



PRESENTS



MOTHER OF GEORGE

A film by
Andrew Dosunmu

****Best Cinematography – Sundance Film Festival 2013 (World Premiere)****

107 mins. • USA • Rated R

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SYNOPSIS

Adenike and Ayodele (*The Walking Dead*'s Danai Gurira and veteran actor Isaach De Bankolé) are a Nigerian couple living in Brooklyn. Following the joyous celebration of their wedding, complications arise out of their inability to conceive a child - a problem that devastates their family and defies cultural expectations, leading Adenike to make a shocking decision that could either save her family or destroy it. Acclaimed director Andrew Dosumnu (*Restless City*) captures the nuances of this unique and fascinating culture by creating a beautiful, vibrant, and moving portrait of a couple whose joys and struggles are at once intimate and universal.

Q&A WITH DIRECTOR ANDREW DOSUNMU
AND SCREENWRITER DARCI PICOULT

What was the genesis of this project and script?

Picoult: I was invited to present my one-woman show, MY VIRGINIA, at the International Association of Woman Justices. While I was there, I heard a lawyer from Women and Law in Southern Africa tell a story which she called "Mother Of George". While I listened, I thought that story could be my story. It could be any woman's story, any mother's story regardless of culture. It touched my heart and I connected as a woman.

Can you tell us a little about your background and how that led you to this project?

Dosunmu: I come from a background where storytelling is an art form, and the more realistic the story and engaging the storyteller, the deeper the story resonates and survives. We tell stories to teach lessons, to impart family secrets and traditions, and to continue a way of life...I hope to bring this honor of storytelling to the art of filmmaking. MOTHER OF GEORGE is a rich and complicated story that has so many layers: love, innocence, trust, tradition, custom, history.

Picoult: Most of my work, prior to MOTHER OF GEORGE, was as a playwright. MOTHER OF GEORGE spoke to me as a film given the rich layers in the story which I thought could be best expressed visually. Be it writing for the stage or screen, I love stories that haven't been told, stories that make me think, stories that expose the fragility and strength of people.

I was drawn to this story for personal reasons. As a woman who has always wanted a family, I connected to Adenike's struggles and desires. Her willingness to do whatever it takes for that desire and her marriage. There is a huge part of me in her; and her in me. That extends to every person in this story--Ayo, Ma Ayo, Biyi and Sade--the more I wrote, the deeper my connection became to who they are and what they want.

Did your background influence your decision to take on the project and why?

Dosunmu: I am always interested in telling the stories of the Diaspora, because I can relate to and relay these jewels without ever faltering. These are the streets I know, these are the people I grew up with. We speak the same languages and seek the same emotional center. But I see that at the same time these very specific stories are universal. I want to bring these stories to an audience who can see themselves in the characters, whether they grew up in Brooklyn, West Africa, Kansas, or anywhere in the world.

How did your background influence your creative decisions?

Dosunmu: I have an inherent need to tell the truth of the characters, which perhaps stems from my West African roots; our everyday reality is the best story there is. There is little need for embellishment when there is drama and flair in every experience.

How long did it take to write the script?

Picoult: I spent years researching; meeting women and men from Africa, who lived in the city. They became my way into the story. I created a family in Brooklyn based on these interviews; as well as my imagination.

Rachel Chanoff, who is part of the Sundance institute read the script and sent it to a producer in Africa who responded to the story and connected me to Andrew.

We went to the Sundance labs, as writer and director. His artistic eye and personal insight brought this story to full life. He taught me to write with my eyes rather than with my ears. Opened my eyes to a world he knew well and brought me inside of it.

This, for me, is why I write. To tell stories that provoke and inspire me. To enter worlds that I may not know but want to know. This wanting gives me the opportunity to open myself to another. To listen and watch closely; and capture the moments that shape our relationships, our families, and our lives.

Regarding the length it takes to write: Truth is, as a writer who loves to keep digging into the story, my writing process never ends. I'll probably be tweaking scenes long after the film premieres.

Can you tell us a little about the casting process?

