by offering a Black lesbian love story that’s tender, awkward, joyful, and messy, reflecting real adolescence. Instead of trauma, Luthando experiences support, love, and belonging. That kind of representation is vital not only for young Black queer girls, but also for older generations who never saw their own youth reflected with joy.

As a filmmaker, I wanted queerness to be expressed visually as well - to externalise Luthando’s internal and physical journey. Working closely with my DOP, Pierre, and our VFX artist, Nicolai, we drew on references outside of film and allowed ourselves to experiment from pre-production all the way through post-production. That process felt like crafting my own form of queer visual language. In many ways, my evolution as a person guided my evolution as a filmmaker, and the story grew with me.

When you envisioned *Black Burns Fast* in your head, before any shooting began, how did it look?

I always had a clear idea about what I wanted the film to feel like. I wanted it to feel grounded, but also youthful and dynamic. I wanted to bring across the feeling of internal isolation from the space you are in, but also how bright, vivid and theatrical Luthando’s internal world contrasted with the roundedness of the ‘real world’ and her challenges. I wanted there to be an authenticity to the film, but more so than anything, I wanted it to be a warm, and joyful exploration of Black youth. I’m pleased to be able to say that I’ve managed to achieve that.

What do you hope audiences will take away with them after seeing the film?

This film is different from what we’ve seen from the continent, and I hope that the audience is able to embrace this. That they allow themselves to have fun with Luthando’s world view and how it manifests. This is a fresh and nuanced depiction of the Black South African adolescence. I hope that, despite the specificity of this experience, that they will be able to

see themselves in Luthando's search for identity or in the girls' friendship and in the joy of youth.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

SANDULELA ASANDA – Writer / Director

Sandulela Asanda (she/they) is a filmmaker from the Eastern Cape currently based in Cape Town, South Africa. They have a background in Law and Economics. Sandulela holds an Honours degree in film from AFDA Film School in Cape Town. Their student film, Nongqawuse, received critical review and was selected as the South African entry for the Escuelas section of the BRICS film festival in 2019. After graduating, Sandulela worked across film festivals, training institutions, and production. Her first professionally produced short, Mirror Mirror, had its world premiere in the Shortcuts Programme at TIFF in 2022, and its European premiere in Berlinale Generation 2023. In the same year, the film won the award for Best South African Short at the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF). Her first feature, Black Burns Fast, made its debut at DIFF in 2025 and will now have its international premiere at the Berlinale in 2026 (also in Generation). Sandulela has most recently worked as a writer on Netflix's Blood Legacy and is commercials director represented by OSU Creative Productions. She is an alumna of the Locarno Film Festival's Filmmakers' Academy, the Durban Film Mart and Realness African Screenwriter's Residency.

CAIT PANSEGROUW - Producer

Cait Pansegrouw is a South African producer who has worked internationally for the past 15 years. Cait is a multi-South African Film and Television Award-winner with work that has travelled to Sundance, Berlinale, Venice and FESPACO, to name a few. Inxeba (The Wound) by John Trengove, which she produced and cast directed, screened at more than 60 festivals worldwide, winning 28 awards, including 6 SAFTAs. It was also selected as South Africa's official entry for the Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film in 2018, making it to the December shortlist of 9 films. This Is Not A Burial, It's A Resurrection by Lemohang Jeremiah Mosese was awarded the Jury Prize for Visionary Filmmaking at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival, where it premiered. The film went on to win 32 more awards and in 2020, it was announced as Lesotho's first-ever entry to both the Oscars and the Golden Globes. In 2022 she produced Sandulela Asanda's first short film, Mirror Mirror. It premiered at TIFF and then at Berlinale Generation in 2023. The film was adapted into a feature, Black Burns Fast, in partnership with Amazon Prime Video and will premiere in Berlinale Generation in 2026. Cait produced multi-hyphenate artist Nakhane's directorial debut, B(l)ind The Sacrifice, which had its world premiere in competition at Locarno in 2024 and went on to compete at Sundance in 2025. It then won the award for Best South African Short at the Durban International Film Festival that same year. She is currently in post-production with John

Trengove's third film. Cait has delivered producing and development workshops for the likes of The National Film and Video Foundation (South Africa), Cannes New Producer's Room (France), Berlinale EFM Toolbox (Germany) The National Film and Television School (UK) and the Ladima Foundation (African Continent). Cait is a Berlinale Talents, La Fabrique Cinema de L'Institut Francais, EAVE Producer's Workshop and Biennale College-Cinema alumna and often participates as a jury member for festivals and funding institutions. She is also a co-founder of the Realness Institute.

PIERRE DE VILLIERS - Cinematographer

Pierre is an acclaimed cinematographer dedicated to exploring the nuances of the human experience through narrative visual storytelling. His career has taken him across nearly every continent, allowing him to capture a vast array of cultures and visual mediums. Pierre's work is recognized on the global stage, with notable credits including the Sundance Jury Prize-winning *This Is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection* (2020) and the Cannes Prix de la Liberté winner *Goodbye Julia* (2023). Following the success of his short film *Vultures* in competition at Cannes 2024, his latest feature, *Black Burns Fast*, is set to make its international premiere at the 2026 Berlin International Film Festival.

KALYA KAHAN – Editor

Glitter, magic, coffee, jazz hands. Talya works in the mysterious world of the edit room, crafting stories, coaxing out characters, and occasionally fixing it in post. An award-winning editor, Talya moved fluidly between broadcast and film, shaping performances and narrative across genres and formats. Her experience spans drama series, award-winning features, and independent cinema. Talya's work is marked by a rare instinct for revealing and connecting the threads of the human experience – however, and wherever, they emerge.

