

Afda alumni in key roles on film which inspired Beyoncé's new album *Cowboy Carter*

By  Earle Holmes, issued by AFDA

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Imagine being able to say that you played a key role on a film that served as a source of inspiration for Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter*.



Afda alumni Vuyo Dabula, Kenneth Fok and Marcelle Du Toit can say just that. Dabula played the lead role of 'Tau', Fok played the character 'Wei' and Du Toit worked as the production manager.

Beyoncé recently cited the Neo-Western set in South Africa as one of the key influences shaping her new album's celebration of Black cowboys. And it's clear why. Like *Cowboy Carter*, *Five Fingers for Marseilles* boldly reclaims frontier mythology, demanding space for marginalised voices in a genre that's long excluded them.

"My process is that I typically have to experiment," Beyoncé says. "I enjoy being open to having the freedom to get all aspects of things I love out and so I worked on many songs. I recorded probably 100 songs. Once that is done, I am able to put the puzzle together and realize the consistencies and the common themes, and then create a solid body of work."

The album is an experiment indeed. Each song is its own version of a reimagined Western film. She took inspiration from films like *Five Fingers for Marseilles*, *Urban Cowboy*, *The Hateful Eight*, *Space Cowboys*, *The Harder They Fall* and *Killers of the Flower Moon*, often having the films playing on a screen during the recording process.

Some aspects of the percussion were inspired by the 'O Brother, Where Art Thou?' soundtrack, where it was more Bluegrass. This body of work undulates from singing cowboy and Blaxploitation to Spaghetti westerns and fantasy with Beyoncé weaving between personal experiences, honouring Black history, to exaggerated character building.

From the grit of South Africa to the sounds of the South, these projects are united in reclaiming Black and African cowboy stories. They shatter ceilings and forge new paths, redefining a genre and industry.

“I knew from the first page of the screenplay that I had found something special concluded that I would not let anything separate me from the project,” says Dabula. “It is not just that it appealed to my boyhood fantasies of being a cowboy, nor the relevant socio-political undercurrents, but how the story unfolds in a way that reminds me of why I fell in love with movies.”

Du Toit had this to say: “Recognition and acknowledgement for the full “Five Fingers for Marseilles” team.

Five Fingers for Marseilles is one of those projects that leaves a deep imprint on your journey. A meaningful text, delivered by well-intentioned creatives, persistent producers and a resilient cast and crew - magic was made on the edges of the Maloti Mountains in the heart of winter. We were faced with multiple logistical challenges - water shortages, limited signal, snow, sleet and a 2000m altitude to tackle.

It is so special to be part of a convergence of creative projects that share a mission to redefine genre boundaries and amplify historically marginalized voices.”

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