

LEVI  
DU PLOOY

JARRID  
GEDULD

KEENAN  
ARRISON

ERNIE "LASTIG"  
SOLOMON



# A LUCKY MAN

BASED ON THE LIFE OF ERNIE "LASTIG" SOLOMON



MARK FYFE & GORDON CLARK PRESENT A LUCKYMAN PICTURES & GROUPTOWN PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS "A LUCKY MAN"  
TRAVIS SWYERS, DAVID ISAACS, BRENWYN VAN GRAAN, THERESA WILLIAMS, LUKE JANSEN, DAVID ISAACS, ANTONIO FISHER, NIEL ROBERTS,  
JASON GEORGE, ANATHE SHAND, GAZELLE COLLISON, LEVI DU PLOOY, JARRID GEDULD, KEENAN ARRISON, JARRID JENKINS, CYSTER WILLIAMS,  
JIM GRANT, LEACASSICK, HEIKO VON FINTEL, FRAMEWORK, ANNE'S ANGELS, YOUNG SWEMIL GSKO, WROSS & MYLES MADONALD  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: NIC TURTON, JOSH BOHRILL, MITO SKELLERN, JIMMY GORDON CLARK, MARK FYFE AND GORDON CLARK, WITH GORDON CLARK



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## Production Notes

**Mark Fyfe and Gordon Clark  
in association with LuckyMan Pictures  
and Groovetown Productions**

**present**

# "A LUCKY MAN"

Levi du Plooy  
Jarrid Geduld  
Keenan Arrison  
Tauriq Jenkins  
Travis Snyders  
Ya'qoob Isaacs  
Bronwyn van Graan  
Theresa Williams  
Shanville Brandt  
Sherman Pharo  
Luke Jansen  
Rosco Roman  
David Isaacs  
Antonio Fisher  
Niel Roberts  
Jason George  
Anathe Shand  
Gezelle Collison  
Cyster Williams

**Casting**

Mito Skellern

**Music**

Ross McDonald  
Myles McDonald  
HeyPapaLegend studio

**Visual Effects**

Grant Legassick  
Heiko von Fintel  
Frameworkx

**Wardrobe**

Annie's Angels

**Production Designer**  
Swemil Osko

**Editor**  
Josh Borrill

**Sound Design**  
Nic Turton

**Cinematography**  
Gordon Clark

**Producer**  
Mark Fyfe

**Written & Directed by**  
Gordon Clark

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

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'A Lucky Man' is based upon the real life story of Ernie 'Lastig' Solomon, a legendary gangster from the violent and crime-ridden area known as the Cape Flats, a depressed peri-urban sprawl abutting the world-acclaimed city of Cape Town.

Ernie Solomon is a man in search of his identity. Is he the product of his circumstances, a victim of fate, or a violent criminal destined to live on the periphery of society? Or is he a 'lucky man', one who discovers that he has to become a self-directed agent, a master of his own destiny?

'A Lucky Man' explores the question of identity and morality in a society circumscribed by social engineering and by fate. A complex, powerful life story told through the eyes of a 'lucky man' who spent most of it watching his back and who now faces the future in the knowledge of his hard fought-for and found sense of self.

## SYNOPSIS

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Based on the real life story of legendary former South African gangster Ernie 'Lastig' Solomon 'A Lucky Man' charts one man's violent rise from childhood in the slums of Cape Town to one of today's most infamous criminals.

'A Lucky Man' is a morality story in which the perplexing issues of identity and ethics are played out in the life of a man literally living on the edge. Born into a family where he is branded a nuisance (lastig) and an outsider by his family, and growing up in a city and country in which he is a member of a community deemed neither white nor black, Ernie 'Lastig' Solomon sets out on a road paved with crime, violence and abuse in search of himself and a place he can call home. It is the universal tale of humanity: the longing for belonging.

Set in the impoverished Cape Flats, a peri-urban sprawl on the periphery of one of the world's most beautiful cities, Cape Town, 'A Lucky Man' traces Ernie's quest as he collides with both family and society. He becomes the ultimate outcast, a bastard son and a criminal. For such a man, there is but one home, prison, the 'Big House', the inevitable destination.

