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ONE FINE DAY FILMS with ANNO'S AFRICA in co-production with GINGER INK FILMS present SAMSON ODHIAMBO LEILA DAYAN OPOU in "SOUL BOY"

CINEMATOGRAPHER CHRISTIAN ALMESBERGER PRODUCTION DESIGNER NAIMA MUNGAI SOUND MIXER BIG WILLIE KIUMI EDITOR NG'ETHE GITUNGO ORIGINAL MUSIC XAVER VON TREYER SUPERVISING DIRECTOR TOM TYKWER SUPERVISING EDITORS SABINE SMIT GUY WILSON  
SOUND SUPERVISOR MATTHIAS LEMPERT ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS BEE GILBERT DIRK WILUTZKY CO-PRODUCERS SIOBHAIN "GINGER" WILSON GUY WILSON VERENA RAHMIG SARIKA HEMI LAKHANI  
WITH KIND SUPPORT OF ARRI FILM & TV SERVICES GOETHE-INSTITUT KENYA GÖTEBORG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL HUBERT BALS FUND ROTTERDAM  
PRODUCED BY MARIE STEINMANN TOM TYKWER SCREENPLAY BY BILLY KAHORA DIRECTED BY HAWA ESSUMAN





## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

Nairobi, Kenya. 14 year-old Abila lives with his parents in Kibera, one of the largest slums in East Africa. One morning the teenager discovers his father ill and delirious. Someone has stolen his soul, mumbles the father as he sits huddled in a corner. Abila is shocked and confused but wants to help his father and goes in search of a suitable cure. Supported by his friend Shiku who is the same age as him, he learns that his father has gambled his soul away in the company of a spiritual woman. The teenager doesn't want to believe it and sets about looking for the witch. When he finally discovers her in the darkest corner of the ghetto, she gives him seven challenging tasks to save his father's lost soul. Abila embarks on an adventurous journey which leads him right through the microcosm of his home town.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

Our hero is 14-years old. We meet him one Saturday morning in Kibera, where he lives together with his parents.

Instead of opening his small shop, Abi's father lies listless in a corner of the single room in which the family lives. Abi is very worried as he's never seen his father like this. Admittedly he has been drinking, and is – as is so often the case – terribly hung-over. But this time it's different. Abi's father reports that he's distracted and not feeling himself, and that the previous night he made a terrible mistake which has cost him his soul. Abi is shocked and runs to his mother in the weaving room but she dismisses him. Abi is unable to persuade her that this time it looks really bad for his father. Abi has to fend for himself. More importantly he doesn't quite know how he can help.

On the street Abi meets the aging Macharia who used to work for his father as a guard. Macharia believes that "Nyawawa" a spiritual woman, who wanders Kibera's dark nights, has stolen his father's soul. Abi doesn't believe in witchcraft. Macharia explains to him that his father has gambled his life away and it is now only right that he has fallen into Nyawawa's hands. Abi runs away. He knows that he's the one who can save his father's soul.

On his way Abi meets his friend Shiku, although he doesn't have any time for her now. His friends Bojo, Willie and Kaka are always making fun of the couple. Shiku is upset by what she hears as the boys misbehave, showing off and displaying stolen mobiles, and telling her about daring tests of courage on the railway lines. But Abi's got other problems now and asks his friend about the mysterious Nyawawa. He simply cannot believe that that a being which until this morning he believed to be a myth could suddenly become a reality. Shiku, who up until that moment has been standing quietly next to him, begins to explain how Nyawawa came to be like this. The boys are spellbound and try to dismiss Shiku's story as a horror story. Then suddenly two shots are fired, and Abi's friends storm off.

Shiku asks Abi why he hangs around with boys like that, and how it is possible that in contrast he treats her so differently when his friends are not around. Frustrated, Abi marches on ahead. He has to find Nyawawa. He's afraid that if he doesn't do anything then his father will die. Shiku realises how serious it is for him and leads her friend to the witch's hut.

