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Abaabi ba boda boda

The Boda Boda Thieves

Yes! That's Us

Producer James Tayler, Donald Mugisha, Maximilian Leo, Jonas Katzenstein, Nathan Collett, Wanjiku S. Muhoho, Jeremy Bean.

Production companies Switch Films (Cape Town, South Africa); Deddac (Kampala, Uganda); Hot Sun Films (Nairobi, Kenya); Augenschein Filmproduktion (Köln, Germany); Know Your City (Cape Town, South Africa). **Director** Yes! That's Us. **Screenplay** Donald Mugisha, James Tayler, Wanjiku S. Muhoho. **Director of photography** Carol Burandt von Kameke. **Production design** Donald Mugisha. **Costume** Shakira Kibirige. **Make-up** Shakira Kibirige. **Sound** Shantos Sekkito, Faisal Jjemba. **Music** Peter Miles, Graeme Lees. **Sound design** Pete O'Donoghue. **Editor** James Tayler.

With Hassan 'Spike' Insingoma (Abel), Prossy Rukundo (Rosa), Saul Mwesigwa (Lex), Michael Wawuyo (Goodman), Peace Birungi (Maria), Andrew Benon Kibuuka (Bujagali), Robert Mutaka (Richard), Irene Kansiime (Irene), Martin Musingu (Oranges), Hassan Kataabu (Designer), Swaibu Muwonge (Slaughter), Hamis Swalley (Hamis).

DCP, colour. 85 min. Luganda, Acholi.

Premiere 8 February 2015, Berlinale Forum

Life in Kampala today could be pretty OK for Abel, if he weren't a young man without prospects, with a father who drives a boda boda and keeps urging him to make start making a living for himself. Boda bodas (from „border-to-border“) are motorcycle taxis sometimes also used to carry goods. Abel is a young drifter whose existence is put to the test when an accident stops his father from being able to drive. All of a sudden, he gains full access to this freedom-representing vehicle. It's a fantastic opportunity for him to escape his life's predetermined plot, but it's not without risk. There are professionals in the city whose specialty it is to snatch handbags – and get away on their boda bodas. Plenty of money can be made from tourists and halfwits. By paying suitable tribute to Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette*, *Yes! That's Us* succeeds in making a neorealist urban portrait of Kampala brought right up to date with Ugandan music, locations and actors. *Abaabi ba boda boda* is a wonderful take on a European classic from a young, African perspective.

Dorothee Wenner

Realism has come of age for African cinema

From the start, we set out to make a film in the spirit of Vittorio De Sica's classic neorealist masterpiece *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, Italy 1948). Little did we realise it at the time but in doing, so we set ourselves up to be compared with one of the greatest works in the history of cinema. This became a daunting, humbling and ultimately inspiring task.

How do you make a film inspired by *Ladri di biciclette* without ruining the original or being compared to it? We believe our strength is that it was clear to us from the start that we were not trying to remake the original but rather that we were freely inspired to ,remix' it.

The question was always: where to start?

Our story belongs to the son and not the father. Considering the fact that eighty per cent of Uganda's population is under the age of thirty, we felt it important to tell this story from the point of view of a young man in transition to adulthood. Our protagonist Abel is a typical ghetto kid who is given a responsibility he is not yet ready for.

The themes we explore with this film are primarily related to the culture of machismo in Africa, the generation gap between rural migrant parents and their city-born children, and the nature of crime and corruption in contemporary African society. *Abaabi ba boda boda* is not *Ladri di biciclette* in a Ugandan setting. It is an original story with a ,borrowed soul'.

Dysfunctional Kampala

We believe that realism has come of age for African cinema and that African realism as a cinematic aesthetic and an ideology is as relevant to audiences today as Italian neorealism was to audiences in the 1950s.

Africa today is saturated with images of wealthy people and their important problems, in Korean soap operas, Brazilian telenovelas, or American blockbusters. There seems to be a deliberate attempt to entertain, but not engage with, African audiences.

We take inspiration from the filmmakers of old who sought to tell real stories of ordinary people without melodrama or artifice and in this way articulate an indigenous sensibility and non-consumerist understanding of the realities that shape society.

Much as *Abaabi ba boda boda* highlights many social issues, above all we ask the question: ,Why do the right thing when no one else does?' For us this is a very relevant question not only for our main character, but also for us as filmmakers, artists, and world citizens. This is also a question without a neat answer or easy conclusion. Whether our film is compared to the original or not, we hope that our viewer will enjoy the journey when they watch the film as we ,re-mix' a classic. The city of Kampala itself has a beautifully dysfunctional character and we want to share its pulse and lifeblood with you.

Africa is alive with possibilities right now. As artists we believe in the power of cinema to mirror society with all its imperfections and all its beauty. We feel compelled to share *Abaabi ba boda boda* as a comment on the basic human values that hold us all together. A society that knows itself through its art is a self-aware society, and a society better equipped to meet any challenge.

Donald Mugisha, James Tayler



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Yes! That's Us is a Ugandan filmmaking collective founded in 2002 by Donald Mugisha, Rogers Wadada, Alex Ireeta and Senkaaba ,Xenson' Samson. The group had started producing music videos and short films in East Africa since 2001. *Abaabi ba boda boda* is the third full-length film by the collective, whose members Donald Mugisha and James Tayler were significantly involved in the production, performing various functions. Donald Mugisha studied Mass Communication at Makerere University in Kampala. He worked for MTV in Uganda before making his first film *The Wrath* in 2002. That same year, he helped co-found Yes! That's Us, as well as starting the Deddac production company. James Tayler worked

as a photojournalist and print editor before becoming interested in film and studying at the South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance. To date, he has produced, directed and edited an eclectic range of television series and documentaries, and he also works as a video artist.

Films

2008: *Divizionz* (Berlinale Forum 2008, 91 min.). 2010: *Yogera / Speak* (85 min.). 2010: *My Silent City* (12 min.). 2015: *Abaabi ba boda boda / The Boda Boda Thieves*.