

Education Events 2005: Teaching Resource

BOY CALLED TWIST (South Africa 2004)



Formal Links

- Key Stage 4: PHSE/ Citizenship, Sociology.
- GNVQ: Media Communication & Production (Intermediate) Edexcel Unit 3 Exploring Media Products, Unit 4 Video Production Techniques.
- AVCE Media Communication & Production Unit 1 Analyse Media Products.
- AS Media Studies AQA: Syllabus Module 2 Textual Topics in Contemporary Media (Film and Broadcast Fiction), Advertising and Marketing, A2: Module 4 Texts in Context, AS Film Studies (WJEB) Unit 2 Producers and Audiences (British Cinema), AS World Cinema.
- HE and FE: Cultural Studies, Politics, Sociology, Anthropology,

Key Concepts:

Literary Adaptation, Representation, World Cinema, Film Funding and Distribution.

Synopsis

Boy Called Twist is a contemporary interpretation of Dickens' *Oliver Twist* which the director Tim Green relocates to the poor streets of Cape Town. A mother dies in childbirth in the middle of nowhere. Fearing blame, the locals bury her in an unmarked grave and drop the baby at a rural orphanage. Now a teenager he (Twist) runs into trouble and escapes to the city where he is caught up in a network of child pickpockets. The gang is run and controlled a couple of small-time pimps and drug dealers. His new friend Dodger (Tertius Swanepoel) teaches him the tricks of the trade, but the inexperienced Twist is caught trying to steal from Ebrahim Bassedien (Bill Curry). There is a strange affinity between this old man - who has lost his daughter - and the young boy who never knew his mother. Bassedien takes Twist in and for a moment it seems that the trauma is over as the little boy encounters love for the first time in his short and brutal life. Simultaneously vicious and touching, *Boy Called Twist* is a portrait of a child who has never known anything but brutality and indifference, and who finally finds the warmth of unconditional love.

Credits

Director of Photography	Mike Downie
Production Design	Michael Berg
Editor	Ronelle Loots
Wardrobe Design	Bridget Baker
Original Music	Murray Anderson
Casting by	Mito Skellern
Executive Producers	Graham Beck Adrian Enthoven Steven Markovitz
Associate Producers	The Fab 1000
Produced by	Aurelia Driver Clare van Zyl

Adapted for the screen and directed by Tim Greene

The Director: TIM GREENE

Tim Greene is a freelance independent film maker. His short films *Corner Caffie*, and *Kap 'an, Driver* have been widely acclaimed for the grit, honesty and lightness of touch with which they portray Cape Town and its people.

He is 35 years old and lives in Johannesburg .

He is currently employed by Curious Pictures, directing *Hard Copy*, SABC3's acclaimed newsroom drama. Other television credits include the popular SABC 2 cop drama *Zero Tolerance* for Ochre Media. In 2002 he directed *Tsha Tsha*, the ground-breaking SABC 1 drama series about sex, love & ballroom dancing.

He learned the film basics at John Hill's Young Filmmakers Workshop after school from 1983 until 1988. At university he received a Performers Diploma from UCT Drama School.

He started his film career as a runner, clambering his way up as a props assistant, then casting director, and eventually as a production manager, servicing foreign commercials.

He started directing in 1994 with his acclaimed short *Corner Caffie*, followed by numerous commercials and music videos for bands including The Honeymoon Suites and Just Jinger.

His second feature *Luddite* – 3rd world cyber-fi from the Ghetto's Edge - is currently in development, principal photography slated for 2006.

Useful Films for comparison:

Oliver! (1968) Carol Reed

Oliver Twist (2005) Roman Polanski

Los Olvidados (1950), Luis Bunuel

Streetwise (1980), Martin Bell

City of God (2002) [Fernando Meirelles](#)

Useful Websites:

www.moviesite.co.za

www.writingstudio.co.za

www.lff.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_11.doc

www.safilm.org.za

www.worldpress.org

www.screenonline.org.uk

www.sensesofcinema.com

Before watching the film:

- Look into modern day homelessness. Particularly look at the causes of it, drug abuse associated with it and charities established to deal with it.
- This film is described as showing the slums of post-apartheid Cape Town. Research the issues and concepts surrounding modern South Africa and the legacy of Apartheid.
- Watch other adaptations of Dickens' 'Oliver Twist'. Consider the main themes and characters motives. How can you imagine this story being set in contemporary cities? Is the story still relevant?

When watching the film:

- How does the visual style and music of the opening sequence draw the audience into the film?
- This film is marketed as being 'Full of local sound and color'. Consider how the film makers have achieved this and how effective they have been in their aim.
- To firmly set Boy Called Twist in reality, not only did Greene shoot on location but he also cast 26 real-life street kids in the movie. Consider how this adds to the overall feel and impact of the film.

