



BBC Films, UK Film Council in association with  
Videovision Entertainment, Lip Sync and ARTE France,  
a Sixth Sense/Origin Pictures Production  
presents

## **THE FIRST GRADER**

### **Starring**

Naomie Harris  
Oliver Litondo

### **Executive Producers**

Joe Oppenheimer, Norman Merry, Anant Singh, Helena Spring

### **Produced by**

David M. Thompson, Sam Feuer, Richard Harding

### **Written by**

Ann Peacock

### **Directed by**

Justin Chadwick

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# Production Notes

<b>CAST</b>	<b>CHARACTER</b>
Naomie Harris	Jane Obinchi
Oliver Musila Litondo	Kimani Ng'ang'a Maruge
	and
Tony Kgoroge	Charles Obinchi
Alfred Munyua	Teacher Alfred
Shoki Mokgapa	Teacher Elizabeth
Vusumuzi Michael Kunene	Mr Kipruto
Agnes Simaloi	Agnes
Kamau Mbaya	Kamau Chege
Young Maruge's Wife	Emily Njoki
Young Marague	Lwander Jawar
DJ Masha	Daniel Ndambuki (Churchill)

## THE FILMMAKERS

Directed by	Justin Chadwick
Screenplay by	Ann Peacock
Produced by	David M. Thompson
	Sam Feuer
	Richard Harding
Executive Producers	Joe Oppenheimer
	Anant Singh
	Norman Merry
	Helena Spring
Co-Producer	Trevor Ingman
Director of Photography	Rob Hardy
Production Designer	Vittoria Sogno
Film Editor	Paul Knight
Costume Designer	Sophie Oprisano
Music By	Alex Heffes
Casting By	Moonyeenn Lee
	Margie Kiundi

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

In a small, remote mountain top primary school in the Kenyan bush, hundreds of children are jostling for a chance for the free education newly promised by the Kenyan government. One new applicant causes astonishment when he knocks on the door of the school. He is Maruge (Litondo), an old Mau Mau veteran in his eighties, who is desperate to learn to read at this late stage of his life. He fought for the liberation of his country and now feels he must have the chance of an education so long denied—even if it means sitting in a classroom alongside six-year-olds.

Moved by his passionate plea, head teacher Jane Obinchi (Harris), supports his struggle to gain admission and together they face fierce opposition from parents and officials who don't want to waste a precious school place on such an old man.

Full of vitality and humour, the film explores the remarkable relationships Maruge builds with his classmates some eighty years his junior. Through Maruge's journey, we are taken back to the shocking untold story of British colonial rule 50 years earlier where Maruge fought for the freedom of his country, eventually ending up in the extreme and harsh conditions of the British detention camps.

Directed by Justin Chadwick (THE OTHER BOLEYN GIRL/BLEAK HOUSE) from a script by Emmy-winner Ann Peacock (THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA, NIGHTS IN RODANTHE, KIT KITTRIDGE), THE FIRST GRADER is a heart warming and inspiring true story of one man's fight for what he believes is his right in order to overcome the burdens of his past. It is a triumphant testimony to the transforming force of education.

The filming process itself was quite extraordinary, as the children in the film – who are in many ways the stars – had never even seen a film or television set before let alone been involved in the filming process. Their involvement in the shoot was a totally novel experience for them and their enthusiasm and energy is captured beautifully on screen.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

Kenya, 2003: A radio DJ announces that the Kenyan government is offering free primary school education to all. Maruge (OLIVER LITONDO), an 84 year-old villager, hears this and decides he wants to educate himself. Arriving at his local school, with a newspaper clipping about this change in policy, he meets Jane (NAOMIE HARRIS), the school's principal, and expresses his desire to learn. Her colleague Alfred (ALFRED MUNYUA), in an effort to get rid of him, tells him all pupils need two pencils and an exercise book.

The next day, Maruge returns, telling Jane he wants to learn to read. He has a letter from the 'Office of the President' that he wants to understand. Exasperated, she tells him the school already has too many pupils. Later that night, she tells her husband Charles (TONY KGOROGE) about Maruge. Cautious of his own position, working alongside the government in Nairobi, he advises her to fight the battles she can win.

After cutting his trousers and turning them into shorts, Maruge returns to the school again. While Jane tells the school inspector Mr. Kipruto (VUSI KUNENE) on the telephone that she currently has five children to a desk, when Maruge re-appears, she relents. Alfred is reluctant, yet Jane is defiant, claiming Kipruto is not the head of the school. Allowing Maruge into her class, she seats him near the front – after he admits his eyesight is not so good – and begins to teach him, and her other charges, how to write the alphabet.

Plagued by memories of his time in Kenya in 1953, when he fought with the Mau Mau against the British, it even impacts upon Maruge in class, when Alfred scolds him for not keeping his pencil sharp. Made to sharpen it, he breaks down as he recalls a time when the British tortured him – using a sharp pencil brutally thrust into his ear. Apologising to Jane, saying it won't happen again, Maruge later educates his fellow pupils, patiently explains about the fight for land that he and other Mau Mau undertook and teaching them the word for 'freedom'.