Ernie has an inventive propensity for self-creation. He assumes identities at will which, through a mixture of cunning and luck, enable him to survive. But he is driven by an irresistible search for his real self and trusts only his own instincts to take him beyond mere survival. He is unable to escape the 'nuisance' of his self-badgering: to know himself and to be known for who he is.

The young Ernie Solomon discards the trappings of childhood respectability and begins the search for an identity of which he can feel proud. The teenage Ernie trades on his innocent looks and natural quick wit to embark on a life of petty, then violent crime. During an inevitable spell in prison, Ernie is forcibly initiated by blade and at last discovers a 'society' in which he can earn respect and thrive. On release, proudly bearing his facial scar and his 'Lastig' nickname, Ernie the man is finally prepared to carve out his slice of society and reap revenge on those who have crossed him.

As a fully-fledged crime lord, Ernie is challenged by rivals and hunted by police. Only if he can continue to fight hard to protect those close to him and keep one step ahead of his enemies, does he stand a chance of remaining a lucky man.

'A Lucky Man' neither glamorises nor sensationalises the lives of people for whom crime is not a choice, but often an inevitable response to living in a society in which they are bound by circumstances and fate beyond their control.

The film does not attempt to solicit sympathy. It simply asks the question: Given the same situation, in which you constantly have to watch your back as you search for your sense of self, for your intrinsic sense of belonging, what would you do? Would you consider yourself a 'lucky man' to have merely survived, let alone to have learned to live and fulfilled the need to belong?

## **BACKGROUND: GANGS AND DRUGS IN CAPE TOWN**

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The Western Cape is the gang and drug hub of South Africa. In 2012, it was estimated that about 60% of gang and drug related crimes are committed in the tough impoverished slums of the Cape Flats, although the province is home to only 10% of the country's population.

This is due to the endemic nature of gangsterism in the region, which sees children growing up with family members and friends of the family belonging to gangs. They are exposed to gangs on their way to and from school and grow up in an environment where they were used to running for cover "when the bullets start firing".

In 2011, for example, there was a known gang presence at 31 schools in the Western Cape and 63 gang shootings took place on school premises in 2012. Gangsters often inform parents that a shoot-out is going to take place at or near a particular school and there is "pandemonium" when parents rushed to the school to fetch their children.

In communities where gangsterism is so prevalent, even children who want nothing to do with gangs are often marked by rival gangs simply because they lived in a particular area. A culture of gangsterism leads to young men being forced to show they are "unafraid to challenge or be challenged" and develop machismo and bravado.

The prison gang members from the infamous numbers gangs, the 26s, 27s and 28s, have often spent decades behind bars, evident from their jailhouse tattoos and scars. The tattoos serve as a form of hierarchy, signify the violent crimes they've committed, and are symbols of the organisation they belong to. The numbers gangs operate like well-organised institutions. They consist of lower and upper structures governed by strict codes of conduct and gang rules. Breaking any of the rules, or the code of conduct, could mean death. Many who have tried have paid with their lives.

## **Q & A: MARKE FYFE, PRODUCER**

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### **Where did the idea for the film originate?**

The film concept emerged from discussions we were having with the notorious gangster Ernie 'Lastig' Solomon. The story of his obsession with finding his own identity gripped us and begged to be captured in film. It's the story of a life, and not just another movie about gangsterism in coloured townships.

### **Why is it an important story?**

The story of people and communities finding their identity is a universal one. This is particularly so in an age when gangsterism and the crime that goes along with it touches so many lives directly and indirectly.

The world is ever more cosmopolitan and these themes of cross-cultural understanding are ever more relevant at a global level. It's a story of survival.

What is entertaining about this character?

Ernie is a man of substantial stature within his community. Following the twists and turns of the decisions he made in his life brought him to a fascinating point. Ernie was driven by an obsession to appease his metaphoric and literal cousin and saw this as part of his quest to gain acceptance as a Solomon.

### **When was the script written and how long did it take?**

Script writing was a three-month process that developed out of testimonials extracted directly from Ernie. From those testimonials emerged a common theme and then evolved the script – the story of a boy who lacked identity and actively sought prison to find himself.

