



**MULTIChoice**  
VUKA! AWARDS 2004

## CREATING SKILLS AND JOBS THROUGH THE WORLD OF FILM

When dancer/choreographer Fanney Tsimong saw an advert in the local Soweto press for the MultiChoice VUKA! awards, he knew this was something he had to enter. Fanney, however, did not have any resources to make this a reality.

The advertisement spoke of a day long film workshop in downtown Johannesburg. This would be an introduction for students and newcomers to gain some know-how and inspiration about the making of Public Service Announcements (PSAs). This is what the MultiChoice VUKA! Awards are all about – judging the best PSAs.

A former dancer with Brenda Fassie, Tsimong went to the workshop, curious and not knowing what to expect. The workshop began by showing previous noteworthy examples of PSAs. This was enough to spark his interest and Fanney knew then that he wanted to make films.

But how could Fanney make his own PSA, without a camera, crew or technical guidance?

Luckily, he saw an advert for two film festivals in Johannesburg, The Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and the Encounters Documentary Festival. Both were run by Nodi Murphy. Tsimong's persistence helped him to get through to Murphy who offered him some casual work at the festival. He was then placed under the mentorship of Mark Schwinges and Leon Otto of Underdog Productions.

Underdog, threw him in at the deep end, they gave him a text book on the technical aspects of filmmaking, which he had to study on his own and learn how to use a camera. At the same time, he was shadowing people on the job. His PSA was then shot in a single day, using his friends as actors and carrying out all the technical roles personally. He then went into edit and it took him two weeks to get the product that he wanted.

"When someone comes to me for mentoring, they have to prove that they have passion for the work. Fanney came through. He was motivated and he had the right attitude. In this industry, the learning process does not stop," said Schwinges.

With the help of Underdog Productions, providing technical assistance and the valu-



Fanney Tsimong took the on the job training and has never looked back (inset) just one of the skills on offer

able training, Tsimong was able to put together his very first PSA. The theme was safe sex.

Then the time came for the MultiChoice VUKA! Awards gala evening. The MultiChoice VUKA! Awards is a film competition that encourages filmmakers and advertising agencies to make Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and/or charity commercials for the many organisations in South Africa that are striving to make our country a better place. Many of these issues are of government priority such as water conservation, sustainable development, literacy and health and youth issues. The best of these commercials, entered into the competition are given free airtime on selected DSTV channels, a platform made available by MultiChoice to promote worthy causes in South Africa and to showcase young up-and-coming filmmakers alongside talented experienced professionals.

Tsimong attended the ceremony completely oblivious to the fact that his PSA had been nominated for the MultiChoice RAW Talent Award. The RAW Talent Award was introduced by MultiChoice to create opportunity for young filmmakers who have entered the VUKA! Awards and have had their work judged "of broadcasting standard" by the industry judges but, who as disadvantaged competitors, have never had the opportunity to attend film school or any other tertiary institutes.

The award is given by the MultiChoice staff who come together on a given day and vote for their favourite PSA from the successful entries from previously disadvantaged individuals.

When he heard that he had won the RAW Talent Award "I was in such a complete state of shock and amazement, I couldn't even find my way to the stage!" Says Tsimong.

His prize was a bursary to participate in a three and half month training course at AFDA film school in Johannesburg.

According to Wilmien Rossouw, directing champion at AFDA: "His ability to objectively and critically work with his own material/script was a quality that contributed to the texture and impact of the final product. In the light of the personal and financial obstacles he has to contend with, one can safely say that Fanney's desire to tell stories is a strong belief in the fact that he has a definite contribution to make new, fresh narratives that are culturally relevant and moving."

Tsimong's film was one, which was specially selected to be produced and he was considered a model student. From there, his career led him to be employed as a camera assistant on the international feature film *Hotel Rwanda* when it was filmed in Johannesburg.

Fanney's story continues as Underdog has given him the opportunity to create a documentary. It's called *Black Beulahs*, which is about gay black subculture in Soweto – this will be for SABC 1, once complete

Fanney comments excitedly: "Yes, I am very busy right now but I'm definitely entering the VUKA! awards this year. It is very important for me."

### The Film Skills Development Programme

The inspiring story of Fanney Tsimong is a good indication of how the film industry works. It's all about working your way up from the bottom and learning skills. South Africa's film industry has grown considerably in the past 10 years. Film is now studied in tertiary educational institutions across the country. For the last six years MultiChoice through the VUKA! Awards has made a major contribution to the film industry. In addition to providing a platform for PSAs, it has recognised talent and individual growth through this programme.



Opportunities for working in film offers a myriad of different jobs and tasks, ranging from the caterer to the accountant, from the carpenter and the electrician to the location manager and the make-up artist.

With this in mind MultiChoice together with the National Film and Video Foundation and the Department of Labour have initiated The Film Skills Development Programme which kicks off this year. All the parties concerned are eager to see the development of skills in the industry. The Department of Labour supports the programme financially. The National Film and Video Foundation brings knowledge and insight of development of the film industry, together with extremely valuable training programmes run by experienced trainers. Together with MultiChoice this makes for an extremely beneficial partnership.

"Since the VUKA! Awards started six years ago we've recognised that there are a large amount of people with all the enthusiasm in the world, but no skills or resources to enjoy a career in film, so we've implemented workshops to find these eager people and attempt to give them an opportunity to show their abilities," comments Lebogang Hashatse, Head of Corporate Affairs at MultiChoice.

If a hopeful filmmaker registers for the workshops they have a chance of entering the Skills Development Programme. A hundred trainees will be divided into groups of ten. Each group will be assigned as interns at production houses. The interns will then be mentored in a specific facet of the film industry for example, cinematography, editing, art direction and so forth.

This was conceptualised and will be organised by the National Film and Video Foundation and MultiChoice.

Once the interns have experienced adequate training in their respective fields they will be grouped together – each person bringing a new skill to the mix and therefore will be able to make their own PSA for the MultiChoice VUKA! Awards.

This training and film skills transferral exercise is vitally important to the creation of jobs in an industry rife with opportunity. Each individual will have an entry skill into the filmmaking process which makes them employable.

The partnership between MultiChoice, the Department of Labour and the National Film and Video Foundation makes a huge impact in this area.

Organisations who are all supporting this programme are the Commercial Producers' Association (CPA), Independent Producers Organisation (IPO), South African Script Writing Association (SASWA), National Television and Video Association (NTVA) and CreateSA.

Another interesting spin off from the skills transfer programme is that Government is now recognising that the film industry is formidable.

The example of Fanny Tsomong's contribution and experience in film so far is a testament to how the film industry is an economic train waiting to board people from all platforms.