

EVERYONE DESERVES A GREAT LOVE STORY

Rafiki

A FILM BY WANURI KAHIU



A BIG WORLD CINEMA AND AFROBUBBLEGUM PRODUCTION IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH MPM FILM SCHORTCUT FILMS APE&BJORN RINKEL FILM RAZOR FILM
IN ASSOCIATION WITH TANGO ENTERTAINMENT WITH THE FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE ASSISTANCE OF THE ACP GROUP OF STATES AND THE SUPPORT OF THE CNC AND INSTITUT FRANÇAIS SORFOND
THE NETHERLANDS FILM FUND AND HUBERT BALS FUND THE BERLINALE WORLD CINEMA FUND AND ARRI - INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAM
A WANURI KAHIU FILM SAMANTHA MUGATSIA SHEILA MUNYIVA CASTING DIRECTOR NINI WACERA PRODUCTION DESIGNER ARYA LALLOO COSTUME DESIGNER WAMBUI THIMBA SOUND RECORDIST FREDERIC SALLES EDITOR ISABELLE DEDIEU
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CHRISTOPHER WESSELS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER TIM HEADINGTON CO-PRODUCERS MARIE-PIERRE MAGIA & CLAIRE GADEA GEORGES SCHOUCAIR RUBEN THORKILDSEN & VERONA MEIER
REINIER SELEN GERHARD MEIXNER & ROMAN PAUL WANURI KAHIU TAMSI RANGER WRITTEN BY WANURI KAHIU JENNA BASS BASED ON A STORY BY MONICA ARAG DE NYEKO PRODUCED BY STEVEN MARKOVITZ DIRECTED BY WANURI KAHIU



PRODUCTION INFORMATION

A
Big World Cinema
and
Afrobubblegum Production
in co-production with
MPM Film, Schortcut Films, Ape&Bjørn, Rinkel Film, Razor Film
in association with
Tango Entertainment

Rafiki

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Synopsis

Short Synopsis

“Good Kenyan girls become good Kenyan wives,” but Kena and Ziki long for something more. Despite the political rivalry between their families, the girls resist and remain close friends, supporting each other to pursue their dreams in a conservative society. When love blossoms between them, the two girls will be forced to choose between happiness and safety.

Long Synopsis

Directed by Wanuri Kahiu, ‘Rafiki’ is the first Kenyan film in Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival (Un Certain Regard).

Kena helps her father John Mwaura run a small convenience store in Nairobi as he campaigns for a local election. Kena lives with her mother, who isn’t really on speaking terms with John. Kena starts flirting with Ziki, a neighbourhood girl with colourful hair, who also happens to be the daughter of Peter Okemi, John’s political rival. Kena and Ziki have some romantic dates, and quickly become very close, but there are tensions about displaying their affection in public because homosexuality is illegal in Kenya.

Ziki’s friends get jealous that she is spending so much time with Kena, and when they attack Kena, Ziki defends her. Ziki takes Kena home to dress her wounds, but Ziki’s mom catches them kissing. They run away together to hide but are found by the town gossip, who brings an angry mob to attack the two girls. They are both arrested and have to be picked up by their fathers. Ziki can no longer bear to see Kena, and her parents send her to live in London. John refuses to let Kena take the blame for what happened, even though it means forfeiting his chance at winning the election.

A few years later, Kena has fulfilled her dream to become a doctor and gets word that Ziki has returned to town.

Rafiki was banned by the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) “due to its homosexual theme and clear intent to promote lesbianism in Kenya contrary to the law.” The KFCB warned that anyone found in possession of the film would be in breach of the law in Kenya, where gay sex is punishable by 14 years in jail. The ban raised international outrage by the supporters of LGBT rights.

The film’s director, Wanuri Kahiu, sued Kenya’s government, to allow the film to be screened and become eligible to be submitted as Kenya’s entry for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film at the 91st Academy Awards. On 21 September 2018, the Kenyan High Court lifted the ban on the film, allowing it to be screened in the country for seven days, therefore meeting the eligibility requirements.