It is this startling rite of passage through the prison system that young men of Ernie's community seek a sense of belonging. This search is explained through the story.

The inciting incident for the movie occurred when nine-year old Ernie was forced by circumstance to search for his own identity.

This then led us directly to Ernie in his mid-teens, from 15 to 18, within the prison system, and then Ernie at 29 years of age, out of prison, and now 'A Lucky Man'.

The skeleton of the film and casting was acquired in a non-traditional and organic fashion. It was non-traditional in the sense that, normally, a script is completed before casting commences, but our approach was to use actors who had lived in or near to this

lifestyle. This organic development of script has been material and crucial to the run of the story.

Once we had the actors in place, we arranged for them to meet with Ernie and we then developed the dialogue in collaboration, deciding through this process how Ernie spoke, moved and ‘operated’.

The exciting challenge came in having to seamlessly transition a 9-year old to a 15-year old and into a 29-year old. We needed to create visual cues within the script that showed this transition.

Of course, the opening sequence required a powerful hook that would draw the audience into Ernie’s world – one that could be woven naturally into the main storyline. This writing process took us to a total of four months.

### **Why did Gordon Clark come on board as the director?**

Gordon’s extensive experience in the Cape Flats allowed him to take on the entire project including scriptwriting and movie development. Ernie was comfortable with this as he had worked with Gordon before on a photographic exhibition called ‘The Ernie Lastig Occurrence’. The exhibition revealed life on the Cape Flats and the inevitable journey from childhood to the gangster world that many of the youth who live there undergo. It revealed Ernie’s strained attempt to go back to his beginnings, perhaps even to seek redemption. It was at once real and imaginative. In the film, Gordon’s treatment of the subject is sensitive but unflinching. He allows us the privilege of getting inside a world – and a man – we would otherwise have little or no access to.

### **How did you go about casting the film?**

We were very fortunate to have the experienced casting director Mito Skellern on board as she has access to Cape Town’s acting community. Even though our priorities lay in casting the best people for the roles, we wanted to work with actors who understood the dynamics of the Cape Flats and who knew, or knew of, Ernie. Mito understood this philosophy and already had key actors in mind from outset.

Ernie also wanted to give people from the community a chance to work in the movie – as opposed to outsiders who would not have the same authentic appreciation for the complexity, the nuances, and dynamics that play out in these communities.

**What do the lead actors bring to the film?**

The lead actors were all very excited to meet Ernie in person because this enabled them as a team to be consistent in how they played their roles. The actors chosen brought authenticity to the movie. They all came from these communities and understood the dynamics associated with it. As one example of their commitment, Jarrid Geduld, the actor who plays Ernie in his teens, had completed principal photography, but he continued to remain on set to assist Levi du Plooy, who played the younger, nine-year old Ernie. This proved invaluable as it was Levi's first time on a movie set.

**How did you choose the music for the film?**

Ross and Miles McDonald of Hey Papa Legend, a prominent local music production house, gave the movie a sense of authenticity through the score – they also wrote the opening track that really set the tone for what was to come.

**Describe the making of the film**

It was shot over an eight-month period in 2011 and edited in 2012. The film was shot on location in the actual neighbourhood where Ernie grew up, in the suburbs of Elsie's River and Hawston.

The backdrop for the prison scenes proved to be difficult to find. Fortunately we discovered an old reform school in Tokai that could be dressed appropriately to create a prison environment.

Because we wanted authentic locations, we were in large part guided by Ernie in terms of the actual streets he walked.

The biggest challenges were shooting on location in an inhabited environment, where high unemployment means a significant degree of noise and activity on the street by mid-morning. This meant we needed to shoot extremely early in the day, but it was an arrangement that worked well.

Our production crew consisted of a cameraman, who was also the director and writer, several focus-pullers (alternating) ad hoc, a gaffer, a grip and trainee. We had no wardrobe or makeup and hair, unless we required something specific. One of our actors also doubled as a coordinator.

This kept our crew very small and intimate. It numbered at no more than eight people at any given time, which allowed us to complete the movie on a small budget.

**What was it like to work with the cast?**

All the cast members were very easy to work with. They were excited by the project and in the process of making the film we became one efficient unit driven by teamwork and a common goal.

