

Brett Michael Innes and *Daryn's Gym*: Telling the different story

 By [Emily Stander](#)

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Daryn's Gym, a South African mockumentary comedy written and directed by Brett Michael Innes, has been selected to be part of the 51st edition of the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR).



Brett Michael Innes. Image: Mark Christopher Innes

The film will have its premiere as part of the Big Screen Competition section of the programme. This section is the result of the collaboration between IFFR and VPRO, looking to bridge the gap between popular, classic and art house cinema by showcasing sixteen feature films from across the globe to an audience jury.

Better known for heavier, more dramatic films, Innes has been in the industry for a long time. A Safta-winning filmmaker, his hand has been found in making films like the new adaptation of *Fiela se Kind* and *Sink*. Dipping his feet in the world of comedy, *Daryn's Gym* was a bit of a diversion from his usual style. "To pivot to comedy is not something I think my peers expected, and definitely not something I saw myself going into," he said. "But I absolutely loved it."

We spoke to Innes to find out more about the process of filming and what challenges the South African industry faces.

The process

So, why the decision to make a mockumentary? "As an audience member, I love a mockumentary film. I think it treads this line where it fuses drama techniques and approach, but frames it through the lens of comedy," Innes said. "If I was going to do a comedy, slapstick would not be something I play into, it wouldn't come naturally to me."

Mockumentaries (or sometimes referred to as docucomedies) are meant to bring forward current issues in a style that mixes fact and fiction. This was no different with *Daryn's Gym* - as the story was inspired by real things that Innes noticed himself. Having been a member of a big conglomerate fitness centre in Randburg, Innes noticed that there was a smaller, privately owned gym across the street from where he would regularly go. This sparked the thought - how does this family-owned business sustain themselves in this situation?

And so, *Daryn's Gym* was born.

The South African story

African stories are usually told through the lens of tragedy. "We only ever see stories of pain and trauma, and what separates us going to festivals," Innes said. "When you look at South African films that have done anything, they all focus on that."

As such, *Daryn's Gym* being selected for the IFFR is a big step forward in telling the diverse stories we *actually* have on offer. "To have a film that is comedic and celebrates our diversity and actually shows that there is a version of South Africa where we are multicultural," Innes said.

Taking the diversity of South Africa international provides us with the opportunity to show the world that we are more than the trauma we have suffered. Innes explained, "I just love the fact that it's going to show a version of South Africa that so few people get to see. Seeing this version of South Africa will just add to the delightfully complex world that we do live in."

The industry moving forward

Beyond the already-challenging issues that Covid-19 brought forward for the local film industry, an interesting development occurred in response to the #MeToo movement. For the first time, Innes worked with an intimacy coordinator on set.

The purpose of this position is to ensure that everybody involved in the making of the film is comfortable, safe, and

understands their position - especially when it comes to filming sex scenes or scenes that include nudity. "It was a game-changer for me," Innes said. "The amount of abuses that have taken place on productions has gone unchecked for decades. South Africans love to joke when we get uncomfortable, but that just feeds into a really inappropriate culture in a country with gender-based violence the way it is. We have to take strong measures to protect our actors and our crew."



A scene from on-set. Image: Paulo Areal

A prime example of how a change can be made in an industry plagued by these kinds of issues, taking the time to educate those in the industry about these issues and bringing forward solutions is the way to go when thinking about making positive change for the future.

Daryn's Gym was released on 1 December 2021, and is available to watch on Evod.

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

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