Resentment brews over Maruge's education. At home, people shout that he should stay away from the school, while in the playground, covert photographs are taken of him. Soon enough, the story that an old man is going to school hits the radio airwaves. Kipruto arrives, furious that he has learnt in the press that Maruge is attending his school. Jane tells him that Maruge fought against the British. She later learns from Maruge that the same soldiers killed his family.

Desperate to keep Maruge in school, Jane calls Charles, but he advises her not to go over Kipruto's head. She wilfully ignores him, visiting the head of the education board to plead Maruge's case. Her protests fall on deaf ears and Maruge is made to attend an adult education centre, where he soon finds himself surrounded by people with no ambitions to learn. He goes to see Jane, telling her he must learn to read because he wants to be able to understand the letter he's been sent. Refusing to go back to the adult education centre, Maruge nevertheless must say his goodbyes to the children. Yet Jane offers him a reprieve – as her teaching assistant.

As the story breaks, the press descends on the school, surrounding Jane and wanting to question Maruge. He tells the reporters that the power is in the pen. Nevertheless, his presence in the school is beginning to cause anger amongst the parents of the young pupils. One mother confronts Jane, accusing her of seeking fame and fortune from all the attention, while another father proclaims to Alfred that the school is spending too much time on Maruge. Again, Kipruto arrives with the school in chaos, telling Jane that her special pupil cannot stay and that plans are afoot for the government to compensate the Mau Mau.

Resolute, Jane decides to teach Maruge to read after school has finished – despite receiving threatening phone calls. A delegation of politicians arrive at the school, keen to cash in on the free publicity surrounding Maruge, while secretly demanding that Jane cut them in on any money she has received. Events begin to spiral – people attack the school with sticks while Charles receives an anonymous telephone call, noting his wife is now out of control. Jane soon receives a letter that she is to be transferred to a school 300 miles away. Charles tells her that events surrounding Maruge are tearing them apart, explaining that he's received calls claiming she has been unfaithful.

Jane explains to Maruge that she is being transferred, and then undertakes an emotional goodbye to the children, who all bring her gifts. Meanwhile, Kipruto introduces the class' new teacher. Enraged, the children padlock the school gate and throw missiles at her and Kipruto. Meanwhile, Maruge travels to Nairobi, heading to the Ministry of Education, where he confronts the board on behalf of Jane, showing them the scars he sustained as a young man tortured by the British.

Jane returns to the school, where Maruge is there to welcome her back. He wants her to read to him his letter, which explains he will be compensated for his time in the prison camps. As the film draws to a close, the radio DJ announces that Maruge – the Guinness Book of Records holder for the oldest person to go to primary school – will speak at the United Nations.

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

### **From Humble Beginnings:**

Every film has its birth, a moment where it comes into being. For THE FIRST GRADER, it was an article in the Los Angeles Times of the same name: The First Grader. The article, written by Robyn Dixon, told the remarkable story of Kimani N'gan'ga Maruge, an 84-year-old Kenyan villager who had fought for the Mau Mau rebellion against the British occupation during the 1950s. When the Kenyan government announced in 2002 that it was proposing free primary school education for all, Maruge took it to heart. Arriving at his local school, run by one Jane Obinchu, he requested that she take up his offer and enter him into the first grade so he could learn to read and write.

An enchanting true-life story, made more so by the fact Maruge would later address the United Nations about the need for education in Africa. Screenwriter Ann Peacock was hooked the moment she read the article, *"I just picked up the phone and called my agent and said, 'I have to do this story',"* she says. *"I was just totally blown away by his courage. This is a man who is illiterate and poor and has nothing, but he just wants to learn to read. To be prepared to humble himself in such a way, to go to a primary school...I thought that was the most amazing thing. But, what really excited me was his Mau Mau background. It informed the character. He stood up and made his voice heard once before and now he was doing it again."*

As it turned out, Peacock wasn't alone. Enter Richard Harding and Sam Feuer, the producers behind Los Angeles-based outfit Sixth Sense Productions. Like Peacock, Feuer had read the L.A. Times piece and – remembers Harding – called him straight away. *"It was a Sunday. I'll never forget. He called me and told me about the article and I was hooked."* Born in Sierra Leone, with African parents, Harding immediately solicited the opinion of his mother. *"She said she thought it would be a remarkable story, and we should go ahead and make it. Once I got mom's approval, I knew it was a good story to make!"*

Harding and Feuer worked quickly, contacting the journalist behind the article, who referred them to Jane Obinchu, the principal of the school that Maruge attended. *"She had told us that nobody had been out there regarding the purchase of their life-rights,"* says Harding. *"We had a lawyer put a contract together and within a week we were out backpacking in Kenya."* They met with Maruge to convince him to let them tell his life story. *"At the beginning, he didn't quite understand what we were asking. He thought it was a*

*documentary or an interview we wanted to make. A lot of reporters had been out there already.”*

When Maruge realised what the project was, he signed on the dotted line, leaving Harding and Feuer to return to the United States to contemplate how they might turn this remarkable tale into a viable feature script. At the same time, Peacock’s agent came back with some news. *“We discovered that Sixth Sense Productions had gone out there and bought the rights to the story,”* she recalls. Eventually, her agent tracked down Harding and Feuer, explaining that Peacock was desperate to bring Maruge’s story to the screen. *“It was such a wonderful marriage at that particular point,”* says Harding, *“we knew it was destiny for us to get together and make this film.”*

*“The obstacle was to find backing for this project. There were a few companies wanting to come on board early on, however they did not share our vision for this film,”* Harding explains. Even with Peacock attached, whose adaptation of THE

CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE for Disney was then riding high at the box-office, it proved hard for Harding and Feuer to get financiers to come on board. *“We were shocked. This was Ann Peacock – she’d just written one of the highest grossing movies of that year, which even beat out King Kong! The companies that we had hoped would come on board thought it was a small movie that wouldn’t do that well – though they kept saying they would love to see it once made,”* Harding recalls.