**What were the highlights of the shoot?**

The whole shoot felt like a highlight. Every day was one single ongoing journey of understanding, growth and collaboration for all concerned.

**What excites you about this film?**

It is a story of intrigue and a convoluted cultural ethos. It's laced with simple human emotions from a backyard that we all know so little about. Very few people understand what plays out in the Cape Flats on a daily basis.

**Who is your target audience?**

South Africans at home and abroad. It's a universal story about identity and coming of age. It also provides reveals some interesting facts about the South African landscape – against the backdrop of a country that has been prominent in the news for many of the wrong reasons.

## BIOGRAPHIES: CAST

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### **Keenan Arrison (Adult Ernie)**

Keenan has appeared in the 2007 SABC 1 television drama series 'Divers Down'. He also appeared in two short films in 2006: 'Ongeriewe' and 'Freedom Days'. In 2007 he also got a starring role in the eTV drama series 'Shooting Stars'. In 2009, he appeared in 'Shirley Adams. He currently plays the role of Ashwin Fernandez in the M-Net soap opera 'The Wild'.

### **Tauriq Jenkins**

Tauriq studied theatre and performance at the University of Cape Town. He is the Executive Director and founder of The Independent Theatre Movement of South Africa which is a professional company and drama school based in Cape Town lecturing in Shakespeare, Classical Greek and Creative Writing. He is passionate about developing theatre and youth work. He has appeared in many theatre productions. His film and television credits include 'Mercenary for Justice' (2006), 'Confessions of a Gambler' (2007), 'BBC Special Forces Heroes' (2008), 'Crusoe' (2008), 'Darfur' (2009) and 'Strike Back' (2011).

### **David Isaacs**

After studying drama at UCT, David appeared in several stage productions. His television career started with 'Skerpieon onder die Klip', a documentary about the history of the Afrikaans language. In 1996 he appeared in the television drama 'Hagenheim Streng Privaat', and then in Penguin Films' 'Fishy Feshuns'. For this role he was awarded an Avanti nomination for Best Supporting Actor in a comedy. In 2000 he teamed up with Oscar Petersen and Heinrich Reisenhofer to create 'Joe Barber', one of South Africa's most successful theatre productions, which ran for more than a decade. In 2000 he also starred in the sit-com, 'SOS' for eTV. In 2001 he won the Avanti Award for Best Actor in a TV role and in 2002 he received an FNB Vita theatre nomination for Best Comedy Actor. His work also includes feature films such as 'Cape Of Goodhope' (2004), 'Visa/Vie' (2010), and 'Skeem' (2011).

## BIOGRAPHIES: CREW

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### **Gordon Clark (Writer, Director and Co-Producer)**

Gordon has been directing commercials with some of the world's leading brands. His abilities go beyond creating a visually arresting picture. He has a unique approach to dialogue, portraiture, storytelling and working fast and clever. He has also gained a solid reputation for innovative, quality work that remains true to the concept. Prior to directing, Gordon built up a reputation as a world renowned stills photographer.

His talent for directing commercials is fuelled by his passion for stills photography that led to his first book being published with wide acclaim. It came to the attention of none other than Oprah Winfrey, who was so taken with Gordon's evocative images of the continent and its people that she wrote the foreword for the book. It is due to his sensitivity as an artist that he manages to fully capture the essence of the African people against the unique landscapes of South Africa.

Gordon has directed two successful commercials for Motorola and Hyundai out of Ogilvy Singapore that proved his skill in live action and visual special effects. Other major international brands that he has worked with are Coca Cola, Toyota Prado, Nike, Djarum, AT&T and the Salvation Army. He has won numerous advertising industry awards. He makes his feature film directorial debut with 'A Lucky Man'.

### **Mark Fyfe (Producer)**

Mark has developed a reputation for being somewhat of an entrepreneurial legend around Cape Town, having founded Harley's Liquors in the city bowl and becoming the first person to obtain a Sunday liquor licence in SA. But at the tender age of 50, his leap into the untested waters of film production stretched his pioneering spirit to the limits.

In partnership with internationally renowned film director Gordon Clark, Mark leaped at the role of producer on 'A Lucky Man'.

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