

South Africa: A Lobola Well Worth Paying

By Daniel Dercksen, 5 March 2013

Inspired visionary Henk Pretorius' Fanie Fourie's *Lobola* is a heavenly Romeo and Juliet fable that happily buries old worn-out issues and clichés and celebrates an optimistic New South Africa.

With heartfelt honesty, passion and catching wit, 30-year-old Pretorius knows how to tell a story that unites his upbeat age group with older generations whose futile views of life in South Africa are less hopeful. The three years he has invested in writing the screenplay with Janine Eser (inspired by Nape à Motana' novel), is now paying off, big time. What makes a story truly original is not what you say, but how you express yourself, and with Fanie Fourie's *Lobola*, Pretorius and his team deliver a refreshing and well-crafted film.



Subtle and skilful telling

Pretorius spins moments of absolute magic with his subtle and skilful telling. When Fanie (Eduan van Jaarsveldt), an atypical white Afrikaner collects Dinky (Zethu Dlomo), a non-traditional Zulu girl from the township for their first date, her appearance is reminiscent of a Cinderella mirage and, like a princess, she is on her way to the ball, gloriously dressed in a shimmering green ball gown surrounded by a sea of colourless rural shacks and escorted by her very own prince on a white horse. Fanie's reaction to her natural beauty sums up his earthy and honest humanity, when he catches his breath and says that she looks "exquisite". The humour that stems from this intimate encounter is priceless and shows how important it is to say what we feel, no matter what other people see.

And yes, there are equally brilliant satirical moments that reveal the nature of elitist and snobbish white society (who pays to have the dark pixel removed out of a group family photo), or the idle ignorance of township boys having a party in their backyard to the disturbance of the neighbourhood and being snubbed by Fanie who gives Dinky a universal remote to control their boom box.

When Fanie falls head over heels in love, it is real, and he does not give his newfound love dull flowers, but a floral display you will never forget. With Fanie, Pretorius makes it clear that love does not have any boundaries and most definitely not imprisoned by traditions or conventions.

Battered car wrecks

And when Fanie the "artist panelbeater" proudly shows off his work of art - battered car wrecks in the process of ultimate transformation in his garage - to a gorgeous white girl who carries the approval of his conservative mother (Marga van Rooy), Pretorius waves his wand. Fanie flicks a switch to reveal his magical world through a chorus of neon lights that illuminate his dreams.

Like most South Africans, Fanie's larger-than-life dreams shine brighter than the rainbow of our new nation and are powered by his unrelenting determination to make a better life for himself and show the world who he is without having to be ashamed of anything. Dreams are there to recharge our failed aspirations and, with Fanie Fourie's *Lobola*, the recharge comes with a bonus makeover.

As with *Bakgat* and its sequel, Pretorius knows his market well and with Fanie Fourie's *Lobola* fortunately takes a bold step forward to bravely remove the blinders off others who refuse to embrace the differences that separate.

Old-fashioned bribery and corruption

Pretorius makes it clear that idealists all have a price to pay and that it takes more than good old-fashioned bribery and corruption, or 30 cows, to affect real transformation. The visual impact of Fanie Fourie's *Lobola* is not mere "Kodak moments", but skilfully accentuates the emotional journey of its characters; the visual dynamics tells their own story and amplify the theme and probes the surface of what we see. When Fanie's conservative uncle (Richard van der Westhuizen) cracks racial jokes in the presence of his black gardener (Yule Masiteng), there is something uncomfortably familiar about the situation. When the gardener cracks a joke about black people calling two old white people on a farm an ATM, the uncomfortable silence, followed by raucous laughter, shows two different sides of South Africa.

Zethu Dlomo shines in her role of Dinky and is adequately described by Pretorius as our very own Marilyn Monroe, with Eduan van Jaarsveldt perfectly capturing the essence of every man in South Africa. They are well supported by Marga van Rooy and Richard van der Westhuizen as Fanie's conservative family, with Jerry Mofokeng as Dinky's Zulu "warrior" father.

A superb soundtrack

The film also has a superb soundtrack that features a number of popular and lesser-known local artists, featuring the music of: Hip Hop Pantsula, Jack Parow, Freshlyground, Radio Kalahari Orkes, Lira, Mi Casa, Teargas, Bongo Maffin, and fokofpolisiekar, as well as a few underground tracks from Mix n Blend, Richard the 3rd and PH Fat.

A highlight of the film is Chris Chameleon in the role of Fanie's successful brother Sarel, a cheesy Afrikaans pop star. As a well-known singer himself, his contribution to the film, and all the songs he wrote with Hunter Kennedy (Die Heuwels Fantasties/fokofpolisiekar) and Fred den Hartog (Die Heuwels Fantasties) is truly brilliant. The music poignantly underscores the comedic and dramatic journey of the characters and perfectly marries word and image with lasting impact.

We need films like Fanie Fourie's *Lobola* to show how the best of two broken worlds can unite into a harmonious whole to celebrate the realities of an idealistic world crippled by unrealistic aspirations or wrongful motives. It also shows that there is much more to paying your lobola than delivering cows, it's about understanding and respecting the cultural differences that separate and embrace a new world that outshines the old.

It is one of this films you can share with others who might not see the world you do and, at the end of the screening, it is guaranteed that you will have made new friends. Fanie Fourie's *Lobola* is a film that everyone can enjoy with its English subtitles and message that transcends our borders.

Exclusive interview

When I first met writer-director Henk Pretorius in 1998 he was a 15-year-old schoolboy and was I teaching him the fundamentals of writing a screenplay. Now, with the release of his sensational film Fanie Fourie se *Lobola* (following the success of *Bakgat*), Henk is teaching myself and others what the real South Africa is all about. Our conversations surrounding subtext in film and the effect it has on audiences, made Henk's teachers cringe when he wrote richer, yet more controversial, stories in his Afrikaans literature class.

"Some gave me a one out of 10, others seem to think I am going to be a professor at a university. No one dreamed or thought I am going to be making films," laughed Pretorius. He wrote and directed *Bakgat*, which broke opening weekend records with more than R1.5 million at the box office, and *Bakgat2* has, to date, grossed almost R5 million locally, a proud achievement for 30-year-old Pretorius. For him, success means "waking up and being happy with your life's journey and to look forward in attaining a set of meaningful goals".

"My goal has always been to create films for the world. I am closer to that goal now that I have travelled around the world. I have never dreamed that I would enjoy it so much and also meet such a group of truly

spectacular people."