Then, a minor miracle happened. On Peacock’s way to South Africa, where she had grown up before moving to Los Angeles, she stopped off in London to have a meeting with BBC Films producer Joe Oppenheimer. During the meeting, she began to pitch Maruge’s story. *“He just said ‘Come with me’. He took me along the passage to David Thompson and sat me down. I pitched it to David and he listened absolutely enraptured. And when I finished, he said ‘Let’s do it’ – which completely stunned me. Producers never declare themselves in front of the writer! They usually go away and talk about it. But, David said ‘Let’s do it’.”*

Then head of BBC Films, Thompson, recalls this very moment quite clearly – and just why he wanted to commission Peacock to write it. *“It was something about the idea that caught my imagination. It was just an extraordinary story, and above all, a story of one man’s endeavours to break through his past and have a new beginning – even at that age. There was something about that that really captivated me. It seemed to be in a way a universal story in a sense that it symbolised what can be done, if somebody is absolutely determined.*

*And, it's not just a story about the triumph of education. It's also a story about someone overcoming their past."*

When Thompson stepped down as head of BBC Films to set up his own production company, Origin Pictures, he made it clear that he wanted THE FIRST GRADER to be his new outfit's inaugural production, a proposal that delighted the people at Sixth Sense Productions. *"He didn't even finish his sentence before Sam and I both yelled out 'Absolutely!'"* remembers Harding. *"David orchestrated the financing of the film, which was a tremendous help. Without his involvement from the very beginning, I don't think we could've got it done the way we envisioned – especially as he greenlit it when everybody else said no."*

### **Bringing the Team Together:**

With the production underway, the big question was who should direct THE FIRST GRADER? For the producers, there was only one choice, Justin Chadwick, who Thompson had recently collaborated with on the 2008 feature THE OTHER BOLEYN GIRL. *"He was the perfect partner – a real collaborator,"* says Thompson, who had even worked with Chadwick, during the director's brief time as an actor, on the 1993 BBC Films production THE HOUR OF THE PIG. *"He's a wonderful person to work with. Very much knowing his own mind, very firm, but also very approachable and accessible and a real creative partner."*

Chadwick was immediately sold when he received Peacock's script. *"I really responded to the material. I thought it was a really challenging movie to do. Education and children, that really struck a chord with me,"* he says. *"I went into the meeting with David and Joe and the way we three responded in that room, I knew we'd all make the same film. They knew it was a difficult subject matter – an old man goes back to school – and we were squirreling in hard-hitting issues while having essentially an uplifting story about the power of education. But, from the very, very off, I knew we all wanted to make the same thing."*

Part of Chadwick's initial fascination with the story stemmed from his own upbringing in the northwest of England *"I know that if I hadn't have come across one teacher, I would never have gone to the local theatre at 11 years old and then joined Manchester Youth Theatre. That changed my life. Education is the most important thing for me. I know it's an obvious thing to say. But, all you need as a child is one good teacher to come across. And, Jane Obinchi is clearly a brilliant teacher."*

With Chadwick on board, he began to work with Peacock to refine the script. *“She’s a very collaborative, open-minded person,”* the director notes. *“I had certain things I wanted to do with the script. Immediately, I wanted to focus on this relationship between Jane and Maruge. The flashbacks were quite complicated in the original script. Also, Jane was a lot older in the original script, and had children of her own. It felt more like from an outside point-of-view. In the early days of the script, you go with your sensibility about what you want to do with the arc. And, I wanted the children at the school to come through, to enrich the story.”*

If this suggests Chadwick immediately had a grasp of the narrative direction he wanted to take, he admits things really began to change as he started to research his subject. *“I came to this not knowing about Kenya and its colonial history,”* he says. *“I hadn’t been to Kenya before. I’d been to Africa but I’d only been as a tourist. I’d been to the Gambia when I was a student and been around and travelled. So, I made a very conscious decision to really immerse myself and talk and listen to as many people from that period – from the period of the Fifties. But, also with people that really knew their subject. And, that’s what really informed the script and changed it.”*

Yet what really affected Chadwick was meeting Maruge, who would sadly die of cancer just a few months later. *“He was a real fighter,”* says Chadwick, recalling their encounter in a hospice where Maruge would spend his last days. *“He refused to be old. You’d be sitting with him and he’d go ‘I’m not old! He wanted to go for a walk. So, we helped him up – he was as light as a feather but you could feel the strength inside him. He had this real power and he walked a few steps, and he went to the front gate, and he said, ‘Open the gate’ and he took off down this road! We were in the middle of Nairobi, and there were goats and trucks everywhere! All the nurses started chasing him with a wheelchair, and he was hacking it down the street!”*