When Abi finally stands in front of Nyawawa he discovers that she is both beautiful and frightening. His courage impresses her, and so she gives him a chance to save his father's soul. She gives Abi seven challenges which he has to overcome without any help from others before the sun goes down the next day.

The first is: "Disappear from public gaze in the guise of another"  
The second: "Pay someone's debts without stealing from anybody else"  
The third: "Help a sinner get out of trouble, without judging him"  
The fourth: "Explore a new world"  
The fifth: "Use your knowledge to save someone's life"  
The sixth: "Discover something that can't be understood and understand the difference."  
And finally the seventh: "Introduce yourself to the giant snake, the one which you are most afraid of"

Each of the tasks which Nyawawa has given Abi presents him with a very special challenge – each one brings with it a risk and a reward.

Following a journey full of adventure and obstacles through his home town, Abi is in fact able to overcome all the challenges, so the next morning he makes his way back home. The small family shop is open. His father is serving his customers. Everything is as if nothing had happened. However, only Abi knows what he has learnt, how you can take control of your destiny.

## PRESS NOTES

### KIBERA

SOUL BOY is set in Kibera, one of the largest slums in the African continent, in the middle of Nairobi, Kenya. Kibera is a chaotic slum-city built out of temporary housing and is infamous for its high level of squalor. Children have to grow up quickly here as they learn to fend for themselves. Suspicion and fear still lingers as the Luo and Kikuyu communities recover from the 2007/2008 post election violence which saw neighbour turn on neighbour. Despite all of this the cohesion and the dignity of the people who live here is remarkable. Alongside the day to day tension, the social environment is dominated by a universal solidarity and common desire to maintain a working community.

### THE PROJECT

In September 2008 Marie Steinmann and Tom Tykwer teamed up with Ginger and Guy Wilson (from the Nairobi based production company Ginger Ink) to set up a project which would build on the work of their One Fine Day association and the British NGO partnership Anno's Africa - both of which have specialised in developing creative opportunities for those working in developing countries.

Operating within the framework of a manageable budget, the project was intended to develop a film workshop in Nairobi. Led by Tom Tykwer, a small team of professional filmmakers would create a feature film in Kibera by working together with a much larger crew of young local apprentices. The first goal was to integrate Nairobi's residents, especially the slum inhabitants, those who were curious and wanted to learn the practical skills of feature film making, so that they could learn technical skills which would create job prospects and leave inspiration in the communities.

The project quickly developed its own dynamic energy. The Kenyan author Billy Kahora outlined the idea for a film, which translated the secrets and myths of this multilayered social microcosm into a modern, inspiring fairytale-like story: SOUL BOY.

The young Ghanaian-Kenyan filmmaker Hawa Essuman (born in 1980) took over the directing reins. SOUL BOY is her film debut, having worked successfully in local theatre. In the meantime she is developing her second feature film, which is set on the coast of Kenya.

Following an intensive period of research in Kibera the screenplay took approximately six weeks to complete. Casting the film was spread out across the whole city: with the support of Anno's Africa, the production searched for their young lead actors in Kibera's slums, schools and alleyways. One week of pre-production was all that remained to prepare for the 13-day shoot. SOUL BOY was finally shot between 17 November and 1 December 2008.





Tom Tykwer, Hawa Essuman, Billy Kahora

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

SOUL BOY shows Nairobi's contrasting worlds: the rich and the poor, the beautiful and the sad, folklore and the modern life. The film shows all the things, which influence and contradict contemporary our society seen through the eyes of a 14-year old boy from Kibera, the giant slum in which over a million Kenya's live.

In this contrasting microcosm a boy goes in search of his father's soul and discovers himself. SOUL BOY gives the filmmaker the possibility to subjectively observe this pulsating and multilayered environment from the perspective of a young and thoughtful protagonist - and with that to conquer frontiers.