Dosunmu: It was merely a matter of scheduling for this project, thankfully. As we worked the script, I knew the actors I wanted for the roles. I have wanted to work with Isaach de Bankolé for many years. His screen presence is as strong and commanding as any Hollywood star; he is the epitome of the dedicated professional. Danai Gurira is one of my favorite actresses. Her subtle, yet powerful performance in my first film, RESTLESS CITY, convinced me that she would carry the role of Ma George with dignity and grace...and the right amount of optimistic naiveté. Tony Okungbowa gave an amazing performance as the evil force in my first film; I wanted to exploit his kindness here, and show his sensitive side. I often think the secret star of MOTHER OF GEORGE is Bukky Ajayi, who has mesmerized audiences throughout Africa for over 30 years. She is a remarkable actor who continues to bring nuance to every character she embodies. Yaya Alafia was my natural choice as the street-wise, first generation beauty with brains. I then surrounded them with my family of supporting extras who I have cultivated over the years in order to round out the world.

Talk about how you worked with the actors to get these wonderful performances.

Dosunmu: I simply offered them the world these characters exist in, as I saw it, and asked the actors to relate to the circumstances. Pulling from their own lives, in order to draw parallels and find their own motivations. Even if the situations were seemingly removed from the actors own life experiences, each actor was able to find the emotions needed to flesh out their characters.

How long was the shoot and where did you shoot the film?

Dosunmu: We shot for 22 days in New York City.

Where and when is the film set?

Dosunmu: The film is set today, in Brooklyn.

In your own words, how would you describe what the film is about?

Dosunmu: The film is about love, tradition, sacrifice and hope. Some viewers may think it is about betrayal, others may see it as about overwhelming love. I welcome both interpretations as I realize, in making this film, that love has infinite layers - it never looks the same each day. One thing is for sure, what people do for love is both a mystery and a revelation.

Picoult: At its heart, it is a story about a family and a marriage, and the ties that bind them together. It is a story about family expectations and personal desires and how the two rub up against each other. It is about the secrets and lies we have in order to deal with this rub. It is about what we do to create the life we want and how our actions affect those in our lives.

Talk about how the film was shot and why you made these choices.

Dosunmu: As a filmmaker, I want to bring the weight of the African oral tradition to filmmaking, and my challenge is to bring that fluidity, that feeling, those emotion that the hearing of a story at your grandfather's knee evokes. Can we make films that breathe, enter us and reach deep inside us the way hearing a story from someone's own mouth does? Can we make films that have that rhythm, and that quality of tone? I want the viewer to feel they are in the middle of the story, a living, breathing tale that began before and will continue after.

What is your favorite scene in the film and what was your favorite scene to shoot?

Dosunmu: I am a New Yorker who is in love with New York. If I can shoot in my city and bring it to life as a character in my movies, I am happy. Every scene is my favorite scene!

What was the most difficult scene to shoot?

Dosunmu: To be able to explore and expose human nature is never difficult; I turn it over to my actors and they live, breathe, cry, and bleed. They think, and worry, and plot, and make decisions, and rejoice or suffer the consequences, and I just watch it happen.

What do you want audiences to take away from the film and the characters?

Dosunmu: That sometimes the price we pay for people we love is very dear.... there is sacrifice in every action... and everyone has a secret. Sometimes people we love keep secrets to protect us and to enrich us, but it never feels like that when the truth comes out. We naturally hate when people keep things from us, so we hate secrets, and never consider what might be for our own good.

Picoult: A deeper understanding of this couple, this marriage, this family. The difficult choices that each person makes in this film may provoke one person and inspire another. My hope is that it catalyzes a discussion within one's self and with others. And that it creates a rich experience for an audience--both cinematically and personally.

Can you tell us about the main characters?

Dosunmu: Nike is a woman who is new to America, and while open to all offered here, never intends to lose her footing or her roots. Ayodele is convinced he is King of New York, the land of golden opportunity, and he intends to live the American dream. Biyi is young, social; he just wants to have fun and be free. Sade is a free spirit who is upwardly mobile and wants love and security. Ma Ayo is traditional and somewhat demanding.