Harding, who had kept in regular touch with Maruge via his granddaughter since their first encounter, concurs. *“He was a wonderful, gentle old man. Even up until the day he was dying, he wanted to learn. We went back to visit him when he was in the hospice and his desire to learn was just greater than anybody I’d seen. Every single time we went to visit him, he tried to convince us to bring a teacher to come over and teach him. Unfortunately, the nuns at the nursing home would not allow it, because the other residents there would’ve opposed him getting preferential treatment. But, he would constantly ask for a teacher because he missed learning. He was a very lovely, spirited man.”*

It was this spirit that Chadwick wanted to invest in the script. While this meant rewriting the story across a number of drafts, Peacock felt the project was in very safe hands. *“It’s wonderful when you can hand your script over to someone almost like you’re handing your child over to them – and you entrust them to do the very, very best and make it even better than you did. And, that’s how I felt with Justin. He had such a clear vision of what he wanted to do. And he inspired me tremendously and brought the best out of me – and we really got the script to an even better place than it was.”*

### **Creating the World of THE FIRST GRADER:**

The next big question faced by Chadwick was where to shoot THE FIRST GRADER. South Africa was mooted, a sensible idea given how the country’s infrastructure and film industry was perfectly used to handling large-scale outside productions yet Chadwick, for one, was not convinced. *“I fought to shoot it in Kenya,”* he says. *“We could’ve shot it in South Africa, but I fought for it to be shot in Kenya, because you just felt this unbelievable, inexplicable energy that was there, with these children, these people. It was a different feeling – and I wanted to capture in the film and use in the film. I went down to South Africa but I kept coming back to Kenya.”*

Both Thompson and Oppenheimer had worked in South Africa before for the adaptation of Gillian Slovo’s novel, RED DUST, Thompson was in agreement with his director. *“It was much better filming in Kenya, much more authentic and real,”* he says. Thompson had been involved in a similar debate when prepping Michael Caton Jones,’ SHOOTING DOGS with Oppenheimer once again, and in the end they found a way to shoot the majority of the film in Rwanda despite the obstacles. The Kenyan film industry was somewhat in its infancy though, despite having recently played host to Fernando Meirelles’s Oscar®-winning THE CONSTANT GARDENER. Nevertheless, things were changing. *“A lot of people are waking up to the film industry and saying ‘it’s a good thing’,”* notes Vittoria Sogno, THE FIRST GRADER’s locally-based production designer.

With Kenya settled upon, Chadwick relocated to the country to begin preparations several weeks before the shoot was due to begin. While he began scouting for locations, he also faced the difficulties of casting – in particular the youngsters that Maruge finds himself learning with in the classroom, where much of the film is set. *“I was thinking, ‘How am I going to cast this?’ There were thoughts that we’d have to go all over Africa to try and get this class.”* But, something about this notion didn’t sit right with him. He decided it would be much better to visit a real school and cast a classroom of kids en masse.

*"In the end, we found this wonderful location up in the Rift Valley in the mountains," Chadwick notes. "Very unexpected. Not how you imagine Africa to be. It was freezing cold and barren and quite different kind of climate, where it changes quite a lot during the day. We were in the middle of nowhere – a good hour-and-a-half away from the city – and these were country children. So, these children would wake up in the morning, do an hour's work, then walk five or six miles to school – and emerge from this plain in the Rift Valley, which was almost like a desert, to this school."*

At the same time as securing this valuable setting, *"the big quest"*, as Chadwick puts it, was to find an actor able to play Maruge. *"It's a Kenyan story and we wanted a Kenyan lead actor,"* says Thompson. *"That was very important for us. But, we didn't think we'd find one. It was a nightmare! Frankly, it was very difficult getting people well enough of that age who could pass their medicals. At one stage, it looked like it was going to be impossible, because of the various medical problems that people tend to have at that age."* On Chadwick's first trip, he cast his net wide, looking all over Africa, for an actor able to not only embody Maruge's indomitable spirit but also who could act in both English and the local language Kikuyu.

Eventually, he came across Oliver Litondo, a TV news anchorman in the 70's who had always had a burning ambition to act. As soon as Chadwick met him, he was convinced he had what was needed to lead a film, *"I started to screen test him and...he's a lovely man, Oliver. He had a very good heart and he was very responsive and intelligent in the way that he thought about education and what the film was."*

Litondo, like all of the local cast and crew on the film, knew Maruge's story well. *"I read about it in the local media. And, of course the way the local media reported it, it was not like it was something that people wanted to know. There's no curiosity per se. So, I read about it in the newspaper. And, then later on, people started talking about it a bit. But, the local media treated the story simplistically. They didn't want to know anymore apart from the fact that this old man might want to make some money out of this. As we show in the film, even the head teacher is accused of making money out of Maruge."*

Given Maruge spends the latter part of the film travelling to Nairobi to argue with officials at the Ministry of Education, when Jane is about to be transferred to another school, it was clear Litondo wasn't playing a simple rural villager. *"Maruge was everything in one. The character is challenging in the sense that at one time you find him in a childish situation, playing with children in school. In another situation, he's acting as a freedom fighter. In*

