

Anant Singh: Filmmaker, visionary, entrepreneur

With a passion for film and the ambition to establish world-class production studios in South Africa, visionary producer Anant Singh is a pioneer in the South African filmmaking industry.

As one of South Africa's leading filmmakers, he's produced more than 75 films since 1984, and is a true movie-making entrepreneur.

Humble beginnings



Born and raised in Durban, Singh had an interest in movies from an early age. "When I was in high school, I worked in a film hire store, rewinding movies for R1 a day," recalls Singh. "I guess the entrepreneurial spirit evolved from there, when I began to screen films to kids in the neighbourhood and realised there was an opportunity to make some money."

He began his film career when he withdrew from his studies at the University of Durban-Westville to buy a 16mm movie rental store instead. He soon became involved in video distribution, forming a company called Videovision Entertainment and in 1984, moved into

film production with the film *A Place of Weeping*, directed by Darrell Roodt.



This was the start of an illustrious film producing career and a selection of his subsequent feature films include, among others, the critically acclaimed *Sarafina*, starring Whoopi Goldberg, Leleti Khumalo and Miriam Makeba; a film adaptation of Alan Paton's revered novel *Cry the Beloved Country*; *Paljas*, an Afrikaans film directed by Katinka Heyns, and *Yesterday*, which was nominated for Best Foreign Language Film at the 77th Academy Awards in 2005.

Through an association with Leon Schuster, Videovision Entertainment was involved in the production of three South African box office hits - *Mr Bones* which grossed R33-million, *Mr Bones 2* which grossed R35-million, and *Mama Jack* which grossed R28-million.



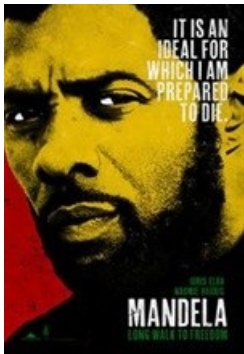
Production studios

Over the years, Singh has received numerous accolades for his involvement in the film industry, and his company Videovision Entertainment is internationally renowned, and one of the leading media and entertainment bodies in South Africa, and Africa.

Videovision was the driving force behind the establishment of the Cape Town Film Studios (CTFS), which opened in 2010. Equipped with the latest technology and state-of-the art equipment, these studios cover an area of 200 hectares with 60 hectares for film studios and associated facilities.



Since commencing operations in 2010, CTFS has hosted many foreign film shoots, including some big-budget Hollywood productions - Safe House, starring Denzel Washington and Ryan Reynolds, and Mad Max: Fury Road, starring Tom Hardy and Charlize Theron.



Latest film

Anant Singh is also the producer of the highly anticipated film Long Walk to Freedom, the autobiography of Nelson Mandela. The film is currently in the final stages of post-production, and is scheduled to be released in South Africa on 29 November 2013. Singh acquired the rights from Mr Mandela over 16 years ago, and at the time, when granting him the film rights to his autobiography, Nelson Mandela called him "a producer I respect very much ... a man of tremendous ability."

Commenting on the production of Long Walk to Freedom, Singh said "It has been a fascinating process trying to condense an amazing story in a two and a half hour film. We went through over 30 drafts of the script. It's been difficult, but I think we were finally able to tell Mr Mandela's epic life story in an appropriate and engaging way."

Singh says that he would like the strong production values of his \$35-million (R348-million) film to play a key role in showcasing Cape Town Film Studios' skilled workers and state-of-the-art facilities, adding, "I'm hoping that given the profile and hopefully the quality of the film that we will also get more films to shoot in South Africa."

Cape Town Film Studios have recently finished filming another Hollywood blockbuster - a gritty pirate adventure series called Black Sails. "It is comparable to a big film," CTFS CEO Nico Dekker says. "The series is something of a coup for the studios and the eight-episode first season of the original drama, set for a 2014 debut, is the TV production with the biggest-ever spend in South Africa."

Dekker says that since the Bahamas also aggressively court foreign shoots, landing Black Sails was another impressive accomplishment for a fairly new facility. "Longer series of this nature typically don't travel to Africa, and this show is set in the Caribbean, so it must be some form of compliment," says Dekker. "We invested heavily to make this series possible, and hopefully they will be back for more seasons."

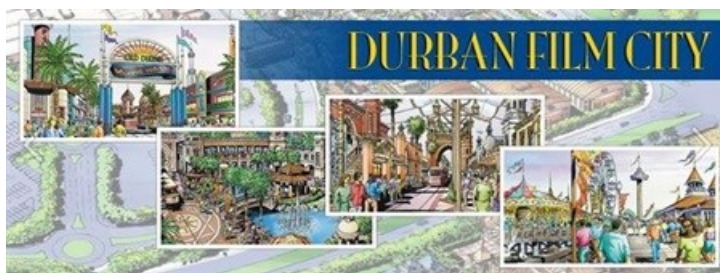
New studio in the making

Next on the cards for film producing entrepreneur Anant Singh is the construction of Durban's first film studio complex at the former SANDF military base known as Natal Command. Singh says one of the unique things about the South African film industry is that it has been growing exponentially over the past 10 years. "But probably 80 percent of revenue from film productions is in the Western Cape. We have such diversity in KZN for shooting films. That's one more reason that we need a film studio here."

Plans to build the new studio were held up for several years by a conflicting investment interest in the site, but in November 2012, the Constitutional Court ruled in favour of Singh, allowing him to commence development of his ambitious project.



Singh is adamant that although put together a decade ago, his film studio plan is still viable, and says, "The city has always supported the project and we absolutely believe it is viable. We had discussions with the city manager in the past few months regarding the way forward and we will now have to look at costs and the whole development in a more current form."



Similar to Universal City in Los Angeles, the 20-hectare location will feature a working studio with back lots, plus tourist and recreational entertainment areas open to the public. Singh has dubbed it Durban Film City, and says, "The vision is to create a state-of-the-art working environment complete with sound stages, in which local and international films can be created. Alongside this would be a studio setup similar to Universal Studios which would include coffee shops and restaurants, as a public and tourist attraction."



Singh says the new studio will not only stimulate economic growth in Durban and KwaZulu- Natal but also promote the city's tourism industry. "There are also the related tourism, leisure and lifestyle elements this will bring to Durban. In effect, with additional developments like restaurants and a hotel, this will create a mini Universal Studios in Durban."

Promoting the industry

And there are other exciting developments in Durban film world, with the recent formation of the Durban FilmMart, a joint programme of the Durban Film Office (DFO) and the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF), aimed at facilitating opportunities for African filmmakers to tap into various sources of funding, and introduce entry-level filmmakers to the industry.



When asked about advice for an emerging generation of young film entrepreneurs, Singh says, "The industry worldwide is filled with stories of people making low budget films and achieving success. I think that people need to follow their passion and work hard, but there are also opportunities, such as government incentives, as a result of recognition of the film industry as a strategic one."

A passion for the entertainment industry as well as the belief in, and ambition to create South Africa's own successful film production studios drawing on a wealth of local talent, are just some of the fundamental elements behind Anant Singh's great motion picture success story.



SOME OF ANANT SINGH'S NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS AND AWARDS:



Chairman of Cape Town Film Studios.



CEO of Videovision Entertainment.



Chairman of Videovision Group of Companies.



Producer Member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.



Awarded the World Visionary Award at the 2007 Palm Beach International Film Festival for his contribution to world cinema and his production of socially conscious films.



Lifetime Founder Member Award of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.



Recipient of the Crystal Award of the World Economic Forum.

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