Were there films that inspired you when you approached this film at any point during the script or shooting phase?

Dosunmu: I was more influenced by contemporary African artists, and writers: Chris Ofili, CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE, Yinka Shonibare...who tell these stories of longing, and sacrifice, displacement and belonging.

How did it feel to premiere the film at Sundance?

Dosunmu: Sundance was, in many ways, the birthplace of MOTHER OF GEORGE. Sundance invited Darci and I to workshop the film in the very early stages and have continued to champion the film over all these years. I was proud to bring them back our film and experience it through the Sundance prism.

Picoult: Fantastic. The Sundance Screenwriting and Directing Labs were an incredible experience. The support Michelle Satter and her team have given us has brought this film to life. Having it premiere at Sundance is a tribute to their belief in artists.

FILMMAKER AND CAST BIOS

Andrew Dosunmu (director)

Andrew Dosunmu is currently based between New York City and Nigeria. Raised and educated in Nigeria, Dosunmu began his career as a design assistant at the fashion house of Yves Saint Laurent. He has subsequently worked as a Creative Director and fashion photographer, whose images have appeared in a variety of international magazines. Besides a flourishing career in photography, Dosunmu is also active in film and television. His award-winning documentary *HOT IRONS* (1999) won best documentary at FESPACO and Reel Award at Toronto. In South Africa, Dosunmu has directed episodes of the widely acclaimed television series “Yizo, Yizo” which dramatizes the policy debates around education in post-Apartheid South Africa through a frank presentation of the social crises and conflicts at a Johannesburg high school. Dosunmu has also served as creative director for album covers (for such artists as Erykah Badu and Public Enemy), and directed music videos, including his first for Isaac Hayes, Angie Stone, Common, Wyclef Jean, Kelis, Aaron Neville, Maxwell, Tracy Chapman and Talib Kweli. Dosunmu was selected to participate in the photography exhibition “Snap Judgments: New Positions in Contemporary Photography” at the International Center of Photography. In 2007, Dosunmu was honored with the request to speak at the TED Global conference. Dosunmu is currently in production on his documentary *THE AFRICAN GAME* which documents the fans and spirit of football in Africa. Photographs from this documentary have already been published in a coffee table book by Powerhouse Publishing. Dosunmu’s first feature film endeavor, *RESTLESS CITY*; premiered at Sundance in 2011.

Darci Picoult (screenwriter)

Darci's one woman show, “My Virginia,” was presented in theaters and solo festivals both nationally and internationally. Performances include New York Theater Workshop, Ensemble Studio Theater, LA Theater Work's "The Play's The Thing" series, which was broadcast throughout the country on National Public Radio, "Women Center Stage" in St. Louis, San Francisco's Solo Mio Festival, Philadelphia's Women's Theater Festival, Slovenia's "City of Women" Theater Festival and in Croatia at the Cultural Center for Women Refugees. “My Virginia” has also been performed for legal and medical conferences across the country in programs cosponsored by the National Cancer Institute and the National Institutes of Health; and in Brussels for a program sponsored by the European Commission and was showcased on the BBC series *Medicine at the Crossroads*. Theatrical work includes “LILS 90th,” developed at the Sundance Theater Lab, world premiere at The Long Wharf Theater in New Haven under the direction of Jo Bonney; “Jayson With A Y” developed at NY Stage and Film and produced by The New Group in New York, “Ancient Lights” and “Making The World Round” workshopped at New York Theater Workshop and read at Lincoln Center as part of the New York Public Library Reading series. Darci taught writing for the Legacy Project at the Public Theater, NY Shakespeare Festival and currently teaches acting at the Tisch School of the Arts/New York University. She is the recipient of the 2008 National Theater Conference/Paul Green Award for her theatrical work.