Abila's search for his father's soul is driven by a belief in myths and fairytales, which are still very much alive in our modern society - independent of the belief in a Christian or Muslim God. SOUL BOY also demonstrates how different and complex realities are presented, how they are valued and how you overcome them. The passion, with which Abi attempts to rescue his father, represents our desire for fulfilment. For ourselves, our families, our community - for our own existence.

*Hawa Essuman*

## THE VISUAL CONCEPT

Kibera, Africa's biggest slum, never really sleeps. It is unimaginably overcrowded; it is constantly busy and bustling. The constant growth of temporary housing is represented by the used and faded colours with which the huts are painted. They represent the different stages of decline.

The roads of Kibera are crammed with pedestrians, street-traders, cars, craftsmen – and especially children. They are everywhere and create a strong sense of community, by bringing together every mother, every father and every family. Many of them are orphans. Their desperate need, modest homes and worn-out clothes give a true picture of the bitter poverty they experience here.

The intensity and speed of Abi's story is conveyed by the fact that the actors and the camera are constantly moving. We follow Abi with a hand-held camera and so experience the pressure and uncertainty which our protagonist is under. Then there are again quiet, thoughtful moments when we look inside ourselves.

We try to capture both the urgency and poetry of this particular universe; following our young hero Abila, whose energy and curiosity leads us through the labyrinth.



Leila Dayan Opou, Samson Odhiambo

## PRODUCTION NOTES

For a number of years Tom Tykwer's partner Marie Steinmann has been working in Nairobi's slums on the arts workshop "Art Education for Children" which has been organised by NGO's Anno's Africa. It is from this initiative that the German association One Fine Day was established. "I wanted to take part, but the only thing I know is film," explains Tykwer laughing. So the idea for a film workshop was developed from which a genuine film experience could at last be established: SOUL BOY.

In the schools and on the streets of Nairobi apprentices for the workshop were recruited, who were then trained in all the creative and organisational disciplines which are part of professional filmmaking. In cooperation with One Fine Day and Anno's Africa the production was set directly in Kibera and three other slums. Here dozens of children went through the casting process until finally with only a few days to go before the start of production Leila Dayan Opu was discovered in the Mathare slum, who fitted the role of Shiku perfectly. The search for the lead-role Abila ended just one day before shooting began when the casting team, who were also being supported by the local film initiative Hot Sun Foundation, discovered Samson Odhiambo. Overnight the 13 year-old Samson, who had grown up in Kibera, became the star of a feature film.

With only one week of genuine pre-production SOUL BOY was shot in the space of 13 days in Kibera. Hawa Essuman the young Ghanian-Kenyan filmmaker took over the directing reigns with Tom Tykwer as mentor at her side.

Screenwriter Kahora and Essuman relied on the support of Nairobi's local production company Ginger Ink for this heart-felt project. "Of course there have been films about Africa, such as The Constant Gardener by Fernando Meirelles," says producer Ginger Wilson who also played a small acting role in SOUL BOY. "These films are aimed at an international audience. They are stories about white people in Africa, seen from that perspective. Whilst that is all fine and perfectly good cinema, in these films Kenya is used as a backdrop and is seen from an observers point of view. This is not what Kenyan films are interested in communicating; Kenyan stories happen to be from Africa, but not "about Africa" - they are about the realities, relationships and concerns of normal daily life.

"There is no shortage of stories," confirms director Hawa Essuman. "Billy Kahora has written a story which from his point of view represents Kenya and in particular Kibera. And SOUL BOY is definitely a local project. Our crew was made of up of 80 percent local people, and it was filmed in our own language."

"Our local filmmakers work very hard to be able to make their films," continues Essuman. "We still need to learn how we can find a larger forum for our films, so that they will also be seen and heard; because that is what we would wish for ourselves."