*another situation, he's confronting people who are more educated and of a higher mental capacity than him. And yet, you find him arguing probably at par or even sometimes above them."*

Sadly for Litondo, unlike Chadwick, he never got to meet Maruge. *"I came on board just before he died. The first time I came for audition when I talked to Justin, we planned to go and see him the next time I came back. But, that day when I left Nairobi to go home, it was on the news that he had just passed away, which was very sad. I felt very sad about it, because I would've loved to meet him and talk to him. Having read the script, I became very interested in the man. To play his character, I decided I had to do a little more than just acting. So, I meant to see him and meet him but unfortunately he died before I could."*

After Litondo had been secured for the lead, Chadwick's thoughts came back to the other key role: that of the school's defiant principal, Jane Obinchi, who fights the authorities to keep Maruge in her classroom. Chadwick had initially considered the British actress Naomi Harris, best known for her work in the Pirates of the Caribbean franchise. *"She's a really intelligent actor, very honest and subtle"*, he says. Keen to find an entirely Kenyan-based cast, he soon dismissed the idea. But, after scouring Africa to no avail, he returned to his first instincts and reached out to Harris. *"I'd never heard of the story of Maruge,"* recalls Harris. *"But they asked me if I wanted to be involved. I thought the script was great. I loved the idea of being a part of it."*

Rounding out the cast, Chadwick hired Shoki Mokgapa and Alfred Munyua to play Jane's colleagues at the school, Elizabeth and Alfred. With Vusi Kunene, most recently seen in THE NO.1 LADIES DETECTIVE AGENCY, brought on board to play the school's officious inspector, Mr. Kipruto, that left one major role to fill: that of Charles, husband to Jane. In the end, the production lucked out, casting the South African-born actor Tony Kgoroge, who has appeared in some of the finest African-set dramas of the past decade, including HOTEL RWANDA, BLOOD DIAMOND, LORD OF WAR and, most recently, Clint Eastwood's INVICTUS.

*"He's very supportive of Jane and he's very ambitious, a family-loving kind of guy,"* Kgoroge says of Charles. Fortunately, like Harris, who gets to meet the real Jane when she came to set one day, Kgoroge got a chance to spend time with his real-life counterpart. *"It really helped me. He's a gentleman. I looked at him and thought, 'My goodness – how am I going to play him?' He's a loving guy. It's in him, y'know? His walk, and how he looks at his wife...the way he laughs. It's a genuine laugh. It's a genuine smile. Those are the things that, in the small space of time, I tried to grab and use."*

## **Back to School:**

Despite his principal cast in place, Chadwick still faced one major headache: how to integrate Harris and Litondo into a classroom of real pupils who had never even seen a camera or a television, let alone acted before. *“I knew we wouldn’t be able to shoot them in the traditional way,”* says Chadwick. While he had already had accumulated experience working with *“real kids”* from Newcastle when he worked on a TV show, he’d never pulled off anything like this. Initially, long before filming began, he decided the best approach was just to gradually make his presence felt at the school. *“I just sat there, and let the children come to me, and just observed what they were like.”*

The next move was to introduce Rob Hardy, the film’s cinematographer, and Jennie Paddon, his assistant – but without any equipment in tow. *“I banned all cameras,”* says Chadwick. *“If you bring a camera, kids just want to see what they look like on a camera and all of a sudden you get kids acting up for the camera, and I didn’t want any of that. So, there were three of us hanging around the school. And, we got to know the children, got to know them properly – and then guided them towards those different characters that we were going to do. Then slowly we got a little tiny camera in.”*

Chadwick initially felt like he would need to shoot the film using the same “observational” style he had used for his award-winning BBC version of BLEAK HOUSE. But, he soon changed his mind when the camera was introduced. *“Literally we had the camera a few inches from the children and they weren’t bothered. Unless they caught their reflection in the camera glass, they just didn’t know. You had to give them something to play or do that was more interesting than Rob or the camera.”* Even so, while the children didn’t prove camera-shy, the question of how to get them to ‘act’ was another matter. In the end, Chadwick resolved to design lessons plans for the children that could be integrated into the film.

*“When Naomie walks in as Jane, you give her a proper lesson and you give the children a proper thing that they have to do,”* says Chadwick. *“And they would do it. So much so that I would go in and they’d go, ‘Teacher Justin! Teacher Justin!’ There’d be stuff on the blackboard for me to mark! They just saw me as a teacher. Everything was structured like that. They thought Oliver was a real student going to the school. They thought Naomie was a real teacher. They thought Rob, the cameraman, was a real teacher – although he had a camera!”*

Shooting in a technique Thompson describes as, “*rapid fire...but in a non-intrusive way*”, the producer notes that Chadwick’s style reminded him of working with the legendary director Alan Clarke on his 1989 television film, THE FIRM. “*There was that same incredible focus and that team spirit, driving towards a goal, and filmmaking not being too obtrusive – doing it in a quiet way, without all this locking off sets. Making the whole set live and being able to shoot the whole time, and doing it in a non-conventional filmic way. Shooting somewhere between a film and a documentary. That was really necessary to get the children relaxed.*”

