



AFRICAN ODYSSEYS PRESENTS: PREVIEW

Omen (Augure)

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A film by: Baloji

©: Wrong Men North, New Amsterdam, Tosala Film, Special Touch Studio, RTBF

In co-production with:

New Amsterdam Film Company, Tosala Films
And: Special Touch Studios, RadicalMedia Berlin,
Serendipity Films, Big World Cinema

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du Monde, Red Sea Film Fund

With the participation of: TV5Monde

Presented by: Wrong Men

Produced by: Benoît Roland

Co-producers: Sander Verdonk, Emmanuel Lupia,
Sébastien Onomo, Ben Schneider, Ellen de Waele,
Steven Markovitz

Screenplay: Baloji

Script Collaborator: Thomas van Zuylen

Director of Photography: Joachim Philippe

Editors: Bruno Tracq, Bertrand Conard

Art Director: Eve Martin

Costume Designers: Elke Hoste, Baloji

Sound Recordist: Jan Deca

Sound Mixer: Danny van Spreuwel

Sound Editor: Erik Griekspoor

Cast:

Marc Zinga (Koffi)

Yves-Marina Gnahoua (Mama Mujila)

Marcel Otete Kabeya (Paco)

Eliane Umuhire (Tshala)

Lucie Debay (Alice)

Belgium-Netherlands-France-Democratic Republic
of Congo-Germany-South Africa 2023

90 mins

Digital

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**SIGHT
AND
SOUND**

+ intro and Q&A with director Baloji

Tomisin Adepeju will be hosting a post-screening discussion with Baloji. Their conversation will interrogate the film's textured exploration of grief, cultural identity and familial anguish.

Baloji on 'Omen'

Omen tells the intertwining story of four Congolese characters who are labelled as witches. Why did you choose this topic?

In Swahili, my name Baloji means 'sorcerer', or even 'sorcerer who can take all the other sorcerers' powers'. It's an awful name, really. It's like being named 'Devil' or 'Demon' in Belgium. So because of my name, and because people used to label me as a sorcerer, I've always been fascinated by witchcraft, and by people who are seen as different. That's why Koffi, the main character in the movie, has a port-wine stain on his face: I wanted to visualise the weight of that label.

Why did you decide to focus on several characters, rather than just one protagonist?

I wanted to show different forms of assignation, in order to approach the subject in a larger way. For a woman like Tshala, being labelled a witch is a bigger burden than for a man. For an older woman like Mujila, it's even worse. That was one of the most important things I wanted to show: how society is structured for men, and how they try to control women's bodies. What happens when a young girl doesn't want to have kids. Or how a woman gets completely discarded when she grows old. I've been studying feminism a lot. I think that's my obligation, because as a man, I'm part of the problem. And part of the solution as well. In the same way that racism is a white people's issue: it can't be solved unless white people start talking about it.

Paco, one of the main characters, is a young boy who is also considered a sorcerer.

When parents have money issues, it's sometimes believed to be the fault of their youngest children, who have supposedly cursed the family. In these cases, the parents often send these kids away, and they end up on the streets. This is what happened to Paco. But he deals with his assignation in a very different way than Koffi, who is ashamed and thinks it's the worst thing that ever happened to him. Paco has learned to use it to his advantage: he does magic tricks and scares people. He takes a certain pride in his assignation.

Does that mirror your own attitude? As a kid, you were called a sorcerer. Now, you make movies – which you could call magic tricks too.

Yes, I've finally accepted that maybe my name is also what I am. In Congo, I learned that originally, my name means 'man of science', so it comes from something positive. It wasn't until colonialism came into the picture that the word 'baloji' turned into something negative. So now I can deal with it. And when I started making movies, I decided to put some magical realism into them. It's part of me, so it must be part of my cinema language.

You've done so many different things in your life: you worked as a fruit picker, you were part of successful Belgian hip-hop group Starflam, you've acted... When did you start dreaming of becoming a film director?