Festivals – Official Selection

Festival de Cannes (Un Certain Regard)
Sydney Film Festival, Australia
Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, Czech Republic
New Zealand International Film Festival, New Zealand
Durban International Film Festival, South Africa
Melbourne International Film Festival, Australia
Monterrey International Film Festival, Mexico
Toronto International Film Festival, Canada
Film Ohne Grenzen, Germany
Filmfestival Oostende, Belgium
Helsinki International Film Festival - Love & Anarchy
LUCAS Film Festival, Germany
Zurich Film Festival, Switzerland
Busan International Film Festival, South Korea
Brisbane International Film Festival, Australia
Montréal Festival du Nouveau Cinema, Canada
Mill Valley Film Festival, USA
Reel Pride Film Festival, Canada
CTIFM&F, South Africa
Chicago International Film Festival, USA
BFI London FF, United Kingdom
Adelaide Film Festival, Australia
Warsaw Film Festival, Poland
TWIST: Seattle Queer Film Festival, USA
Milwaukee Film Festival, USA
Africa in Motion, Scotland
Newfest - The New York LGBT Film Festival, USA
Ake Arts Festival, Nigeria
AFI Fest, USA
Marrakech Film Festival, Morocco
International Film Festival Rotterdam, The Netherlands
And over 100 other festivals

Theatrical Release

Kenya (7 days)
France
Switzerland
Germany
Belgium
The Netherlands
Scandinavia
United Kingdom
USA
Canada

To be released:

Brazil
Japan
Israel
Eastern Europe

Awards

Bridging the Borders Award	Cinema Without Borders
Youngsters 16+ Award	LUCAS Internationales Festival für junge Filmfans
Jury Winner: Best Narrative	OUTshine Film Festival
Best Narrative Feature Award	TWIST: Seattle Queer Film Festival
Audience Award Best Narrative Feature	TWIST: Seattle Queer Film Festival
The Silver Hugo-Q	Chicago International Film Festival
Perfect award: Prix du public	Festival Everybody's Perfect
Audience Award for Narrative Feature	NewFest NYC
Youth Jury Prize	Festival international du film francophone Tübingen Stuttgart
Public Preis	Festival international du film francophone Tübingen Stuttgart
Best Music (Feature Films)	Carthage Film Festival
Best Actress (Feature Films) - S Mugatsia	Carthage Film Festival
Best Actress Award	Fespaco, Burkina Faso
Free To Be Me Award	Hivos
Outstanding Lead Performance	Reelout Queer Film + Video Festival
Outstanding Ensemble Performance	Reelout Queer Film + Video Festival
Best Director Award	Zinegoak Film Festival
Diversity and Human Rights Award	Zinegoak Film Festival
Lesbian and Gender Award	Zinegoak Film Festival

Q&A with Wanuri Kahiu – Director

What was the starting point for the film?

I was in my late teens when I first saw a film about young Africans in love. Before that, I had never seen any Africans kiss. I still remember the thrill, surprise and wonder and how the film disrupted my idea of romance. Before then, affection was reserved for foreigners, not us. To imagine that it was normal for Africans to hold hands and kiss on screen was astonishing. Years later, when I read 'Jambula Tree' by Monica Arac de Nyeko I was caught off guard again. As a romantic, I had to bring to life the tender playfulness of the girls in 'Jambula Tree' and as a filmmaker, it was vital to show beautiful Africans in love and add those memories to cinema.

'Rafiki', can you explain the title?

'Rafiki' means friend in Swahili, and often when Kenyans of the same sex are in a relationship, they forgo the ability to introduce their partners, lovers, mates, husbands or wives as they would like, and instead call them 'rafiki'.

How did you find your two actresses as it must have required a great deal of sensitivity and a certain amount of secrecy?

I met Samantha (Sam) first. She was at a friend's party and she looked exactly the way I imagined Kena would. I didn't know anything about her but soon found out she was a drummer. I was excited when she agreed to come in for an audition, and even more so when she agreed to play the role. I knew what it meant to accept a role like this in Kenya. It meant a commitment to uncomfortable conversations with friends, family and a possible opposition from the government. However, Sam did not waiver, she committed to the project and lovingly brought Kena to life.

Sheila came into the audition full of the joy of living. She was full of charm and curiosity and her portrayal of Ziki was the perfect match for the more even-tempered and responsible Kena. Sheila was initially hesitant to take the role but a close queer friend reminded her of the importance of being seen and acknowledged, so she agreed.

How did you manage to create the intimate scenes?

The experience we want to communicate is the incredibly soft yet awkward newness of first love and the willingness to risk everything, and choose it. To do that, we allowed for awkward silences, held gazes, improvised dialogue and fluidity of movement between Kena and Ziki.

When creating that world, we referenced artists like Zanele Muholi, Mickalene Thomas and Wangechi Mutu whose work expresses femininity, strength and courage. We hoped to reflect these attributes in the film and infused the scenes with the immediacy of the vibrant Nairobi neighbourhood we were in. Production designer Arya Laloo created a maximalist, lo-fi, hybrid aesthetic by mixing lots of prints and textures – from traditional Kenyan and other African cloths to mass-produced fabrics, furniture from different periods and styles and employed bold, bright and varied palettes.

The setting is Nairobi but how did you choose your locations and how important is that for you?