SOUL BOY is an important step in the right direction. With their independent production company One Fine Day Films ([www.onefinedayfilms.org](http://www.onefinedayfilms.org)) Tom Tykwer, Marie Steinmann and project manager Sarika Lakhani would like to set up more film projects which are about and located in East Africa; working together with ambitious filmmakers from the region to develop projects, while also attracting international support for local productions. "In Kenya there are many talented individuals in all sectors of film production" says Tykwer. "We hope with our support that at least a few of these projects will be realised. At the same time we would like to help develop and build up a network of co-workers for ambitious films from this region."

A good example of the general enthusiasm for this project came about when shot a scene in which a mobile-phone thief flees through the streets of Kibera. "We had organised 20 extras" explains Hawa Essuman, "But then suddenly everyone on the street started to take part - simply everyone. That would never have worked if the community wasn't emphatically supporting our project. This support is priceless. "

Production coordinator Caroline Ngesa hopes that SOUL BOY shows, "How cooperative and helpful people are here. Everyone should know that they are welcome to come to Kibera and they shouldn't expect any difficulties. "

## CAST

Abila	Samson Odhiambo
Shiku	Leila Dayan Opou
Nyawawa	Krysteen Savane
Macharia	Frank Kimani
Abi's Father	Joab Ogolla
Abis's Mother	Lucy Gachanja
Aunt Susan	Katherine Damaris
Bojo	Kevin Onyango Omondi
Kaka	Calvin Shikuku Odhiambo
Willie	Nordeen Abdulghani
Claire	Siobhain "Ginger" Wilson
Brian	Nick Reding
Amy	McLean Wilson
Rafael	Jomo Wilson
Thief	Godfrey Ojiambo
Angry Man	Rogers Otieno
Matatu Tout	John Githui
Mr. Kamangu	Tony Rimwah
S.A.F.E. Stage Father	Juma Williams
S.A.F.E. Stage Mother	Sharleen Njeri
Kama	Micheal Babu
Kimani	Peter Paul Njogu
Bibi Okello	Lydia Makori
Mama Wekesa	Aida Mulafu
Mama Akinyi	Rose Adhiambo
Weaver Woman	Consolata Apondi
Gatekeeper	Gilbert K. Lukalia
Old Couple - Man	Jones Onyango Ajwala
Old Couple - Woman	Clementina Makokha
Auctioneer	Christopher Abuga
Thug 1	Douglas Asila
Thug 2	Alex Jadolo
Dead Man	Anthony Waweru



## FILMMAKERS / CREW

Directed by	Hawa Essuman
Written by	Billy Kahora
Produced by	Marie Steinmann Tom Tykwer
Co-Producers	Siobhain "Ginger" Wilson Guy Wilson Verena Rahmig Sarika Hemi Lakhani
Associate Producers	Bee Gilbert Dirk Wilutzky
Director of Photography	Christian Almesberger
Production Designer	Naima Mungai
Editor	Ng'ehte Gitungo
Sound Mixer	Big Willie Kiumi
Original Music by	Xaver von Treyer
1st Assistant Director	Tony Rimwah
Production Manager Kenya	Rebecca Chandler
Production Coordinator Germany	Svenja Rieck
Supervising Director	Tom Tykwer
Supervising Cinematographer	Christian Almesberger
Supervising Editors	Sabine Smit Guy Smit
Sound Supervisor / Re-Recording Mixer	Matthias Lempert



SOUL BOY Cast & Crew

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Format	35mm
Ratio	1:2.35
Sound	Dolby SRD
Running time	60 minutes
Country of origin	Kenya Germany
Date of production	2010
Festivals 2010	Gothenburg International Film Festival Rotterdam International Film Festival Berlin International Film Festival



## THE PARTNERS

Thanks to ARRI Film & TV Services' generous support and sponsorship, it was possible to shoot the 60-minutes film on 35mm.

The project was supported during and after production by the Goethe Institute, Kenya.

Financial support for post-production was given by the Gothenburg Film Festival fund as well as from the Hubert Bals fund at the Rotterdam Film Festival.

SOUL BOY will premiere at these two festivals in January and February 2010, this will be followed by a special screening of the film at the Berlin Film Festival.

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