

## Drawing Pictures With Words

### Selwyn Quamina- Awardee of the Trinidad & Tobago Film Company 2007/ 2008 Production & Script Development Programme (PASD)



**Selwyn Quamina** has worked for several years as an editorial cartoonist and feature writer with the Trinidad Express Newspapers Limited. While that may not be news to you, it may surprise you to know that he has also written several screen-plays and a twelve-part television series and despite many setbacks and challenges, continues to pen more screenplays.

Now screenwriting is not exactly taught in secondary school and it is only now that UWI is offering a degree in film production so what inspires someone to express themselves in this way and how do they learn these skills? Selwyn's answer is, "Through reading. I first started with comic-books. I was always fascinated by the characters' expressions, especially of fear. Then I moved on to reading novels and stage-plays. A play by Freddy Kisson titled, "like Hog love Mud", was the first one I had ever read. I found that it was easier to understand and follow the story of a play than of a novel. So reading plays became my favorite pastime activity."

Is he discouraged? It does not seem so because he is currently working on another big project, "The Other Jerry" which delves into the life a notorious gangster. The current situation in Lavantille makes this especially poignant and a film where local gang life is neither glorified nor judged but presented for what it really is, is sorely lacking in our media landscape. Complimenting this screenplay is a book his exploration of gang life in Trinidad and Tobago inspired him to write. Selwyn hopes to self-publish "Gangster Brother" to accompany the screenplay.

"The essential things you need to be a good screenwriter are a very vibrant imagination, clear understanding of human nature and the circumstances that can send a person inevitably along a whole uncharted universe of emotions" He explains and believes his cartoonist skills only enhance this process.

It is a pity that people with the biggest imaginations and creative prowess do not always have the biggest budgets and financial resources but fortunately for Selwyn, unlike his first project, this time around he has support and financial assistance from the Trinidad and Tobago Film Company for his first feature film screenplay.

"Besides the financial assistance I got from the TTFC, they have been a total inspiration for me, which gives me a lot of motivation also."

Like many creative people, the framework provided and demanded by a organisations also helps to streamline the creative process and make it all the more efficient. Selwyn puts it this way,

**The Process:** "The first screenplay that I wrote under the TTFC's script-development programme, "The Other Jerry" was challenging for several reasons, ( 1) I had to meet a deadline, (2) The subject matter was based on an on-going scourge that is afflicting our country, so my primary objective was always to make the story educational and motivational , with the hope that it would discourage our young people from a life of

crime, (3) There was so much to tell in that story that I ended-up writing almost two hundred pages, making it much longer than the standard for a workable screenplay. In the end, it became the best thing I have ever written, receiving critical acclaim from the Monitoring Committee, as well as from American Producer, Rudy Langley, who has also expressed interest in producing it.”

Selwyn just cannot stop doing what he loves in large part to his ability to and love for observation of the human dynamic. Obviously for him, the ideas just keep on coming. “I continue to draw on the human drama in all its forms as it happens all around me. As he puts it, “We just need the scope and opportunity to expand and develop that raw talent.”

This of course is something the Trinidad and Tobago Film Company as well as the Film Production Degree programme at UWI has been doing. Adding to this, Selwyn believes the Ministry of Education should explore screenwriting as an essential tool to revitalizing command of the English language in schools and help young people to bridge cultural and class gaps in our society.

The best thing about this creative man is that he is not jaded and eternally optimistic about the future of film making and the creative arts in Trinidad and Tobago.

“I do believe we are already on the right track, and it is only a matter of time now before we make a big impact on the international stage, and when this happens, all will come on board.”