From KTV to Cannes
SIRI LINN BRANDSeY - Sep 17 2010 17:42

The director of *Shirley Adams* harboured no goals to be a famous filmmaker.

'I worry that this man thinks I'm stalking him," director Oliver Hermanus says, tongue firmly in cheek, as he moves his eyes in the direction of the owner of Cape Town restaurant La Boheme. Hermanus, who directed the feature film *Shirley Adams -- a Portrait of a Mother*, is referring to frequent visits to his favourite hang-out in Cape Town where we're sharing a meze platter of biltong, feta and olives.

"You know, there's this level where it's nice to have regular customers, but when they're there all the time it kind of gets too much," he says, before relating it to a story about photography students' obsession with the iconic cinematographer, Christopher Doyle. "They would choose seat 34B or 34D on Cathay Pacific flights between London and Hong Kong because he always sat in 34C. Eventually one of them would bump into him because Doyle travelled so much and he always flew Cathay."

Hermanus wanted to be an aero-nautical engineer when he was growing up in Cape Town. "I think what I like about movies is the idea of being affected by them. Going into a space, watching a film and coming out feeling completely different; inspired, sad or happy. It has an amazing power," he says, clenching his hands as he says the word "power".

His first film was a horror movie titled *Déjà vu*, which he made with a friend when he was 13.

"We got a lot of attention for it and we were on KTV. It was like the coolest thing at that age. They showed all the best cartoons, but our film was so violent that they couldn't show it. We couldn't even watch our own film. We were too young," he says, laughing.

Back then Hermanus had no idea that he was going to make a movie like *Shirley Adams*, screen it at film festivals such as Toronto and Locarno and scoop the Golden Unicorn Best Feature Film Prize at the Amiens Film Festival in France. Neither did he envision being one of six international film directors at Cinéfondation, the Cannes Film Festival Residence in Paris. He was too busy re-enacting Britney Spears videos with his cousin in front of his parent's house in Kenilworth to harbour goals as lofty as these.

"My friend around the corner had one of those big Sony handycams. I used to borrow it and my cousin and I would shoot the most random stuff. My cousin loved Britney Spears. She was the kind of girl who would stand in front of the mirror and sing into a deodorant bottle. She was pretty good actually."

As a young filmmaker Hermanus dreamed of making movies like *Mission Impossible*, but as he grew up his childhood hero MacGyver was usurped by Michael Haneke (whom he describes as the new Stanley Kubrick,) and the Dardenne brothers (*Rosetta* 1999.) He earned his bachelor degree in film, media and visual studies at the University of Cape Town before going on to attain his masters in practical filmmaking at the London Film School, sponsored by Hollywood director Roland Emmerich, whom he met through a friend. "I was exceptionally, exceptionally lucky. I can't explain it. People ask me: 'How do you meet someone like Emmerich?' I don't know the answer."

Though it may sound like an easy route -- from meeting Emmerich, studying at the London Film School to the making and success of *Shirley Adams* -- Hermanus jokes about having to pay the price.
"There is a reason I've gone grey at 27. I'm the greyest person I know at my age," he says, pointing to his temples where a few rogue silver highlights protrude.

Despite his recent fame, he seems very down to earth. "My family's good at making fun of me -- my dad will call me and ask, 'So how's your film project doing?' It's good that people I spend most of my time with still treat me the same way because I think that if people around you start treating you differently you start seeing yourself differently."

At present Hermanus has two feature film projects up his sleeve: The Struggle and Skoonheid. The latter, which he describes as a narrative about infatuation in a philosophical Death in Venice kind of way, is the one he plans to take to Paris next year.

Judging from his success with Shirley Adams, it's not unlikely that future film students will try to hijack a seat next to him on flights between Paris and Cape Town. Or perhaps this restaurant's owner will have to thank him for a few extra patrons.

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