

# South African films



Compiled by CHEREZAAN BASADIEN

## Audiovisual Selector

South Africa has a long history of film production and has therefore one of the oldest film industries in the world. The industry is growing at an exceptionally competitive rate and competes internationally in areas such as providers of quality content, creative workmanship, and as a service region. Over the past ten years the industry has produced an array of award-winning films. Some of the best local and international films to be shot in South Africa include: **Yesterday**, **Tsotsi**, **UCarmen Ekhayelitsha**, **Hotel Rwanda**, **Catch a fire**, **Lord of war**, **Blood diamond**, **District 9**, **Invictus**, and many others that have hit international screens.

In this article I am reviewing a selected few DVDs that are available in the SN collection. The selection will appeal to a wide variety of viewers: there's something for everyone, ranging from inspirational, comedy, sad to historical. Encourage your users to view some of these.

**Bakgat** / director, Henk Pretorius

**Bakgat** is about finding yourself, despite being still in high school. The film focuses on Katrien who is dumped by her boyfriend, high school rugby star, centre Werner 'Killer' Botha, so he can focus on his sport. To get

even, she takes a bet with her friends that she can make a star out of the school's dorkiest boy, Wimpie Koekemoer – the biggest geek in school. Wimpie is constantly embarrassed by his conservative mother and his strange father, especially in front of girls. Katrien and her friends Liezl and Christie decide to give Werner a taste of his own medicine by planning to make Wimpie the new centre of the first team. Wimpie dreams of being popular, and now his dream could unexpectedly become a reality. It turns out rugby is a lot harder than Katrien and Wimpie anticipated and he almost gives up. Fortunately his unexpected popularity leads to friendship with school rascals Japie and Fanie. The mischievous duo convince Wimpie to keep playing rugby, even though they're much more interested in pajama parties with girls. Katrien falls unexpectedly in love with Wimpie, until she realises he is merely using her.

### Classification

Parental guidance: I 3; Sex and Language.

**Boy called Twist** / producers, Aurelia Driver; Clare van Zyl; director, Tim Greene

This is a unique and modern take on **Oliver Twist**, the classic Charles Dickens novel of a young orphan's search for love. Twist is sent to an orphanage when his mother dies shortly after giving birth to him. He's given his new name by Mrs

Corlet, an orphanage director with a literary bent. Years later, with the orphanage in dire financial straits, Corlet sells a group of the older orphans to Bedel, who brings them to a farm where they are fed little and worked mercilessly. When Twist dares to demand more food, Bedel beats him, then takes him to a family-run funeral home, where he starts work as a gravedigger. He does well there, until his fellow workers grow jealous of him and start trouble. Faced with returning to the farm, Twist chooses to run away. At a highway rest stop, he's found by Dodger who brings him to the vicious Bill Sykes and his pretty girlfriend, Nancy. They take Twist to Cape Town, where he falls in with Fagin and his crew of young scam artists, including Charley Bates. Twist is arrested for robbing an old man, but rather than press charges, Ebrahim Bassadien, a wealthy Muslim, takes Twist in and shows him a new way of life. This is an excellent adaptation of the Dickens' classic and the best modernisation attempt to date. This is definitely worth seeing!

### Awards

Official selection Festival de Cannes Tous, les Cinemas du Monde  
Winner Best Feature Apollo Film Festival 2005.

### Classification

Parental guidance: Language.

**Bunny Chow** / producers, Kagiso Lediga, Isaac Kaminsky, Leanne Callanan; director, John Barker

**Bunny Chow** follows the raucous and often ridiculous weekend journey of three stand-up comedians, who embark on a road trip to Oppikoppi, South Africa's biggest annual rock festival.

Kags, Dave and Joey are three friends from Johannesburg who want to be stand-up comedians but show more skill with beer-fuelled trash talk. Joey is, by South African definition, coloured; a devout yet conflicted Muslim. He mines his relationship with his Chinese girlfriend, Angela, for material. Dave, a somewhat innocent and naive 'dishwasher' with dreams of making it big and whose black middle-class status is the source of his jokes, struggles to find his groove at the microphone. And Kags, the most natural comic of the group, simply cannot keep it in his pants. He and girlfriend Kim are in constant battles over his infidelity – followed by their own truth and reconciliation in the bedroom. The three friends decide to hit the road to attend an open-air music festival at Oppikoppi. Joined by Kim, the four slip out of their normal lives for a few days with hopes of mass debauchery, drugs, rampant sex, true love and conquering the rock stages with their comedy show, but they get a bit more than they have bargained for.

