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ORIGINAL TITLE: Buladó
DIRECTOR: Eché Janga
CAST: Tiara Richards, Everon Jackson Hooi, Felix de Rooy
GENRE: Adventure | Drama | Fantasy
LENGTH: 86'
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Curacao, The Netherlands
LANGUAGE: Papiamento, Dutch
PRODUCTION COMPANY: Keplerfilm
WORLD SALES: Picture Tree International

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

Kenza, young and headstrong, lives on a junkyard in the countryside of Curaçao with her father, Ouira, and grandfather, Weljo. The two men are true polar opposites: Ouira is a determined, rational police officer, while Weljo identifies with the island’s spirituality and native inhabitants. As Weljo wishes to prepare his passing to the world of spirits, the relationship between Ouira and Weljo starts to escalate and eleven-year-old Kenza searches for her own path between the two extremes. The down-to-earth mentality of Ouira no longer offers her all that she needs and, slowly, she opens up to the more mystical and comforting traditions of her grandfather.
LONG SYNOPSIS

Kenza is raised by her father and grandfather, who are complete opposites in almost every way. Her father, Ouira, believes in Western rationality, speaks Dutch and is a police officer. Grandpa Weljo, however, is a spiritual man who will only speak Papiamento and has a strong connection with the island’s ancient customs and nature. Both men stubbornly cling to their own outlook on life, causing regular clashes with one other. Although, for Kenza, the down-to-earth mentality of her father has always been something to hold on to while she can’t always follow her grandfather’s spiritual whims, she encounters more and more bumps in her path that go beyond reason. How do you deal with loss and grief? Grandfather Weljo has his own ideas about this and is, according to his own words, getting close to ‘completing his earthly existence’, which triggers something life-embracing in the relationships within the small family. Weljo brings Kenza into contact with the old traditions of the island, offering her more comfort than her father’s way of rationalizing can. Ouira sees his daughter and father drifting away from him and is increasingly confronted with his own actions and mindset.

The three try to free themselves, each in their own manner, from imposed ways of life. Increasingly, Kenza learns that she needs to choose her own path and find a way to grieve for the loss of her mother that she will never get to know.
Director Bio

Director Eché Janga graduated from the Netherlands Film Academy in 2010 with his graduation film MO, which immediately won several prizes. After directing various short films Eché directed his debut feature HELIUM in 2014 which premiered in competition at the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) and won two national film awards (Golden Calves) for Best Camera and Best Music. BULADÓ is Eché’s second feature film as a director.
As a filmmaker I am aiming to show the elusive, something that allows people’s differences to disappear; be it love, mysticism or an existential dilemma. In BULADÓ, this elusive comes to the forefront in the form of mysticism. In Afro-Caribbean culture mysticism is still more present than in the Western culture. Since I am a descendant of both, I play with this contrast in BULADÓ. The story was derived from an old slave saga that was passed on in my family for generations, finally ending up with me. By bringing this story to the big screen, I hope to open eyes to the beauty and power of the underexposed stories of our Dutch colonial history.

The Antillean culture is mainly an oral culture. The indigenous people (Caquetios) as well as the enslaved and their owners are the basis of this culture. Weljo’s story did not come into being just out of the blue. On the island there is a mountain around which a legend has emerged. The slaves who had fled the salt mines and had not eaten the salt of the mines could fly from there back to Africa, to their freedom.

Close to this mountain are caves where part of the indigenous population lived that helped to free the enslaved from their chains. They could jump off the mountain at night and the wind would take them back to the land from which they had been stolen. These places really do exist and the tales from this history have developed in various ways. One of my relatives knows almost all of them. Freedom is a recurring theme in these stories. It is special for me to be able to process one of these stories in a film and to contribute in this way to Antillean culture.