Using this method, it meant that Chadwick needed Harris, as their teacher, on set three weeks in advance. “*I had only been given the part two weeks previously,*” says Harris. “*And I needed to learn the accent, and go through the script and learn my character. I kept thinking – ‘Why does this director want this? Why do I need to come out three weeks in advance? It doesn’t make any sense!’ It’s really unusual. It’s normally a couple of days to get over the jetlag and then you’re on. But he said, ‘I really want you to work with the children.’ So I thought, ‘That’s fine! I’ll just go and start playing with them and they’ll be absolutely fine.’”*

In the end, Harris arrived a fortnight before shooting began. “*I’m so glad that I did. They were so different to any other children that I’d met. Really reserved and really shy, really gentle, really innocent. So it takes them a long time to warm up to you. It was actually really frustrating and upsetting in the beginning. I kept thinking, ‘What is wrong with me? Why won’t they talk to me? Why won’t they play with me?’ Also, I’m an adult and so they’re really respectful of the adults. And, adults are very strict and firm with them in the school – loving but very firm. They’re used to authoritarian figures. You don’t really play around with the teacher. So there was just that distance which made it really hard.*”

What made it harder still was that, while playing Jane, Harris was also having to be the children’s teacher. “*I was really taking lessons,*” she says. “*We had to do a lot of it for real. My step-dad is a teacher...and I have taught at his school before. He’ll say, ‘Come in and do a fun day of acting activities with the kids.’ So again I thought, ‘That will be fine. I’ve done that before.’ It was so hard to keep their attention for that long. And, in the class I had, it was mixed abilities, so you had children who were just learning their numbers, one to ten, and then children who can do really complicated multiplication sums. So you had to work out a lesson plan that was going to keep them all interested, which was really tough.*”

Litondo calls working with the children “*the most interesting part*” of making THE FIRST GRADER. Yet how did they take to an adult arriving in their classroom, dressed in a school uniform? “*They were at first a bit surprised,*” he smiles. “*But, later on they just accepted me*

*as one of them. In that part of Kenya, education is something that is coming in as a new thing, so it doesn't bother them really. So the kids are not so much surprised to see somebody bigger or older coming in. In that school, there is a boy who is 15 years old in the same class as kids who are six years old. So, I think they just accepted me as one of them. Like I'm looking and seeking to get education just as they are."*

For Thompson, he hopes the experience his young cast had in participating on THE FIRST GRADER was just as enriching for them. *"I hope it was a great experience and a life-changing one, making the film. It was a whole experience they'd never had before. And, the Maruge story was an inspiration. There were some much older people in the school – there was a 19-year-old boy, for example. And, he felt he was inspired by Maruge. That's the other key thing. He inspired a whole generation of other people to go back into schooling. The message being you do not have to be what you have been. You are not doomed by your past. You can transcend it. And, that to me is what the symbolic power of the film is."*

### **Maruge and the Mau Mau:**

Working with the school children wasn't the only difficulty THE FIRST GRADER presented. Obviously an outsider to the country, Chadwick was desperate to be authentic to the Kenyan way of life, and admits he was "very conscious" about THE FIRST GRADER not offering up an ill-educated westernised perspective on an African country and its people. *"A lot of American productions, they go in and slam everything in. So I went in and listened to the advice from people there and then you create it outside. I was able to listen, and observe, and people came to me and told me extraordinary things. People with a Kikuyu past, a Maasai past – how people did things, or farmed."*

Yet this still left Chadwick with the issue of dealing with the Mau Mau rebels in the flashback scenes, which take us to when Maruge was a young man fighting the British. *"It's very difficult when you're an outsider to try and work out what went on through history,"* he says. *"A lot of families don't talk about that period of history in that time because it's too raw still. It's very private."* Nevertheless, with a largely Kenyan crew on his side, he began to make contacts that would help him strive for the sort of authenticity he wanted.

*"I was very, very lucky. I met this young man, Paul, who is in the movie – as the Mau Mau leader – whose grandparents had been in the camps. I was very keen to have music in the film, and to record music live. He went to his grandparents, and spoke to them. And, after many meetings his grandma started to give him songs. Some of the songs that are in the film actually came right the way back from that experience. They're completely authentic*

*Kikuyu and completely authentic from that period. That sort of thing, I would never have known.”*

While Chadwick is keen to stress that the film is primarily about *“the importance of education in people’s lives”*, he concedes that it does deal with Kenya’s complicated past. *“In the Sixties, when independence came in, like a lot of places, the general feeling is to move on. You don’t really talk about the past. But we’re at a point now where we can look back. I think that a lot of people in Kenya didn’t even know what had happened to the Mau Mau. The Mau Mau were so represented as a bloodthirsty band of guerrillas, that it’s very one-sided and forgotten. The film touches on that.”*

As far as Litondo is concerned, it was this experience in his youth, as a freedom fighter, that shaped Maruge into the man we see on screen. *“You can see him as a young man not succumbing to certain forces. He was tortured. He was expected to denounce the Mau Mau – but he doesn’t. That I think hardened him. That made him into what we see in the film. In every situation, he was determined. In detention he was determined and his determination pushed him to the level of saying ‘I want to make an impact’. I look at him as being what he is today from what he was, as a young man.”*