We set the film in a lively, upbeat neighbourhood in Nairobi. Once we knew the neighbourhood we wanted to shoot in, we rewrote the script to suit it. The location we chose is a large, tumbling housing estate with churches, schools and shops, all within a perimeter wall that opens out to a dam on one side. It is the kind of place where everybody knows everyone else and privacy is a luxury. We also wanted the neighbourhood to reflect a cross-section of Nairobi people, from boda (motorcycle) drivers to competing politicians and gossiping kiosk owners. In its bright, noisy, intrusive way, this neighbourhood was the perfect antagonist to the quiet, intimate, secret spaces the girls tried to create.

What is the message of the film?

Making a film about two young women in love challenges the larger human rights issues associated with same sex relationships in East Africa. Over the past five years of developing this film, we have seen worrying developments in the anti-LGBTI climate in East Africa. Local films and international TV shows have been banned because of LGBTI content. This has stifled conversations about LGBTI rights and narrowed the parameters of freedom of speech. My hope is that the film is viewed as an ode to love, whose course is never smooth, and as a message of love and support to the ones among us who are asked to choose between love and safety. May this film shout where voices have been silenced.

LGBTI rights in Africa are extremely limited. Gay people face discrimination, persecution and potentially even death but recently they have begun fighting for a place in society. Do you hope to make a difference with your film?

While filming, we challenged deep-rooted cynicism about same sex relations among the actors and crew, and continue to do so with friends, relatives and larger society. 'Rafiki' brings to the forefront conversations about love, choice and freedom, not only freedom to love but also the freedom to create stories. We hope this conversation reminds us that we all have the right to love, and the refusal of that right through violence, condemnation or law violates our most fundamental *raison d'être*: the ability for one human being to love another.

Biography – Director

Wanuri Kahiu – Director

Born in Nairobi, Wanuri is part of the new generation of African storytellers. Her stories and films have received international acclaim. Her films have screened at numerous film festivals around the world. To date, Wanuri has written and directed six films. 'Rafiki' is her second feature film.

She is the co-founder of AFROBUBBLEGUM, a media company that supports, creates and commissions fun, fierce and frivolous African art.

In 2008, Wanuri completed her first feature film 'From a Whisper', based on the real-life events surrounding the twin bombings of US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998. The film won several nods at the Africa Movie Academy Awards, including Best Director and Best Picture, the Golden Dhow award at Zanzibar International Film Festival and Best Film at Kalasha, Kenya Film and TV awards. Shortly after she completed a documentary about the life of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai entitled For Our Land (2009) for M-Net 'Great Africans' Series.

Her short science fiction film 'Pumzi' (2009), partially funded by Focus Features, Goethe Institut and Changa Moto Fund in Kenya, screened at Sundance in 2010. Pumzi won Best Short at Cannes Independent Film Festival, May 2010 and took Silver at Carthage Film Festival in 2010.

Wanuri was named a TED Fellow in 2017 and World Economic Forum cultural leader in 2018. Wanuri published her first children's book, The Wooden Camel (Lanata Publishing), she is currently in post-production on a feature length documentary "GER" (To Be Separate) and in development on "Rust" a near future science fiction film set in Nairobi.

AWARDS

Citta Di Venezia Award/ Venice International Film Festival/ 2010

PUMZI - South Africa, Kenya, 21 min/ 2010

Best Short Film - ARIFF Film Festival/ Port Harcourt/ Nigeria 2010

Silver Prize/ Best Short - Carthage Film Festival/ Tunisia/ 2010

Best Short - Cannes Independent Film Festival/ France/ 2010

Special Jury Prize – Zanzibar International Film Festival/ 2010

FROM A WHISPER – Kenya, 79 min/ 2008

Best Actor – Tarifa Film Festival/ Spain/ 2010

Best Picture – Pan African Film Festival Los Angeles/ USA/ 2010

Best Feature - ION International Film Festival/ Nigeria/ 2009

Best E. Africa Film – Zanzibar Film Festival/ 2009

Best Picture/ Best Director/ Best Soundtrack/ Best Screenplay/ Best Editing – Africa Movie Academy Awards/ Nigeria/2009

Biographies – Cast

Samantha Mugatsia – Kena

Born in Kenya, Samantha Mugatsia is a drummer, visual artist, DJ and a member of the band 'Yellow Light Machine'. She joined the Nairobi eclectic underground scene in 2014 and since then has performed as a drummer at various prestigious festivals and events in East Africa.

In addition, she was the drummer for the 'House of Reggae' band for Virginia Reggae Ambassador and Artist of the Year '15/'16, 'Mighty Joshua'.