#### Awards

Official selection Toronto International Film Festival 2006  
 Official selection AFI Los Angeles International Film Festival 2006  
 Winner Best Actor Sithengi 2006  
 Winner Lionel Ngakasi Awards Most Promising Director; Sithengi Film Festival 2006  
 Official selection Rotterdam International Film Festival 2007  
 Official selection Sydney Film Festival 2007  
 Official selection Melbourne International Film Festival 2007.

#### Classification

Parental guidance: I 6; Sex and Language.

**Confessions of a gambler** / producers, Zaheer Bhyat and Ross Garland; director, Amanda Lane

**Confessions of a gambler** is about a Muslim woman, Abeeda Ariefdien. When she was twenty-nine and nine months pregnant her husband left her to raise four boys on her

own. There is Zane, the eldest, 31, the twins Munier and Marwaan (28), and Reza (27), who is gay. One day Abeeda goes to the casino with a friend, and wins R4,500. She is stunned by the winnings, and soon finds herself going back, her addiction spiralling out of control. She discovers Reza has Aids, and that he is dying. There is also Imran, the man she has loved her whole life, but who is married to her sister, Zulpha. When they first met, Imran was engaged to Zulpha, but he soon fell in love with Abeeda. When her mother dies, this love affair comes to an end, to avoid scandal and not to hurt her sister who had already been jilted once before. This film focuses on the Cape Muslim view of gambling and how easily gambling can become addictive. Very engrossing.

#### Awards

Winner Sunday Times Literary Award (The book)  
 Official selection DUBAI International Film Festival  
 Official selection DUBLIN International Film Festival  
 Official selection MIAMI International Film Festival  
 Winner Herman Charles Bosman Prize (The book).

#### Classification

Parental guidance: I 3; Language.

**Faith like potatoes** / producer, Frans Cronjé; director, Regardt van den Bergh

**Faith like potatoes** is based on the inspiring true story about Angus Buchan, originally a Zambian farmer of Scottish descent, who leaves his farm in the midst of political unrest and racially charged land reclaims and travels south with his family to start a better life in the turbulent hills of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands in South Africa. With nothing more than a caravan on a patch of land and help from foreman Simeon Bhengu, the Buchan family struggle to settle in a new coun-

try. Faced with ever mounting challenges, hardships and personal turmoil, Angus quickly spirals down into a life consumed by anger, fear and destruction but then

turns around and weaves together the moving life story of a man who's manic quest for material success is slowly transformed into a love for God and people. As he wrestles with faith, hope, natural disasters and tragic personal loss (his potato crop), his faith grows, unseen until the harvest.

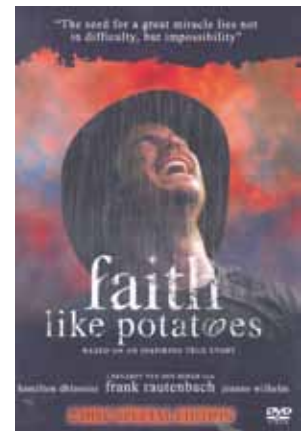
#### Classification

Parental guidance: Language.

**Hansie** / produced and written by Frans Cronjé; director, Regardt van den Bergh

The news of Protea cricket captain Hansie Cronjé's involvement with Indian bookmakers and his resulting public confession rocked the international sporting community. His unprecedented rise to glory was followed by the most horrific fall. Hansie, once South African cricket's golden boy, had been stripped of everything he had held dear: a glorious captaincy, the support of his former team mates and the respect of his nation. In its place the stinging rejection of cricket administrators and the humiliating dissection of his life on international television, made his retreat into depression inevitable. Hansie's bravest moment in

finally confessing his involvement with bookies had suddenly become a tightening noose around his neck. **Hansie** explores the very human drama



## INKQUBO-MBALISELO

of a man who, after losing everything he has worked for begins the painstaking journey back to choosing life. The journey is cathartic. We celebrate with him his glorious victories on the cricket field but by the same token, we feel the agony of his dishonour and the relief when he finally forgives himself, weeping in the arms of his friend and mentor, Peter Pollock. Amidst the darkness of his downfall, we are inspired by the power of his wife's unwavering love, which shines like a beacon of hope. His journey takes us to South Africa, India and England and his team's fiercest battles against the mighty Australians. The movie is enlivened through the cultural diversity of its backdrop, with the colours of India, its rambling buildings and beautiful sunsets, adding a notable poignancy to the drama. Like us, Hansie is both glorious and flawed and, like him, we recognise our need for acceptance and love. **Hansie** is a movie that will captivate with its human drama, its action-packed sequences and its riveting match-fixing intrigue. But above all, the movie will reassure you of the ability of us all to overcome life's difficulties with grace and dignity.