It is a special feeling to have brought this story that I have been carrying with me for fourteen years on screen. Although I consider myself an agnostic, mysticism - especially in nature - plays an important role in my life. Just like Kenza, I have doubts and occasionally tangle between rationality and spirituality. Despite my indecisiveness, this contradiction also makes life exciting and adventurous to me. Ultimately, what we’re not sure about is, what I believe to be, the most interesting in life.
Esther Duysker (1985) studied writing for theatre and her debut film feature screenplay DAG (directed by Tamar van den Dop) was nominated for the national film awards (Golden Calf) in 2011. In 2015, Esther joined the music theater company Orkater with her theater collective Sir Duke. Their joint performance of DE BLACKOUT VAN ’77 became a hit at Oerol theatre festival and their second performance HATTA & DE KOM (Theater na de Dam) received a nomination for the BNG Bank Theater Prize 2018. Her adaptation of Shakespeare’s OTHELLO for the National Theater (directed by Daria Bukvic) was selected for the Netherlands Theater Festival 2020, and in 2017 Esther was nominated for the Black Achievement Award. Next to her original plays, Esther translated and edited the acclaimed Broadway classics A RAISIN IN THE SUN, BENEATHA’S PLACE and CLYBOURNE PARK in 2015. Esther is currently working on an episode of a new drama series for Pupkin i.c.w. BNNVARA and she is writing a children’s book in close collaboration with visual artist Brian Elstak.
In Afro-Caribbean culture, many things take place “below the surface”. The older generations rarely talk about the past, although I notice that this is starting to change. Some feelings and thoughts are taboo. To show pain and vulnerability and making your voice heard often provokes severe reactions, though I also notice an increased openness. A younger generation claims its place, without renouncing the older generation. I think it is important to highlight the interactions of this undercurrent and the thoughts behind it, because the unspoken can often be so revealing. A special and powerful individuality then emerges, which is also what we try to communicate with BULADÓ.

When I developed the character of Kenza, I often thought of myself. Kenza is the tougher version of me as a kid. A young girl with emotional baggage that expresses her strong willpower as soon as she realizes that she has a voice. She is a gentle person in a rough-looking world. For me, this is the poetry and rawness that characterizes the island. Poetry and rawness that often characterizes my writings for theatre, which I also tried to incorporate into the dialogues of BULADÓ. Writing this film made me think consciously and unconsciously about the cultural worlds in which we find ourselves and how we interpret them. The need to find yourself within these worlds, and especially the way to get there, is what I want to pass on to the audience.

In addition to “navigating between cultures, spirituality and reason”, life and death also play an important role. To me, death is inseparable from life and I know, from my own experience, how great loss and sorrow can be when losing a parent, but just as great is the comfort I experience in the spiritual signs that sometimes come to me. They give strength and courage to go to extremes.
COMPOSER BIO

Christiaan Verbeek (Texel, 1984) is a Dutch composer and musician, graduated at the Conservatory of Amsterdam. While rooted in jazz and classical music, his musical scope and interests have widened considerably during the last ten years and brought him to diverse collaborations and requests. For Janga’s Helium, he won a Golden Calf for Best Music 2014. In 2015, he was commissioned to write a new original work for a program dedicated to the 80th birthday of Arvo Pärt. Christiaan Verbeek worked with many musicians and ensembles from The Netherlands and abroad. For Boy Meets Gun (Joost van Hezik, 2019, selected for the Busan International Film Festival) he worked with the world-class harpist Lavinia Meijer. Next to film, Christiaan writes music for theatre, in which he often plays live as well. In 2021 he will work with the Un Certain Regard winning Ukrainian director Sergei Loznitsa on his documentary On The Natural History of Destruction.

www.christiaanverbeek.com
Already within the writing process, Eché knew that music would have an important and powerful role in the film, and that it would be a very honorable task to find a powerful musical voice that could cope with the emotional impact, the mysticism and the spiritual experiences of Buladó. With Helium (2014), we already found out how music really could add in such a way. Again, we chose an organ as an important instrument, which could represent the earth and the spiritual search, the physical wind through pipes linked with the wind on Curaçao and Weljo’s Spirit Tree in the film. With strings I love to add subtle trembling, radiant fields of sound, but in Buladó they also lead the bigger emotional moments. For Kenza and the relation with her mother, I was haunted by the sound of a bowed vibraphone, which carries not only a mysterious singing, but also very vulnerable quality. Together with some gentle piano and solo violin for intimate scenes and some rhythmical parts, the score for Buladó helps to tell what Buladó does. In a strong way, with sensitive layers and with space for reflection and sorrow. All music I’ve recorded was recorded with real instruments to underpin the soul that this film deserves.
Gregg Telussa (1978) graduated from cinematography at the Netherlands Film Academy in 2007. After his studies he worked on several national and international projects, both for commercials, shorts, music videos, documentaries and feature films. The film ANVERS (director: Martijn Maria Smits) won the national film award (Golden Calf) for Best Television Film in 2009. The film BETWEEN 10 AND 12 (director: Peter Hoogen.doorn) was selected for Venice Days 2014. THE DAY MY FATHER BECAME A BUSH (director: Nicole van Kilsdonk) won the first prize at KinoKino Film Festival and the ECFA Award at JEF Festival. Furthermore, the film A CERTAIN KIND OF SILENCE (director: Michal Hogenauer) has won several nominations on international festivals.