After watching the film:

- This film is unusual in that it was funded by 1000 ordinary South Africans who each donated 1000R (about 85) who 'share the desire to see local independent film grow to new heights.' Consider this and look at alternative funding methods for independent films.
- Pallo Jordan, South Africa's minister of arts and culture, criticised the producers for imitating western culture when South Africa had an abundance of home-grown chronicles waiting to be told. Discuss these comments and whether you agree with this statement.
- This film ends well for Twist. Consider and discuss how likely this ending is for real street kids. Look back at the research on homeless charities. Think of a more realistic but still 'happy' ending.

Activities:

- Compare and contrast key scenes from the story from this version of the film and from 'Oliver!' the musical. Scenes to consider include: Oliver/ Twist and the other children drawing straws; Oliver/ Twist asking for more; Oliver/Twist meeting the artful Dodger, Fagin teaching him how to pick pocket. Particularly pay attention to music, costume, lighting, setting and camera style. (See www.lff.org.uk/education for full lesson plan and worksheets)
- Write a diary entry as Twist from one of the key moments in the film.
- Write a review of this film.
- South Africa as a location is used to great effect in this film. From the remote dusty countryside village where Twist is born, through the farm land where he is sent to work, to the slums of Cape Town to the rich suburbs overlooking Table Mountain where he ends his journey. Design and annotate a location map of all the places used. Collect pictures from the internet and photographs from holiday brochures to decorate the map.

Reviews and Further info:

No place like home

By Mary Corrigan

The Sunday Independent

www.sundayindependant.co.za

It may not be anything like London circa 1830, but when a young starved orphan coloured boy in present-day South Africa utters the most famous line in literary and cinematic history: "Please, sir, I want some more", it carries as much gravity as Charles Dickens had intended in his novel *Oliver Twist*.

South African film director Tim Greene has taken Charles Dickens's heart-wrenching yarn and given it a new twist. *Boy Called Twist* tells the story of an orphan who finds himself trapped in Cape Town's dark underbelly, where crime, murder and abuse are commonplace.

To firmly set *Boy Called Twist* in reality, not only did Greene shoot on location but he also cast 26 real-life street kids in the movie. These homeless cast members gave Greene invaluable input.

"I had written the characters of the street children as brash. I had based my perception of the persona of a homeless child on the encounters I had with kids at traffic lights. In person I found them to be scared and tired."

During the filming of the movie, Greene observed how the street children transformed.

"They gradually had this awareness that they were needed and that had a remarkable effect. It was like watching flowers open."

While Greene adapted Dickens's story to a modern-day account that is plausibly rooted in a South African setting, he felt that the shocking circumstances that *Twist* finds himself trapped in are not too dissimilar to situations that many orphaned children experience today.

"Reading Dickens's novel I realised that it read like a contemporary story. Although South Africa is a progressive country, what was happening in London in the 1830s deeply resonated with what is taking place in South Africa now," says the 35-year-old director.

Greene suggests that his decision to adapt Dickens's narrative was also a "strategic choice".

"I needed to be able to sell a story that I could tell quickly. To sell the film all I needed to say was: it's a modern take on *Oliver Twist* set in Cape Town and everyone had an instant picture of what I was trying to capture."

As *Boy Called Twist* was Greene's first foray into filmmaking, he also needed to make a film that would be an instant hit.

"*Oliver Twist* has been the most popular piece of literature that has been adapted for film. The story has been adapted for film 25 times. It obviously works."

Greene found reworking a story that was not originally set in South Africa to be liberating.

"South African filmmakers and artists tend to fall into the trap of being politically correct. Because this story is not set in South Africa, it has no inherent political undertones. This allowed me to tell a personal story."

Greene is not the first writer/director to transform a canonised western narrative into a South African film; Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* was turned into the award-winning film *uCarmen eKhayelitsha*.

Although the film was a success with audiences around the world, Pallo Jordan, South Africa's minister of arts and culture, criticised the producers for imitating western culture when South Africa had an abundance of home-grown chronicles waiting to be told.

Greene says he feels comfortable using a western narrative as the basis for his movie. "I am a cross-cultural being. I make no apologies for being a European in an African paradigm. Dickens is part of my heritage.

"It is good to tell original stories but local stories have come under fire too.

"Europeans don't own their stories. There is a world of storytelling out there; we should not have to confine ourselves in any way."

In writing the script, Greene had to take each of Dickens's characters and find their *raison d'être* in the context of a contemporary African city.

For the character of Mrs Corlett, the woman who runs the orphanage where Twist first makes his home, Greene had to justify reasons for her being aloof and not caring. "I had to discover why a place of care would become a place of neglect. In the context of a rural orphanage where the HIV epidemic has taken its toll it seemed credible that she would seal herself off from the suffering around her in order to cope."

While South African audiences will be able to identify with the characters of *Boy Called Twist*, Greene's deft direction results in a pleasing cacophony of visual imagery that juxtaposes the magnificence of Cape Town's mountain ranges with the murky and dilapidated areas of the city.

Greene may be fervent fan of Cape Town, where he grew up, but he is also passionate about filmmaking.

Since the age of 13, Greene has been plotting a path towards making his first full-length feature. In his teens he attended The Young Filmmakers Workshop.

As there were no film schools around for a young Greene to attend after he finished school he went to the University of Cape Town to do a degree in drama.