Even so, Chadwick argues that he was determined not to sensationalise the flashback scenes. *“We tried to be really honest with it, and fair, and to tell the story of what happened in the Fifties. What I really liked about it – and it tallied with what I was feeling at the time – is that if you see an old person, you make a thousand assumptions about them. But, that person has a huge life behind them and Maruge has this whole huge life. In Africa, the elderly are looked after by their families. They have a family network. I think we have a lot to learn from Africa in lots of ways.”*

Above all, THE FIRST GRADER pays tribute to Maruge, a man Litondo believes is “inspirational” to his nation. *“He’s an inspiration to both young and old Kenyans, who value education. Since Maruge’s story came out, I’ve read other stories of older people going to school,” he adds. Harris concurs. “I love the fact as well that it’s an 84-year-old man wanting to learn. Your life is never over. It’s never too late to learn and to be open to learning as well. I think those are really great messages.”*

According to Thompson, *“What we were trying to do was make a film which was true to his spirit – one that is hopefully accessible, appealing and commercial. It’s both heart-warming but has some real grit in it. That’s what I think Justin has done really effectively.”* Enchanted by his time in Kenya, Chadwick sums up his feelings thus: *“Apart from my children and my*

*wife, it was the best single experience of my life.*” His only sadness is that Maruge is no longer with us. *“That’s the heartbreaking thing – he was never able to see this, and see what we’ve done with it.”* Even so, THE FIRST GRADER will show audiences just the kind of man Maruge was.

## **ABOUT THE CAST**

As well as working on big budget Hollywood Movies such as PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MAN’S CHEST, **Naomie Harris** (Jane) continues to choose challenging and exciting roles in smaller and more diverse films such as THE FIRST GRADER. London-born Naomie graduated with honours from Cambridge University in 1998 with a degree in social and political science. She went on to train at the prestigious Bristol Old

Vic Theatre School and had her first major acting breakthrough in 2002 with Danny Boyle’s zombie horror film 28 DAYS LATER. She went on to receive further international recognition and critical acclaim in her role as *Tia Dalma* in PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MAN’S CHEST and AT WORLD’S END. Other major feature film credits include Michael Mann’s MIAMI VICE, Michael Winterbottom’s A COCK AND BULL STORY, and STREET KINGS with Keanu Reeves and Forrest Whittaker.

Most recent feature film projects include: SEX & DRUGS & ROCK & ROLL with Andy Serkis; NINJA ASSASSIN directed by James McTeigue; Julian Kemp’s MY LAST FIVE GIRLFRIENDS: and, THE FIRST GRADER, written by Ann Peacock and directed by Justin Chadwick.

Major television drama credits have included: Julian Jarrold’s WHITE TEETH, based on Zadie Smith’s best-selling novel; Peter Kosminsky’s THE PROJECT; POPPY SHAKESPEARE: and, more recently BLOOD AND OIL and SMALL ISLAND for the BBC.

Accolades include:

2003 - Winner Best Actress at the Monte Carlo Television Festival

2007 - Winner Rising Star Tribute Award at the Bahamas International Film Festival

2007 - Nomination BAFTA Orange Rising Star

2007 & 2009 - Winner Best actress at the Screen Nation Awards

2010 - Winner Best Actress at The Royal Television Society Awards

**Oliver Litondo** (Maruge) is Kenyan national who started his career as a news reader for a Kenyan news station. He then turned his attentions to acting and until THE FIRST GRADER had only played minor roles. 'THE FIRST GRADER' is Oliver's first lead role.

**Vusi Kunene** (Mr Kipruto) was cast in HOMELANDS directed by Neal Sundstrom in 1996 and in 1997 he appeared in DEAFENING SILENCE directed by Etienne De Villiers, both for SABC Television.

In 1998 he was cast in the drama series JUSTICE FOR ALL directed by Peter Goldsmid, for which he won an Avanti award for Best Actor. He was nominated for an NTVA award for Best Actor for his role of Daniel Mofokeng in HOMELANDS and was nominated for the same award three years in a row (2002-2004) for his role as Jack Mabaso in GENERATIONS.

In 1996 he was cast in two feature films: FOOLS directed by Ramadan Suleman, and Kini and Adams (in which he played the lead role of Kini), directed by Idrissa Ouedraogo for Framework, Zimbabwe.

In 1998 he was cast in A REASONABLE MAN directed by Gavin Hood and then THE KING IS ALIVE, a Dogma production which was directed by Kristian Levring and filmed in Namibia in 1999.

Later film roles included FINAL SOLUTION (2001) and the made-for-TV movie/mini-series DIAMOND HUNTERS also in 2001.

In 2008 he played the role of Doctor Gulubane in the pilot episode of THE NO.1 LADIES DETECTIVE AGENCY directed by the late Anthony Minghella.

He has a starring role in the 10th season of the SABC1 drama series SOUL CITY, in 2010.

**Tony Kgoroge** (Charles Obinchi) His film work includes: BLOOD DIAMOND directed by Edward Zwick for Warner Bros; LORD OF WAR directed by Andrew Nichols; HOTEL RWANDA directed by Terry George; HIJACK STORIES directed by Oliver Schmidt; SKIN directed by Anthony Fabian and INVICTUS directed by Clint Eastwood .