At the moment, Gregg Telussa is working on two NETFLIX originals, the international documentary series HUMAN PLAYGROUND and a series of six episodes that takes place in Amsterdam in the 80s.
To me, Buladó is an important film with an important story that needs to be told. What I liked about it most when I read the script, was the magical and spiritual undercurrent. I knew that I was going to have to play with these elements. During the shooting process, I focused on the credibility and on how I could visualize the urgency of the story into meaningful imagery.

During my first time on Curaçao, a couple of things directly stood out about this island in the middle of the Caribbean Sea: the suffocating heat, the continuously present wind, the rough grounds and rigid vegetation and the sky that looks like a landscape of clouds. For me, in a way, this scenery of Curaçao forms a metaphor for life in general.

The preparing of the shooting has been an important phase in the process. Working together intensively with the director in one place for a long time helped a lot. While photographing the island, I archived several locations and studied the light. I thereby internalized all the places. By then sharing these photos with the rest of the crew, a collective image came into being of where we wanted the film to go.

As our main character is a young girl, we wanted a filming style that entailed a lot of freedom for the actors. At the same time, we wanted the rigor of a decoupage in which every shot would bring you further in the story. This way, a calm rhythm came into being. A variety of being close in the moment and taking distance to show the context and the landscape. With this physical distancing, one can mentally be brought even closer.

For the magic-realistic elements in the film we relied on realism. These moments came into being in the reality and the sensitivity of the characters to look at the world in a different manner. These ambient moments became a cooperation between sound and image without further optical effects. With the decoupage of the scenes, this conversation continued and often did not only focus on image, but certainly also on the sound that accompanies these shots.
Interview with Director and Writer

In his second feature, director Eché Janga mixes an Afro-Caribbean mythological lore, in which the history of slavery echoes, with a personal quest for redemption. In an attic in Amsterdam, the idea for a magical-realistic feature film was born after Eché had discovered a written story by his uncle, Orlando. The story is based on a saga of the desperate escape act of local slaves seeking freedom from the salt mines. “In the legend, the fleeing slaves could go to a nearby mountain from which they would jump off and grow wings that would carry them back to Africa into freedom.” describes Janga. This story has been passed on orally over generations. “Though each generation adds their own interpretation to the story, the essence remains. It’s about a quest for freedom.”

Elusive phenomena are central to the work of Eché Janga. He looks for themes around mystical undercurrents in the human condition. In BULADÔ, the intangible emerges in the immanent Afro-Caribbean spirituality that is inseparable from the island of Curaçao. The director adapted the legend in collaboration with screenwriter Esther Duysker, who immediately embraced the idea. Duysker aims to unearth complex human emotions in much of her theater work. In BULADÔ, she plays with the contemplation of grief and loss. “Death is a theme in many of my works as well as in my own life. It is something that is often neglected,” says Duysker. Like Janga, the spiritual aspect and the inextricable intertwining of life and death appealed to her. In BULADÔ those elements are rooted in the character of eleven-year-old Kenza who is torn between her agnostic father, Ouira, and her spiritual grandpa, Weljo, while she searches for a connection with her deceased mother, and her inner journey leads to emotional growth in her relationship with her father.

In the screenplay nature, religion and ancestor worship guides the characters in their quest for redemption: It is the power of the whispering wind, the spirit tree and the vibrating energy of the island where the blood, sweat and tears of all slaves cry out from the dry earth. Duysker says “I feel a strong relationship with Kenza and through the loss of my own mother I was able to put these emotions in Kenza’s character.”