Lars Knudsen and Jay Van Hoy (producers)

Lars Knudsen and Jay Van Hoy established Parts & Labor, a production company dedicated to director-driven, collaborative filmmaking in 1994. Parts & Labor has since produced 20 films, including Mike Mills' *BEGINNERS*, for which Christopher Plummer won the 2012 Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. Also starring Ewan McGregor and Melanie Laurent, *BEGINNERS* was released worldwide in 2011 by Focus Features and Universal. Parts & Labor produced three films that premiered in competition at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival: David Lowery's film *AIN'T THEM BODIES SAINTS*, starring Casey Affleck, Rooney Mara and Ben Foster; photojournalist Shaul Schwarz's documentary *NARCO CULTURA*; and Andrew Dosunmu's second feature *MOTHER OF GEORGE*. In 2012, they produced both Ira Sachs's *KEEP THE LIGHTS ON* and *THE LONELIEST PLANET*, by Julia Loktev, with Gael Garcia Bernal. In 2008, they signed a First Look / Development deal with Scott Rudin, and now have an overhead deal with renowned German international sales agency K5.

Carly Hugo and Matt Parker (producers)

Carly Hugo and Matt Parker are independent film producers based in New York City. They have collectively produced over twenty features since 2005 and have a proven track record of consistently creating prestigious, high-quality films. Combined, Carly and Matt's recent credits: as producers, *HIGHER GROUND* (dir. Vera Farmiga, Sundance 2011), *HOT COFFEE* (dir. Susan Saladoff, Sundance 2011), and *RESTLESS CITY* (dir. Andrew Dosunmu, Sundance 2011); as co-producers, *BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD*, which was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Picture (dir. Benh Zeitlin, Sundance 2012 - Grand Jury Prize Winner, Cannes 2012 - Camera D'Or Winner), *BACHELORETTE* (dir. Leslye Headland, Sundance 2012), *BEAUTIFUL DARLING* (dir. James Rasin, Berlinale 2010), and *PETER AND VANDY* (dir. Jay DiPietro, Sundance 2009).

Danai Gurira

Born in Iowa and raised in Zimbabwe, *MOTHER OF GEORGE* is Danai Gurira's fourth Sundance film (after Tom McCarthy's *THE VISITOR*, Eric Mendelsohn's *THREE BACKYARDS*, and Dosunmu's *RESTLESS CITY*.) In 2012, Gurira joined the ensemble of the third season of the AMC series *THE WALKING DEAD* playing one of its most anticipated and popular characters, 'Michonne', the mysterious zombie sword slayer. Previously Gurira recurred in *Treme*, the HBO/David Simon series set in New Orleans. Her first love is the stage. On Broadway, Gurira starred Bartlett Sher's award winning revival of *J'oe Turners Come and Gone*. She also earned the Actor's Equity Callaway Award for her performance as Isabella in the 2011 Shakespeare in the Park production of *"Measure For Measure."* Gurira earned an MFA in Acting from NYU's Tisch School. Also a playwright, Gurira recently won the prestigious Whiting Award. Her plays *"The Convert," "Eclipsed,"* and *"In The Continuum"* all investigate the experience of African women over the last century. Her plays have appeared at the Kirk Douglas Theater, the Goodman Theater, the McCarter Theater, Woolly Mammoth, Yale Rep, and others and have received an Obie, the Outer Circle Critics Glasner Award, the Helen Hayes Award, the Theater Hall of Fame

Honors, and others. Gurira is co-founder of Almasi, a theater development and production company in Zimbabwe. She divides her time between New York and Los Angeles.

