

“Don’t ever give up,” says award-winning director



Jamaica is not known for its film industry. It's known for its music, record breaking athletes and an island tourists go to for holiday breaks. Yes, Jamaica is known for many things but not for its films.

However, writer and director Chris Browne hopes to change this with his latest film *Ghett'a Life*. The action drama is set in a politically divided community in Kingston, where to cross the line can mean death. The film aims to tell the untold stories of the ghetto communities

and examines the positive that can come out of a world divided by political rivalry.

Ghett'a Life follows Derrick, a young fighter who has to make the decision between following his fists or his political allegiances. Derrick dreams of being Jamaica's next world boxing champion and wants to join a gym, but the only problem is, the gym is on the other side of his political divide. To go to there he would have to go against his father and his community. For the first time Derrick sees his future held back by the system he accepted. To succeed he has to change the thinking of his father and the community, but how?

The film, which is available to watch at various cinemas throughout the UK, was released in Jamaica in July and Chris says the response was “amazing”.

He tells *Krystal*: “The reaction in Jamaica was amazing. It ran for 10 weeks to full cinemas, and the audience would stand at the end and cheer and clap. People I never knew would somehow get my phone number and call me to say how they loved it. I was so moved by how it affected the audience.”

Chris Browne at the private screening in Jamaica

Chris says he hopes the British audience will watch the film and see how divided certain parts of Kingston are. “I read a review from a British critic where he questioned why didn't the main character in the film go to another gym. Well there are only two gyms in Kingston, one downtown and one out of town. There are certain realities that Jamaicans have to live under that the British don't understand unless they live here.”

Chris is also the co-writer and director of Jamaica's highest grossing film to date –*Third World Cop*. The 1999 film was low budget and shot in 21 days on a mini dv camera, but it was a runaway success playing for four months in Jamaica.

Despite his previous track record and an award winning script (*Ghett'a Life* won best script at The Hartley-Merrill International Screenwriting Competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006), initially finding a producer able to raise the money for the film proved difficult. So Chris set out to do it himself.

“Trying to secure funds for the film was frustrating. Like it would never happen. And there were times where it was a rollercoaster ride of emotions, as it seemed like it was going to happen then didn't. This went on for a few years. In the end I just took a different path to raising the funds.” Chris shot a trailer for *Ghett'a Life* in a day, edited it in two weeks and put on a screening for Jamaican businessmen. Within six months the budget was raised. “Don't ever give up people. Where there's a will, there's a way.”



From childhood, growing up on a farm in rural Jamaica, Chris was fascinated by Hollywood and films. In the summer of 1982, during the time he was at college studying fine arts at The Atlanta College of Art, in Atlanta, he worked with his uncle, Perry Henzell (*The Harder They Come*) on his second feature film *No Place Like Home*. This was when the aspiring director realised that he wanted to pursue a career in film.

Derrick
training to
become a
boxer

Jamaican cinema is yet to break into the global market with only a handful of Jamaican films having worldwide success. Chris says that Jamaica is still in the early stages of developing a film industry and explains that the inability to make films consistently, year after year, is hindering the country's film industry. "When we can achieve a flow of films, only then will we be able to break into the global market."

It is the award-winning director's passion to grow a film culture in Jamaica. Chris is currently working on his third film *The Tenth and Final* – a romantic action drama woven around the exciting and colourful world of Jamaican horseracing.



"We have stories to tell like any where else in the world. And the first world has been telling their stories for so long now there needs to be more variety out there. Look at our music, how strong and vibrant that is in the world, so why can't we find our voice also in the visuals of filmmaking?"

by Melissa Allison-Forbes