Duysker first wrote the dialogues in Dutch before most of them were translated into Papiamento. “We sat in my office for about a year to build the structure of the story. In my view every char-
acter must have its own language. I weigh every word,” says Duysker. “The beauty of the island is poetic and contains a rawness that is represented by Kenza’s father, Ouira. It corresponds with his agnosticism while the poetry is present in the language of Kenza’s grandfather, Weljo.”
In the film, Weljo and Kenza communicate in Papiamento. Janga says “The reason that Ouira speaks mostly Dutch is because he is concerned about Kenza’s future and believes she can only succeed in life if she leaves the island for the Netherlands and masters the language.” But once overcome by emotions, Ouira himself falls back into the local Papiamento.
In the dynamic of the small family, there is hardly any room for openly discussing sensitive matters. The eloquence of the silence comes out in a furious look, a much-needed hug or in small, loving moments of connection, like Ouira combing Kenza’s hair with her mother’s comb.
“While in theatre the story is completely driven by the words, in film you have more space for the imagery and silence, which is much more expressive,” says Duysker. Janga: “More and more dialogue disappeared, the closer we got to the final version. For me, film is mostly about what is not outspoken.” Duysker adds: “As a writer, it was an exciting challenge for me to follow this creative process with Eché.”
Our working title, Flying Fish Don’t Drown, ultimately felt a bit too long. From Piská buladó, which means flying fish in Papiamentu, we settled on Buladó because we felt it’s meaning ‘to take off’ or ‘whatever that takes off’ was more to the point as it stands for changeability of life: the unspeakable dance between freedom and death where the spirit eventually rises.
BULADÓ is recorded entirely in Bandabou, a region in the west of Curaçao. The rugged, but attractive, landscape resonated with the image Eché had envisioned for years. However, the owner of the perfect house with a junkyard we found in Bandabou, did not initially wish to make any deal or accept the money we could offer to shoot the film on his land. Still, Eché remained devoted to the location and learned a valuable lesson about Caribbean sacred culture. “My cousin who lives on Curaçao, Ramon Janga, went to see the guy again on his veranda, with the whole family around him. Ramon explained the story of Buladó and its roots, which finally got us his per-
mission to shoot there. So, it clearly wasn’t about the money, but about the story and the respect offered. I appreciate that money does not open all doors,” explains Janga. Tiara Richards’ talent sparkles on screen. Casting director Vanessa Werkhoven made a pre-selection for a theatre school and scouted at schools. “We chose the children for an audition from the recorded videos,” says Duysker. Janga adds: “The casting was tough, because we started working with children without any acting experience, but also because of the cultural difference. Parents were sometimes afraid that there would actually be bruia rituals (voodoo) in the film.” The real obstacle was the courtesy standards of Curaçao. The children struggled in their acting because they were afraid let go of polite manners when acting out the role of the tough, but cheeky, character of Kenza.

In the casting, Eché Janga, together with the acting coach Roley Kelkboom, managed to light the fire in Tiara. “It even went so far that Roley unexpectedly picked her up and put her on a table where Tiara jumped off and hit him on the back. She was really mad. Tiara became emotional and her tears ran silently,” says Janga. “At his moment everyone realized immediately that we had found Kenza and Tiara discovered the actor in herself. It was a magical moment.”

BULADÓ is a layered portrait of three generations struggling with the past, sorrow and the healing of both. The magic-realistic style of the film displays the amazing value of oral narratives. “Given these universally understandable themes, I’m thrilled that BULADÓ has the chance to appeal to audiences around the world, and at the same time is a tale that the black communities can relate to,” says Duysker.