Isaach De Bankolé

Isaach De Bankolé, César award winning (BLACK MIC MAC) French/African actor, who is also a recipient of French Legion D'Honneur, was born on the Ivory Coast. Mr. De Bankolé has an extensive filmography, and in 2011, the Museum of Art and Design, in association with the Alliance Francaise in New York presented a month long career survey of his work. Mr De Bankolé's upcoming releases include John McDonough's CALVARY opposite Brendan Gleeson, and WHERE THE ROAD RUNS OUT which he recently shot in Equatorial Guinea, South Africa and Rotterdam. Recent releases include Lavinia Currier's OKA! (Telluride 2010), shot in the Central African Republic, and Gabriel Range's I AM SLAVE (Toronto Film Festival 2010), about a Sudanese father's search for his daughter who has been abducted from the Sudan to be a slave in London. Other recent projects include, Clair Denis' critically acclaimed WHITE MATERIAL, Cannes and BAFTA award winning film THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY, directed by Julian Schnabel, and Jim Jarmusch's LIMITS OF CONTROL in which Mr De Bankolé plays the lead role of a mysterious hit man, with a supporting cast that includes Gael Garcia Bernal, Tilda Swinton, and Bill Murray. Isaach was seen in the James Bond film CASINO ROYALE playing Obanno, head of the Lords Resistance Army, and his character is credited with being the "first villain to bloody Bond!" He has also appeared in such US films as Michael Mann's MIAMI VICE, THE GUITAR (Sundance 2007) in which he stars opposite Saffron Burrows, Stuart Townsend's directorial debut BATTLE IN SEATTLE, and Amir Mann's THE FIFTH PATIENT. Isaach also starred in Lars von Trier's sequel to DOGVILLE, MANDERLAY, alongside Bryce Dallas Howard and Danny Glover. Some of his indie film lead roles include, Barry Strugatz' FROM OTHER WORLDS in which he plays a watch salesman abducted by aliens, and 5UP 2DOWN, in which he plays a Caribbean artist whose life is spinning out of control. Isaach was discovered by a French Film director on the streets of Paris while studying to be an airline pilot. He received his masters degree in Mathematics from the Jussieu Paris Sept, and went to the drama school "LES COURS SIMON". He received critical acclaim for his performance in Claire Denis' CHOCOLAT in 1988, followed by many roles in popular French films such as S'EN FOUT LA MORT, LES KEUFS, and VANILLE FRAISE. He has also starred in many international films, including OTOMO (Germany), HOW TO MAKE LOVE TO A NEGRO WITHOUT GETTING TIRED (Canada), BATTU (Africa), Pedro Costa's CASA DE LAVA (Portugal), and Nicholas Roeg's English film version of HEART OF DARKNESS where he co-starred with John Malkovich and Tim Roth. Isaach is a favorite actor of cult indie director Jim Jarmusch, and in addition to his star turn in LIMITS OF CONTROL, he has appeared in Jarmusch's GHOST DOG: WAY OF THE SAMURAI, NIGHT ON EARTH, and COFFEE AND CIGARETTES alongside Cate Blanchett and Bill Murray. Other American films include THE KEEPER, Merchant-Ivory's A SOLDIER'S DAUGHTER NEVER CRIES, THE KILLING ZONE, SAM, SKELETON KEY, STAY, and the lead in SLAMDANCE 2004's winner for Best Narrative Feature HOMEWORK, which also screened at the Tribeca film festival, which he also produced. Isaach directed the documentary TRAVELING MILES, documenting the 1998-touring schedule of jazz singer Cassandra Wilson in Australia and New Zealand. Television credits include guest starring roles on such shows as *The Sopranos*, *The Unit*, and a large guest arc on the 2009 season of 24.

Isaach has graced the stages of Paris in such plays as “Quai Ouest,” “Dans La Solitude Des Champs De Coton,” “Le Retour Au Desert,” “Martin Luther King Ou La Force D’Aimer,” and he toured Africa and France in his one man show “Ma Vie Dans La Brousse Des Fantomes (My Life In The Bush of Ghosts).” On the New York stage, he appeared alongside Lili Taylor in Wallace Shawn’s “Aunt Dan and Lemon.” Mr. De Bankolé has also written and will direct the film ONE WAY TICKET, a mystical African tale loosely based on his experiences living in New York City.