*Classification*

Parental guidance.

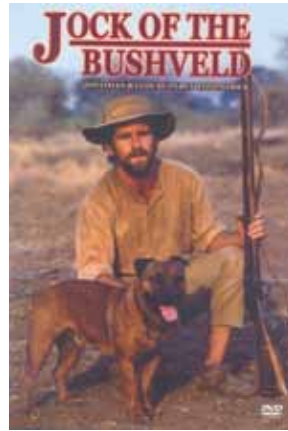
**Jock of the Bushveld** / producer, Duncan MacNeillie; director, Gray Hofmeyr

**Jock of the Bushveld** is a true story by South African author Sir James Percy Fitzpatrick. The book (and the film) tells of Fitzpatrick's travels with his dog, Jock, a Staffordshire Bull Terrier, during the 1880s, when he worked as a storeman, prospector's assistant, journalist and ox-wagon transport-rider in the Bushveld of the Transvaal (the then South African Republic).

Not long into his career as a transport rider, one of Fitzpatrick's companion's dogs had a litter of puppies. She was a well-respected Bull Terrier trail dog, though somewhat unattractive, and she had been covered by a pedigree Staffordshire Bull Terrier. Five of her six pups were the epitome of their breeding. However, one of them was a runt, weedy, ill-proportioned and the victim of constant sibling attacks. Since the runt had not been spoken for, Percy came upon the idea of taking him

on as his own. He was saved by Percy from being drowned in a bucket. Though offered the pick of the litter, after a night of contemplation he decided to stick with the little weakling. He called him Jock and it seemed as if the puppy knew that Fitzpatrick was his master from Day One. He even followed him home without any coaching. Jock was very loyal towards Percy, and brave.

This was the start of many a great adventure. The odd little puppy grew into a great and fearless dog. He was well liked, well respected and well behaved. He lived out his life at Percy's side with unwavering loyalty and his loving memory inspired many a bedtime story to Percy's three children. However,



it was only when Fitzpatrick had made his fortune, settled down to have a family and become an established and well-respected member of society that he took pen to paper at the urging of his children and shared these delightful tales with the rest of the world.

Jock had permanently lost his hearing when a Kudu cow kicked him and Fitzpatrick gave him to a friend until he had a safer place for him to live in town, as he wasn't safe in traffic and amongst people as a result of being deaf. The friend, Ted, loaned Jock to a store-owner Tom Barnett, who was having trouble with thieves and kraal dogs. Jock could not hear Barnett when he called him, and was mistakenly shot, because he was thought to be the dog killing chickens on the farm (yet Jock had actually already killed the intruding dog).

**Jock of the Bushveld** was first published in 1907 when it became an instant best-seller and a local classic. Since then it has never been out of print and it has been the subject of at least one great South African film.

There is also a statue dedicated to this most faithful companion in front of the Barberton Town Hall in Mpumalanga.

*Classification*

Parental guidance: Violence.

**Skilpoppe** / producer, Roberta Durrant; director, André Odendaal

**Skilpoppe** tells the story of Anna Meyer, a schoolgirl who has been awarded the role of Juliet in her school production of **Romeo and Juliet**. Her apparent inability to embrace the darker aspects of this role is a symptom of the turmoil she is experiencing in her real life – turmoil caused by her gay older brother's suicide a few months earlier. The story traces her attempt to hold her family together while ensuring that she herself does not fall apart.

The Meyer family's inability to deal with their tragedy leads to repressed emotions and literal flight from the problem. Anna's parents leave for a European trip while her older sister, Elise, seeks the blissful void of the drug, crack.

Anna is left to contend with Elise's downward spiral and the presence of her shady boyfriend, Julian. Her strongest ally is Ching-Kung – her brother's Taiwanese lover – whose presence is strongly resented by her parents.