“The warm relations we had with the local film crew and the Bandabou community was another reward for us as filmmakers. I really felt the love there. Love for the story that Esther and I developed from their oral history,” says Janga. He then adds. “I am proud that they really connected to the film, and I hope the rest of the island will feel the love for Curaçao and its people in BULADÓ as well.”
KEPLERFILM

After working on award-winning films such as THE LOBSTER (Yorgos Lanthimos), BULLHEAD (Michaël R. Roskam), BLIND (Eskil Vogt) and MONOS (Alejandro Landes), longtime friends, Derk-Jan Warrink and Koji Nelissen, founded Keplerfilm in 2016. They are currently working on a broad range of films: shorts and features, local productions and international (co)productions and for any platform available. Through EAVE, ACE and Binger Filmlab, Koji and Derk-Jan were able to expand their international network. Keplerfilm strongly values building a creative breeding ground on which exceptional and talented writers and directors can grow to reach their full potential; inspiring them to find their own personal signatures and to dream big. Keplerfilm’s ambition is to tell heartfelt stories - whether upbeat or sad, always deeply humane and with heart. Telling stories about real people with inescapable struggles and genuine desires, while at the same time always seeking to entertain the audience intellectually.
Everon Jackson Hooi (1982) was born on the island of Curaçao and moved to the Netherlands with his mother when he was eight. After graduating from secondary school, he followed the audio-visual design course at the Graphic Lyceum in Rotterdam. During his studies he was already focusing on his great passion for acting. In 2004, Everon played the role of Ciro Pieterszoon in the drama series DE HERITAGE and a year later became one of the regular faces of the daily series GOOD TIMES; BAD TIMES (2005). Everon has also appeared in the films DOODEIND, NARANJINA, DE KADEKAPERS and DE TV KANTINE and developed his own drama series WESTWIJK.
THE KEY CAST

TIARA RICHARDS

BULADÓ is the screen debut of eleven-year-old Tiara Richards. With no acting experience she was casted at a primary school on Curaçao. Since the long audition period with 42 other girls and during repetitions, Tiara grew a lot. She is a natural who was completely in her element on set. After filming BULADÓ, she started taking theater classes to pursue her future as an actress.

FELIX DE ROOY

Felix de Rooy (1952) is a Curaçao-born visual artist, theater and film director, actor and curator. He has won several film awards, including a Golden Calf for his role in the film AVA EN GABRIEL, the Paul Robeson Prize (Burkina Faso) and the Saúl Yelín Prize (Havana, Cuba) for the film ALMACITA DI DESOLATO. De Rooy grew up in Curaçao, Suriname and Mexico. He was educated at the Free Academy of Psychopoliš in The Hague and received a Master of Arts in Film Directing from New York University in 1982. De Rooy is acutely aware of his Afro-Caribbean identity and uses it in his creative work. Felix creates paintings, drawings, collages and installations, making his statement on the history of slavery, aiming to keep the debate of white and black history alive. His subjects are transculturalism and the ways that different cultures see each other. He calls his style psychic realism; he creates colorful, dreamy images in which human and mythological figures are central.
COMPLETE CREW LIST

DIRECTOR:
Eché Janga

SCREENPLAY:
Eché Janga & Esther Duysker

PRODUCERS:
Keplerfilm, Derk-Jan Warrink & Koji Nelissen

CO-PRODUCERS:
NTR, Marina Bløk / Michel Drenthe

DOP:
Gregg Telussa

EDITOR:
Pelle Asselbergs

COMPOSER:
Christiaan Verbeek

CASTING DIRECTORS:
Vanessa Werkhoven & Susanne Groen

PRODUCTION DESIGNER:
Robert van der Hoop

LINE PRODUCER:
Ben Bouwmeester

SOUND DESIGN:
Mark Glynne & Tom Bijnen

COSTUME DESIGNER:
Josine Immoos

WORLD SALES

Picture Tree International (PTI) is an energetic, fast-growing world sales company with its headquarters in Berlin. The core business is worldwide licensing across all platforms, with the company maintaining a presence in all major film and television markets.

Alongside licensing, PTI is also able to act as your German co-producer and local distributor via a fully integrated business model that offers producers individual sales and financing strategies in a results-driven and transparent partnership, which is essential in today’s ever-changing audiovisual-industry landscape.

PTI’s line-up of films, around 15 each year, is designed to ensure the right mix of arthouse and crossover productions to fully maximize the revenue potential of each film.

Picture Tree International was founded in December 2012 by Andreas Rothbauer and has been run together with his partner and Co-Managing Director Yuan Rothbauer since 2017.