From 1998 to 2006, I lived above a music and video store in Brussels. Every day, I would go pick up my mail downstairs, and start talking about movies

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Mark Kermode in 3D at BFI IMAX

Mon 29 Apr 18:30; Mon 27 May 18:30

Preview: Hoard + Q&A

Fri 3 May 18:00

Billy Connolly: Big Banana Feet + Q&A with

Douglas Weir and director Murray Grigor

Mon 20 May 18:10

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Silent Cinema: Pavement Butterfly

Großstadtschmetterling + intro by BFI curator

Bryony Dixon

Sun 28 Apr 14:30

Families: The Boy and the Heron

Kimitachi wa do Ikiruka

Sun 5 May 12:30; Sun 12 May 12:00;

Sun 26 May 12:30

Projecting the Archive: For Them That Trespass

+ intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National

Archive Curator

Thu 9 May 18:10

African Odysseys: Restored: Bushman + intro

with Journey Mercies director Tomisin Adepeju

Sat 11 May 14:00

Experimenta: Cinema Is Evil: Welcome to the

World of Legendary, Queer Occult Filmmaker

Kenneth Anger

Sat 11 May 17:50

Seniors: Shakespeare Wallah + intro

Wed 15 May 14:30

Families: Wonka

Sun 19 May 12:50 (Funday)

Silent Cinema: Vagabond Queen + intro by

BFI curator Bryony Dixon

Sun 19 May 15:40

Relaxed Screening: The Magic Flute Trollflöjten

+ intro & discussion

Mon 20 May 18:00

Restored: The Small Back Room + intro by the

BFI Conservation team

Tue 28 May 18:10

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with the guys who hung around in the store. They made me discover films like Gus Van Sant's *Gerry*, that had a very different rhythm to them. That was my film school. For years, I would watch a movie every day. And since I was already very interested in music, fashion and art direction, film felt like the perfect fit for me, because it combined all of my passions into one art form.

How did you create the music for Omen?

Very early on in the process, I realised the music I usually make as a recording artist wouldn't fit the film. My music always has vocals, but in this film they would just be too much. There is already a lot of information in the image. So I kept the music in the film quite subtle. But then I also recorded four albums with songs that wouldn't appear in the film. (laughs)

What was the purpose of these albums?

Each album is written from a different character's point of view. It was a great opportunity to create backstory for the characters, which could help the actors. But mostly, it was an exercise in empathy for me. It made me love and understand each one of my characters. For example, Tshala's album is all about female sexuality. As a man, it took me a lot of reading and studying to really be able to understand the dynamics at play.

Could you talk about the use of colour in Omen?

I have synaesthesia. To me, everything is connected to colour. Sounds, moods... They all have colours in my head. And so every character in the movie also has their own colour: for Koffi, it's dark red – like his port-wine stain. Paco is associated with pink, etc. You can see it in the typeface I used to present their names on screen, but also in the colour filters we used. And in the music too: for each album, I only used chords that I felt were connected to certain colours. Sometimes synaesthesia feels like a disease, but I try to have fun with it.

Together with Elke Hoste, you also designed the costumes for the film. They blend elements from different cultures.

I wanted to create a cultural triangle. There are obviously lots of elements from Central Africa, but there's also an influence from American heritage: the costumes in the parade are inspired by Mardi Gras – we actually went to New Orleans to create the masks. But we also took inspiration from the 'Gilles', the famous folklore characters who appear in the carnival parade of Binche in Belgium. I also used Belgian surrealist painters like Magritte as an influence, for example in the opening and closing scenes.

Production notes

Born in 1978 in Lubumbashi (Democratic Republic of Congo) and based in Belgium, **Baloji** is an award-winning musician, filmmaker, and polymath artist. *Omen* follows several short films noticed in the circuit and distributed worldwide such as *Zombies* (BFI London Film Festival). As a musician, Baloji has released two critically acclaimed albums and two EPs/the latest *Avenue Kaniama* on Bella Union Records.

Tomisin Adepeju is a British-Nigerian filmmaker based in London. His award-winning shorts have screened at over 150 film festivals, including Sundance, BFI London Film Festival and London Short Film Festival. He has also written about film for MUBI and several other platforms. He is the founder of the screening and event series DAILIES where he regularly curates shorts and feature film programmes.