

DORCHESTER FILM SOCIETY
2022/23 SEASON



BULADÓ

(Language: Papiamentu/Dutch)

Director: Eché Janga, 2020. Running time: 87 minutes.
Presented by Dorchester Film Society, 14th November, 2021.

“When was the last time you saw a film from Curaçao?”

If the answer is precisely never, [the] International Film Festival for Youth’s haunting and poetic new *Buladó* will be a bit of a revelation. So will the fact that it’s performed not just in Dutch, but the Papiamentu creole spoken by descendants of its first slaves.

It follows a refreshingly nontraditional heroine, the unsmiling, tough, and stubborn 11-year-old girl Kenza (Tiara Richards), who gets in trouble at school and doesn’t seem to have friends. She struggles with her widower father Ouirá (Everon Jackson Hooi), a local policeman who wants her to follow the rules, and finds herself drawn into the spiritual world of her grandfather, Weljo (Felix de Rooy), who still practises the rites passed down from the island’s slave ancestors.

What’s key is that her father dismisses any suggestion she’s acting out because she misses her mother; how can you miss someone you never knew? But her grandfather knows she needs to connect with the spirit of her mother to move on.

Janga’s camera takes us into the junkyard where the family lives, set amid the low scrub and dusty island earth. It also ventures behind the doors of their modest home—with its pink-walled bedroom, turquoise living room, and bright gauzy curtains fluttering in the island’s every-blowing breeze. These are intimate looks at a world we’d never otherwise see, a side to the Dutch Caribbean that shows the reality beyond luxe seaside resorts.

Weljo builds an “ancestor tree” out of rusty exhaust pipes and other metal junk from the yard, and as its crooked arms reach out to the vast Caribbean sky, it becomes a wildly visual metaphor for building connections with our forebearers. Janga, a Dutch director who was inspired by his own Curaçao roots, works in judicious moments of magic realism.

Buladó ends up being surprisingly moving, touching on loss, but also aging, and the need to maintain connections with our cultural and familial roots. It's a different kind of "family" film that would appeal to older kids who can handle quieter, more contemplative subject matter."

Janet Smith, *Stir*, 14th April, 2021.

From the director, Eché Janga in *The Wrap*, January 12th, 2021.

"For me, communications between people is 90% non-verbal in real life. In film, it's the most interesting medium to communicate — this language of human beings. The less dialogue for me, the stronger the image, and this is the reason why I always use not so much dialogue and I tell my story with images and looks of people and how they behave. It's related to the culture of Curaçao — they don't speak that much but when they say something, it's heavy and meaningful.'

What's perhaps most fascinating about the film is that Richards, who dominates the film, had never acted before.

'We visited a lot of schools and we were searching for a girl between 10 and 12 years old, and she had to resemble my sister when she was younger, a really tough girl and proud and loud and strong, and I was looking for a girl who had that,' Janga explained. 'Tiara didn't understand what it was about when we first came to the school' ...

He added, 'I learned a lot from her but from a director [standpoint], I learned I can direct children as adults. She just wanted to be treated as an adult. She had never acted before... she totally understands everything about the film although it's a difficult film for a child to understand.'

The film premiered at the Netherlands Film Festival last October [2020], where it won the Golden Calf for Best Feature Film award. It was a long road to getting the film made — 12 years, to be exact — but Janga still can't believe that his small film has made such waves, not only among the Dutch film community but also in Curaçao."