



Shabu

Directed by: Shamira Raphaëla

©: Tangerine Tree, Diplodokus, HUMAN

Production Company: Tangerine Tree

Co-production Companies: Diplodokus, HUMAN

Presented by: Tangerine Tree

Producers: Nienke Korthof, Willem Baptist

Co-producers: Maarten Bernaerts, Barbara Dyck

Post-production Supervisors: Rob Maas,

Maarten Bernaerts

Research: Debbie Kleijn

Script: Shamira Raphaëla

Script Adviser: Luuk van Bemmelen

Camera: Rogier Timmermans, Jefrim Rothuizen,

Jurgen Lisse, Gregg Telussa

Visual Effects: Franck Ravel

Editors: David Verdurme, Lykle Tuinstra

Editing Adviser: Luuk van Bemmelen

Titles Animation: Barend Onneweer

Composer: Michael Varekamp

Music Supervisor: René Thie

Sound: Diego van Uden, Eric Leek

Re-recording Mixer: Regard Ibrahim

Supervising Sound Editor: Regard Ibrahim

Thanks: Sharonio Abisoïna aka Shabu

Netherlands-Belgium 2021 ©

75 mins

Courtesy of TAPE Collective

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PREVIEW

Shabu

+ Q&A with director Shamira Raphaëla

Join us in the BFI Bar after the screening for a DJ set from LAJ and more summer treats.

Fourteen-year-old Shabu has crashed his absent grandmother's car, and his family are (understandably) angry about it. Calling via video link from Suriname, his grandmother admonishes the teenager, and his mother agrees that he'll spend the summer working around the estate to pay off his legal fines. Owing either to the presence of documentary cameras or a genuine lack of remorse, Shabu is at first nonchalant about the encounter, shrugging it off with a happy-go-lucky smile. He has his friend Jahnoa to hang out with, and his first girlfriend Stephany to keep sweet. But, over the course of 75 minutes, he faces numerous challenges that teach him and the viewer about Black boyhood, ambition, and responsibility.

On the surface, the film deals in the stereotypical aesthetics of documentaries made in predominantly white European countries about Black communities on estates deprived of state resources. The boys come across an elevator splattered with fresh blood following a fight. A neighbour casually describes how a man across the way 'got sick, or shot or whatever'. With his indifference to paid work, clumsy disregard for material objects (his cracked phone-screen is a case in point), and tendency to cause a nuisance by drumming on neighbours' doorbells, Shabu could be just another disaffected youth. Thanks to Shamira Raphaëla's direction – and to Shabu's endearing personality – the documentary allows him to be so much more. While it's clear from the outset that Shabu's behaviour has more to do with making a name for himself (he has aspirations to become a famous musician) than with a desire to cause upset (we see him buying ice cream for a kid he's hit with a pea-shooter), the film strives for empathy throughout. Jurgen Lisse's camera crew reject any pretence of objectivity: rather than filming subjects discreetly, from a distance, they get up close and personal.

And so, Shabu is filmed in expressive close-ups as he rests with his feet in a dead plant in his grandmother's flat – he was meant to be watering it – or contemplates life without Stephany after a terse exchange on the phone. The estate's colourful red and blue environments seem to glow in the summer heat, adding splashes of psychodramatic tension, while high- and low-angle shots filmed from balconies make creative use of space. This is the world as Shabu inhabits it, with adult responsibilities figuring as unwelcome intrusions that close in on him from beyond the edges of the frame.

It's the use of sound, though, that elevates the film from a well-staged documentary to something altogether more immersive. Shabu's incessant drumming – on bins, walls, and other urban architecture – punctuates Michael Varekamp's jazz-infused score to create a medley of his emotions. It's as if, in expanding the boundaries of what a documentary can and should be, Raphaëla feels an affinity with her subject – neither of them, it seems, want to settle for what's expected of them.

EVENTS & REGULAR PROGRAMME

Film Wallahs: Restoration UK Premiere:

Amar Akbar Anthony

Sun 2 Jul 15:00

Preview: The Damned Don't Cry (Les damnés ne pleurent pas) + Q&A with director Fyzal Boulifa

Tue 4 Jul 18:10

Woman with a Movie Camera: The Apple (Sib)

+ intro by Programmer Jelena Milosavljevic

Thu 6 Jul 18:10

Projecting the Archive: Son of a Stranger

+ intro by Josephine Botting, BFI Curator

Tue 11 Jul 18:15

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 17 Jul 18:30

Experimenta: Nico Night Part 1: Solitude +

Nina Danino in conversation with BFI National

Archive curator William Fowler + Key

Wed 19 Jul 18:15

Experimenta: Nico Night Part 2: The Inner Scar

(AKA La Cicatrice Intérieure) + intro

Wed 19 Jul 20:30

African Odysseys: Passing Through

+ intro & Q&A

Sat 22 Jul 14:00

African Odysseys: Wattstax + intro

Sat 22 Jul 18:10

Seniors' Free Matinee: Summertime

(aka Summer Madness) + intro

Mon 24 Jul 14:00

Art in the Making: Sickert's London + intro by

historian, writer and artist Kate Aspinall +

Walter Sickert: Painter of the Third Floor Back

Tue 25 Jul 18:10

Silent Cinema: The Signal Tower

+ intro by film historian Kevin Brownlow

Sun 30 Jul 15:40

Relaxed Screening:

Fantasia + intro and discussion

Mon 31 Jul 18:00

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There are many poignant exchanges that upend racial stereotypes about Black families in general, and fathers in particular. In one especially moving scene, reminiscent of *Moonlight* (2016), Shabu's father holds him in the water on a trip to the beach. And a sequence that sees the protagonist's brother celebrated at a coming-of-age celebration elegantly reframes Shabu's percussive skills as emanating from Black culture; time and time again, it's as if he's hitting against white structures as he drums. When he says, 'I may seem grownup... but I'm not, I'm only 14 years old,' the refusal of white society to allow Black children their childhood really hits home.

In interview, Raphaëla has explained that in making the documentary she hoped to create a film for children that would both entertain and educate. With its by turns joyful and passionate cast, and the ever-watchable Shabu as its heart, it will no doubt find many adults among its audience, too. Culminating in a carnivalesque party for the local residents, *Shabu* tells a story about what it means to say sorry and do the right thing by the people that matter – and that's something many of us could learn from, no matter our age.

Rebecca Harrison, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 2023

Shamira Raphaëla

The director grew up on the island of Aruba. After completing school in the Caribbean, she moved to the Netherlands and took a degree in audiovisual arts at the ArtEZ University of the Arts in Arnhem. Her debut documentary, *Deal with It*, won several international awards. In 2019, she won the Golden Calf at the Netherlands Film Festival for *Daddy and the Warlord*. Alongside her work as a filmmaker, she is programmer of the short film programme at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and co-founder of the 'framing of us' initiative which aims to decolonise the documentary film industry.