ABOUT THE CAST

ESIHLE NDLELENI (she/her) – Luthando

Esihle is an up and coming actress from the Eastern Cape, currently based in Cape Town, South Africa. She took Drama as a subject in high school, which is where her love for acting began - through theatre. She attended AFDA Film School in Cape Town, where she obtained her BA in Live Performance. After graduating, she joined Artistes Personal Management and started off in local commercials to get her foot in the door. She was a waitress in a Campbell X directed feature and landed a small role in the CBS adaptation of *King Shaka Zulu*. She first collaborated with Amazon Prime on *The Morning After*, a BothWorlds/Paradoxal production, and reunited with Amazon in 2024 for *Black Burns Fast*, the debut film by Sandulela Asanda. The film had its domestic premiere at the 2025 Durban International Film Festival and will now have its international premiere at the Berlinale in 2026. She can currently be seen in a supporting role on Mzansi Magic's Mpondoland, a South African drama series.

MUADI ILUNG - Ayanda

Maudi is an award-winning actress, voice actress and master's candidate at the University of Cape Town. She began acting at the age of 13, where she starred in numerous high school theatre productions. Now based in Cape Town, South Africa, she has appeared in television productions both locally and internationally. She has starred in films that debuted at the Joburg Film Festival (JFF), Durban International Film Festival (DIFF), Lagos International Film of Animation (LIFANIMA), HollyShorts in Los Angeles, Hollywood Black Film Festival (HBFF) and more. Her first European Premiere will be at the Berlinale with *Black Burns Fast* by Sandulela Asanda. In 2025, she won Best Actress at FAME Week Africa's Short Film Festival.

MILA SMITH (she/her) - Jodie

is a 21-year-old actress and SAMA-nominated singer/songwriter from Cape Town, South Africa. She made her television debut at age 12 on the Disney Channel Africa game show *Disney Cookabout*, where she won the season. She later co-founded the band Skyscrapers, composing original music and starring in M-Net's 2016 DStv Animania December campaign featuring her song "Megaphone." While continuing her music career, Mila remained active on screen, appearing in television commercials for brands including Woolworths, Boomerang Africa and Suzuki. In 2022, she matriculated with distinction in drama and received the Best Actress award at the Stellenbosch Eisteddfod. Her screen acting career advanced in 2024 with her feature film debut in Sandulela Asanda's *Black Burns Fast*, where

she plays Jodie, the quirky and endearing best friend of the film's protagonist, Luthando. Following the production, Mila signed with acting agency MLA and has since appeared in campaigns for Spotify and Ackermans. She most recently starred in *Atmosphere*, a proof-of-concept short directed by Rachel Reynolds that is currently in development. Whether on stage or screen, Mila is steadily carving out her creative path

KHENSANI KHOZA - Zenande

Khensani is a South African actress and media creative whose career spans over two decades, beginning as a child performer. She portrayed a young Zenani Mandela, Nelson Mandela's eldest daughter, in the 2012 film *Mrs. Mandela*, and played the lead role in the award-winning Mzansi Magic film *Phindile's Heart*, which earned recognition at the Mpumalanga Film Festival. She has also presented on YoTV and Q-Base (SABC 2), and appeared in commercials and a wide range of national productions. In *Black Burns Fast*, the debut feature of director Asanda Sandulela, Khensani plays a role in exploring youth, identity, and contemporary South African life. The film premiered at the 2025 Durban International Film Festival and will have its international premiere in the Generations section at the Berlinale in 2026. Known for her range, depth, and versatility, Khensani continues to craft work that resonates nationally and internationally.

NTSIMEDI GWANGWA (she/her) - Lazola

Ntsimedi is an actress from Johannesburg currently based in Cape Town, South Africa. She holds a BA and Honours in Theatre and Performance from the University of Cape Town. After graduation she worked on a theatre production, *Fake News*, for the Institute for Creative Arts with Nelisiwe Xaba and Mocke Jansen Van Veuren. Her first on screen role was in Eirik Svensson's *Safe House* (2025). Movement is a quintessential part of Ntsimedi's self and artistic expression. Classically trained in ballet for 15 years she has done other movement practices including contemporary and jazz dancing, karate, acrobatics and rhythmic gymnastics. She is honoured and willing to perform the stories that shape our world. She is in Sandulela Asanda's *Black Burns Fast* that will have its international premiere at the Berlinale in 2026. When she's not performing she is a yoga instructor (RYT500), sound practitioner and production assistant.

BASETSANA MOTLOUNG - Anele

Basetsana is a theatre and film practitioner, with an Honours degree in Theatre and Performance from the University of Cape Town. Her acting credits span local and international film, TV, theatre and voice over work. These include: Amazon Studios's *The Power* (2023); Netflix's *Love and Wine* (2025); Showmax's *Wyfie* (2024) and Sandulela Asanda's *Black Burns Fast* (2025), screening at the Berlinale in 2026. Basetsana's behind-the-scenes credits include writing and editing for the short film *Stringer* (2023). She additionally operates as an arts administrator and community theatre facilitator, having worked with several local theatre and film organisations, including as an assistant for the Joburg Film Festival. She serves as Art Director for an NGO, the Destiny Hope Foundation, empowering underprivileged girls through the arts.

END CREDITS

CAST

Luthando	ESIHLE NDLELENI
Ayanda	MUADI ILUNG
Jodie	MILA SMITH
Zenande	KHENSANI KHOSA
Lazola	NTSIMEDI GWANGWA
Anele	BASETSANA MOTLOUNG