After paying his dues as a runner and props assistant he started directing TV adverts and TV series such as *Zero Tolerance* and *Tsha Tsha*.

Greene initially found it difficult to get funding for *Boy Called Twist*. So he came up with a novel idea; he asked 1 000 members of the public to each invest R1 000.

Pledges poured in from around the country and *Boy Called Twist* went into production.

While his film was well received at Cannes, Greene does not expect to make any money from it.

Fortunately, he says, he is not involved in filmmaking for the money.

"Filmmaking is the pinnacle of creativity; it's a medium that brings together literature, music and art. It has been such a tremendous treat to be able to do it."

Jocelyn Newmarch

<http://www.iafrica.com/>

<http://entertainment.iafrica.com/movies/newrelease/494718.htm>

It's so refreshing to watch a really good movie — one that does everything right, from cinematography and direction to acting and script — and realise that it's a local production. One reason why local movies aren't always as good as they should be is the lack of funding available, forcing directors to cut corners and keep costs down as much as possible. But 'Twist's' director, Tim Greene, came up with a novel solution to this ubiquitous problem.

Getting someone to give you R1-million for your movie is nearly impossible. Finding two people to each give you R500 000 is almost as hard. But... finding a thousand people to each give you R1000 might just be do-able.

That's the innovative premise Tim Greene came up with, and his thousand funders each get an "associate producer" credit at the end of the film. Thanks to them, and grants from South African organisations, 'Twist' is one of very few films that can call itself wholly South African.

Greene's creativity extends from financing through to storytelling, and his adaptation of Charles Dickens' 'Oliver Twist' is extremely well-done. For once, Cape Town isn't standing in for Los Angeles or Miami, but is allowed to be its own contradictory self. And despite the quintessentially Victorian concerns of the original novel, Greene has transposed it into a movie that sensitively depicts South African socio-economic concerns.

A young mother dies in childbirth on the lonely West Coast, and her son given to the local orphanage, run by Mrs Corlet, who names her charges after the classics.

'Oliver' was already taken, so the newcomer (Jarrid Gedult) becomes 'Twist'.

After a cruel adventure at the hands of the local undertaker's household, Twist decides it's time for him to seek his fortune in the big city, where he soon falls into the hands of Fagin (Leslie Fong), Bill Sykes (Bart Fouche), and his prostitute girlfriend Nancy (Kim Engelbrecht), who all have their own motives for looking out for the boy. Then, true to the Dickens tale, he is taken in by a kindly gentleman (Bill Curry) — his grandfather, though neither realise their relationship.

The action is pacy, the villains memorable and cruel, the heroes never overplay themselves. Greene has picked the cream of South African actors for his feature, and they're a pleasure to watch. I particularly enjoyed Fong's rendition of Fagin.

Street children are an everyday feature of Cape Town life, and with heartwrenching faces and beseeching hands at every red light, it's easy to feel overwhelmed.

Too often, our helplessness is transformed into callousness. But 'A Boy Called Twist' never fails to remind us that these kids are just as human as we are, without sentimentalising or proselytising.

About the filmmaker: "Like Oliver himself, *Twist's* director Tim Greene asked for more. And he got it, though it was no easy task. At the beginning of 2003, Greene began raising the R1 million he needed to shoot the screenplay that had grown out of his adaptation of Dickens. He stood in the Cape Town and Johannesburg traffic with a placard reading: "Hi, my name is Tim. I am an independent film maker. I have written a film called 'Twist'. I am looking for 1000 investors with R1000 to spare. Please help!" By the end of May 2003, the 33-year-old had 837 investors - or, as he calls them, Lucky Champions. Then ACT weighed in with R100 000 and the magic million mark was reached. Greene could start turning his screenplay into a 16mm film."

The film employed a crew of 60 and a cast of 40 in a shooting period of 21 days that included preparation and wrap. Greene notes that "the 26 street kids who appeared in the film (spending six working days on set) gained valuable knowledge and are now in an infinitely stronger position to be selected for the Linzi Thomas programme to get kids off the streets and into the film industry."

Soul Beat Africa: Communication For Change website

<http://www.comminit.com/africa/materials/ma2004/materials-1765.html>

FINANCING TWIST

Boy Called Twist is a groundbreaking innovation in South African film finance. In 2002 director Tim Greene put out a call that he was looking for 1000 investors who could each risk R1000.00. Spreading the risk across a broad community of like-minded people, he was able to break the deadlock of risk-aversion that holds the SA film industry captive.

Twisted Pictures (Ltd.) was formed to offer maximum investor security, and pledges poured in. By August 2003 a million rands had been secured. The Arts and Culture Trust contributed a grant and Spier Arts Trust invested in the project.

Principal photography lasted 21 days and was completed on schedule and within budget.

The offline edit of the film was screened for the National Film and Video Foundation (SA) in 2004 and on the basis of the screening, a further R1,000,000.00 was committed to the film's completion. The final finance required was invested by Graham Beck Wines.

This means that the *Boy Called Twist* can now claim the rare distinction of being a completely South African financed film.