Drawn to poetry, she has performed as a house band member for different Kenyan hip hop groups at various prose writers and thespians events such as the Spoken Live Thursdays (put together by Pan African Writers Collective: Jalada) and The Kwani Trust writer's stage.

Samantha also worked on 'Afri-Na-Ladi', a collaborative project with Ghanaian based artist Jojo Abot. She then performed as the opening act for 'Alsarah and Nubatones' (of Nubian origin and now based in Brooklyn, NY) for their SILT Tour at Alliance Française. Together with her band she created the Lounge Project and has had numerous collaborations with renowned African artists.

As a visual artist and model, she has collaborated on numerous projects and has co-created a CD Demo Art Design together with Kanyeki Nyeks.

She recently launched her acting career by landing a lead role in 'Rafiki'.

Sheila Munyiva – Ziki

As a rising filmmaker, Sheila has directed adverts in her home country Kenya and is currently working on directing her first short film 'Ngao', a narrative based on her experiences as a child.

In college, she trained as a news anchor before changing her major to film production. Soon after, she expanded her script writing skills by attending writing masterclasses which deepened her love for filmmaking.

Sheila strongly believes in the power of giving back and doing good for others. Currently, she uses her influence to mentor young girls at a non-profit school in the slums of Kibera.

Film production

The making of 'Rafiki' took six years, starting with a script development workshop in 2012. With the support of numerous international funders and the participation of six co-producers led by South African production company Big World Cinema, pre-production began in December 2016. The film was shot in March-April 2017, over four weeks in a Nairobi housing estate, and a few other city locations. With the exception of the four foreign HODs, the entire crew was Kenyan and based in Nairobi. This is a women-led film with a female director, writers, HODs, crew members, trainees, and sound-track artists. The story and its creation is a celebration of young Kenyan women working in the creative economy.

Production Companies

BIG WORLD CINEMA lead by Steven Markovitz, was established in 1994 and has produced and co-produced feature films and documentaries including *aKasha* (Venice Critics' Week, TIFF 2018), *High Fantasy* (TIFF, Berlinale 2018), *Silas* (TIFF, IDFA 2017), *Winnie* (Best Director, World Cinema Documentary Competition, Sundance 2017), *Stories of Our Lives* (TIFF, Berlinale Teddy Jury Award 2015), *Beats of the Antonov* (Winner TIFF Documentary Audience Award 2014), *Viva Riva!* (TIFF 2010, Berlinale 2011), the winner of MTV Movie Award for Best African Movie. They executive-produced the feature film *Boy Called Twist* (Cannes 2005) by Tim Greene; South African - Canadian feature film, *Proteus* (Berlin, Toronto, Sydney, Rio, Hamptons). They also produced the short *Inja* (nominated for an Oscar® - 2003); and *Husk* which premiered in Official Competition at the Cannes Film Festival. Big World Cinema has an extensive production and distribution network across Africa.

AFROBUBBLEGUM is a media company that supports, creates and commissions fun, fierce and frivolous African art. Made up of storytellers, clothes makers, graphic designers, musicians, lovers of life, joy harbingers, beauty mongers, hope sayers. With links to existing online presence, we celebrate the breadth of curators, collectors and creators already celebrating the joy, love and happiness of Africa through their work.

With the financial contribution of the European Union and the assistance of the ACP Group of States and with the support of Aide aux Cinémas du Monde – Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée – Institut Français, Sørfond, The Netherlands Film Fund and Hubert Bals Fund, the Berlinale World Cinema Fund and ARRI - International Support Program.

CAST

Kena	Samantha Mugatsia
Ziki	Sheila Munyiva
John Mwaura	Jimmi Gathu
Mercy	Nini Wacera
Peter Okemi	Dennis Musyoka
Rose Okemi	Patricia Amira
Blacksta	Neville Misati
Mama Atim	Muthoni Gathecha
Nduta	Nice Githinji
Waireri	Charlie Karumi
Tom	Vitalis Waweru
Elizabeth	Hellen Aura
Pastor	Githae Njogu

CREW

Writer/Director	Wanuri Kahiu
Co-writer	Jenna Bass
Producer	Steven Markovitz
Co-producers	Marie-Pierre Macia & Claire Gadéa Georges Schoucair Ruben Thorkildsen & Verona Meier Reinier Selen Gerhard Meixner & Roman Paul Wanuri Kahiu, Tamsin Ranger
Executive Producer	Tim Headington
Editor	Isabelle Dedieu
Additional editing	Ronelle Loots
Director of Photography	Christopher Wessels
Production Designer	Arya Laloo
Sound recordist	Frederic Salles
Casting Director	Nini Wacera

Based on the short story, *Jambula Tree*, by Monica Arac de Nyeko