As Anna tries to hold the family together, the rehearsal process of playing Juliet serves as a catalyst for her own buried feelings of guilt and remorse to come to the surface. Add to her dilemma a burgeoning romance with her real-life Romeo, and Anna soon realises that even though she tries to display maturity beyond her years, she is only a seventeen-year-old girl – a girl who is not coping. The return of her parents and her opening night forces Anna to confront her own role in her brother's suicide and sets the stage for an emotionally cathartic finale.

**Skilpoppe** taps into the zeitgeist of the South African youth – where tragedy is a part of life and growing up can be a brutal but beautiful experience.

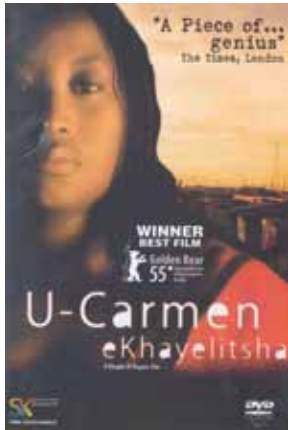


*Classification*

Parental guidance: 16.

**U-Carmen eKhayelitsha** / producer and director; Mark Dornford-May

**U-Carmen** is based on Georges Bizet's 19th-century opera and was filmed on location in Khayelitsha, a modern South African township. The energy, compassion, and heat of township life in all its elements create a constantly visually interesting and dynamic background for the unfolding of the story, which owes part of its huge popularity to



the thrilling combination of a violent gangster tale with a passionate, almost supernatural love story. As it unfolds, it explores issues of fame and wealth, the position of a strong and independently minded woman in a very masculine society and, perhaps most importantly, the incomprehensible attraction between abuser and victim. Bizet's opera, based on Prosper Merimée's novel, premiered in Paris on 3 March 1875. Set in a poor area of Seville, the story of the magnetic woman who seduces, loves, and ultimately destroys her lover and herself ... **Carmen** is one of the best known and widely loved of all operas.

Some people see opera as a rather distant and high-brow entertainment. This film is quite a different experience! The singing is sublime, the acting dramatic and filled with energy and enthusiasm. The location is grim and poor whilst brimming with life.

I'd recommend it to anybody who loves music, enjoys a spectacle or is interested in South Africa - well, Cape Town, or this part of Cape Town.

*Awards*

Winner Best Film Golden Bear 55, Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin.

*Classification*

Not available.

**Yesterday** / producer; Anant Singh; director;

Darrell James Roodt

**Yesterday** is a movie about a young Zulu mother called Yesterday who discovers she has AIDS.

Yesterday is plagued by a persistent cough and feelings of weakness. She goes to the local clinic, only to be turned away at the end of the day without having seen the doctor. When her daughter Beauty finds her mother collapsed on the doorstep of their home, her mother's teacher friend insists she return to the clinic.

The doctor who sees Yesterday asks her where she got her name from, and Yesterday explains that her father named her Yesterday because 'he said things were better yesterday than today'. The doctor tells Yesterday that she has AIDS and that she probably got it from her husband, who is a migrant mine labourer.

She travels to the mine where her husband works to tell him the news and to tell him that he is also sick. He reacts to this news very badly and beats her up.

Yesterday returns home and tries to continue living her life as best she can. She asks



her teacher friend to take care of Beauty when she dies. A few months later her husband comes home to her after being fired. He is very ill from AIDS-related illnesses and

begs Yesterday's forgiveness for blaming her and for beating her for telling him the truth.

Yesterday and Beauty take care of him as well as they can until he dies.

Yesterday's focus then falls on preparing Beauty for school. She never went to school, so her single goal becomes living long enough to be able to see Beauty attend.

When the doctor tells her she has a strong body that keeps the illness somewhat under control, she replies it's not the body but her mind. Yesterday sees her daughter start her first day at school.

*Awards*

Winner Venice Film Festival: Human Rights Film Award

Winner Leleti Khumalo Special Jury Award, Sithengi Film Festival

Winner Best Picture Pune International Film Festival

Official selection London Film Festival

Official selection International Film Festival of India

Nomination Best Foreign Language Film, Independent Filmmaker Project Spirit Award Official selection Toronto Film Festival.

*Classification*

Parental guidance.