Yaya Alafia

New York-born and -bred Yaya Alafia began her professional acting career starring in Liz Friedlander’s TAKE THE LEAD, opposite Antonio Bandaras. She was then seen opposite Mark Ruffalo in Lisa Cholodenko’s Oscar-nominated THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT. Other film work includes John Sayles’ HONEYDRIPPER, TRON LEGACY, Andrew Niccol’s sci-fi thriller IN TIME and Oren Moverman’s THE MESSENGER. Upcoming films include Neil Drumming’s BIG WORDS and Lee Daniel’s THE BUTLER. Yaya’s television work includes portraying the duplicitous daughter of Vanessa Williams’ character on the final season of *Ugly Betty*, a recurring role on *All My Children*, as well as appearances on *House*, *Body of Proof*, *Army Wives*, *Mercy*, *Law & Order SVU*, and *Eve*.

Tony Okungbowa

Actor, producer and DJ on The Ellen DeGeneres Show, Tony Okungbowa has turned like-ability into an art form. He was raised in London and Lagos by Nigerian parents in a house where the music reigned supreme. Tony received an undergraduate degree in Drama from England's Middlesex University and after some theatre work in the UK, moved to New York City for graduate study at Lee Strasberg. It was in Manhattan where his career took off, landing roles on shows like *The X-Files*, *NYPD Blue* and many others. Next he was off to Los Angeles where his work as an actor and DJ were kicked into high gear. He's now the man who makes Ellen dance every day and has been a fixture on the hit show for it's incredible 10 seasons run. Besides Djing on the show, His love of music can also be found in albums he has released and collaborated on including, “Hollywood sessions Vol. 1”, “Total Dance 2009” and ‘A Night to Remember” with Jojo Flores. Recently, Tony has set his sights behind the camera, as well. He starred in and produced the film "Mother of George", which premieres at Sundance in the US Dramatic competition category. He also starred in and executive produced, "Restless City" which was an official selection at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival and was released late last year. Under his Turntable Studios banner Tony continues to expand his horizons as an entertainer and as a visionary. He's broken ground, charmed the world, and the best is yet to come.

MOTHER OF GEORGE

Directed by
ANDREW DOSUNMU

Written by
DARCI PICOULT

Produced by
LARS KNUDSEN
JAY VAN HOY

Produced by
MATT PARKER
CARLY HUGO
DARCI PICOULT

Produced by
CHRIS MAYBACH
SAEMI KIM

Produced by
PATRICK CUNNINGHAM
TONY OKUNGBOWA

Executive Producers
SAEROM KIM
RON SIMON

Executive Producers
RHEA SCOTT
FADY SALAME

Executive Producers
LAURA BERNIERI
JERRY TANKERSLEY
JOSEPH SORRENTINO

Executive Producers
ISAACH DE BANKOLÉ
ANDRÉ DES ROCHERS

Executive Producers

DAVID RAYMOND
JAWAL NGA

Director of Photography
BRADFORD YOUNG

Editor
ORIANA SODDU

Production Designer
LUCIO SEIXAS

Costume Designer
MOBOLAJI DAWODU

Music by
PHILIP MILLER

Casting by
KERRY BARDEN
PAUL SCHNEE

ISAACH DE BANKOLÉ

DANAI GURIRA

TONY OKUNGBOWA

YAYA ALAFIA

BUKKY AJAYI

and

ANGELIQUE KIDJO

CAST (in alphabetical order)

Adenike Balogun	DANAI GURIRA
Ayodele Balogun	ISAACH DE BANKOLÉ
Biyi Balogun	TONY OKUNGBOWA
Ma Ayo Balogun	BUKKY AJAYI
Sade Bakare	YAYA ALAFIA
Atibo	KLARISSA JACKSON
Dave	ISHMAEL OMOLADE
Doctor	ROSLYN RUFF
Frank	CHINAZA UCHE
Funke	FLORENCE EGBUCHULAM
Helen	MUTIYAT ADE-SALU
Hyacinth	ATIBON L. NAZAIRE
Mr. Lawal	DEEN BADAROU
Marsea	DA'VINE JOY RANDOLPH
Monica	SUSAN HEYWARD
Ma Nike	ANGELIQUE KIDJO
Nurse	LENORE THOMAS
Tony	HUBERT POINT DU JOUR
Tunde	BABS OLUSANMOKUN
Yinka	EBBE BASSEY