**Israel Makoe** (David Chege) is a South African actor, poet, singer and dancer. His film work includes Gavin Hood's Oscar® winning film TSOTSI. He is a highly established TV actor in his home country having appeared in NO. 1 LADIES DETECTIVE AGENCY, written, directed and produced by Anthony Minghella.

**The School** the majority of the rest of the cast was made up of locals and the children who actually went to the schools that were used as locations for the films. The actual headmistresses from the schools played the market sellers and the old codgers were just that – old codgers that lived and worked in the surrounding areas.

## **ABOUT THE FILMAKERS**

**Justin Chadwick** is the award winning theatre, television and film director who most recently completed shooting THE FIRST GRADER, starring Naomi Harris for Origin Pictures / Sixth Sense Productions for BBC Films and the UK Film Council. His first feature film was the highly-acclaimed THE OTHER BOLEYN GIRL, which premiered at the 2008 Berlin International Film Festival, starring Eric Bana, Natalie Portman and Scarlett Johansson.

Previous to this Justin set-up the mini-series, BLEAK HOUSE, and directed nine of the fifteen episodes, which were broadcast by the BBC in the UK, and by PBS in the United States as part of their Masterpiece Theatre series. He was nominated for the Prime-time Emmy Award for Outstanding Directing for a Miniseries, Movie or Dramatic Special; the Royal Television Society Award for Breakout Performance Behind the Scenes; and, the BAFTA Award for Best Direction for his work on BLEAK HOUSE, which was the Best Drama Serial winner at the British Academy Television Awards 2006. BLEAK HOUSE was nominated for two Golden Globes, three Satellite Awards and won at the Royal Television Society Awards, the Broadcasting Press Guild Awards and the Television Critics Awards.

Coming from a background in acting, he started his directorial career in the theatre with award winning productions including Moliere's Hypochondriac at the Assembly rooms during the Edinburgh Festival. He made his television debut with the 1993 television movie Family Style starring Ewan McGregor, after which he directed and performed in Shakespeare Shorts, a series that explored the history of Shakespearean characters and presented them in key scenes from the plays in which they appeared. He directed episodes of EAST ENDERS, BYKER GROVE, THE BILL, SPOOKS, and set up the series' for RED CAP and MURDER PREVENTION.

Justin is also developing several projects including the screen version of the Daphne du Maurier novel, JAMAICA INN, for Focus Films, he is writing the adaptation for the multi-award winning novel, THE TENDERNESS OF WOLVES, for Pink Sands Films / Film 4, which he will also direct, and he is attached to the Ron Bass script, THE GODMOTHER, with Unanimous Pictures producing, based on the novel by Carrie Adams.

**Ann Peacock**, the scriptwriter, was born and raised in South Africa where she obtained an undergraduate degree majoring in English Literature and Speech & Drama and later, a Law degree from the University of Cape Town. Ann immigrated with her family to Los Angeles where she became a screenwriter. Ann won an Emmy for her first film A LESSON BEFORE DYING, which she wrote for HBO, and followed it with the blockbuster hit THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE, NIGHTS IN RODANTHE and KIT KITTREDGE: AN AMERICAN GIRL. Her upcoming projects, other than THE FIRST GRADER, include an adaptation of John Grisham's THE PARTNER, the epic MARCO POLO, the action classic ODYSSEUS, the indie MEMORY OF RUNNING and adventure story AIRMAN. She has retained a strong connection with Africa.

Producer **David M. Thompson** has won numerous international awards including three Baftas, two Emmys and several Golden Globes. Having run BBC Films for over a decade, he commissioned a range of award-winning films including BILLY ELLIOT, AN EDUCATION, FISH TANK, THE DUCHESS, REVOLUTIONARY ROAD, IN THE LOOP, EASTERN PROMISES, NOTES ON A SCANDAL, BRIGHT STAR, MY SUMMER OF LOVE, A COCK AND BULL STORY, THE OTHER BOLEYN GIRL, SHOOTING DOGS, RED ROAD, IRIS and DIRTY PRETTY THINGS.

He left the BBC in 2008 to set up independent production company Origin Pictures. Origin produces both film and television through their development deal with BBC Fiction, Fremantle Media and Distant Horizon. Their first film for the BBC, FREEFALL by Dominic Savage, was the first drama to explore the financial crisis. Their feature, THE FIRST GRADER, set in Kenya, will come out later in the year and this summer they will shoot a four-part adaptation of Michel Faber's bestselling novel THE CRIMSON PETAL AND THE WHITE for the BBC, as well as Edwardian ghost story, THE AWAKENING, starring Rebecca Hall, Dominic West and Imelda Staunton.

Whilst at the BBC, Thompson made a special contribution to introducing the work of new directors such as Pawel Pawlikowski, Lynne Ramsay, Andrea Arnold, Saul Dibb, Dominic Savage, Sarah Gavron and Francesca Joseph. His TV credits as producer include several Alan Clarke films such as THE FIRM and ROAD, as well as the first SHADOWLANDS and

numerous award-winning television dramas which he executive produced / produced such as INTO THE STORM, THE GATHERING STORM, CONSPIRACY, THE LOST PRINCE and EINSTEIN & EDDINGTON for the BBC.

Producer, **Richard Harding** launched the film and television production company SIXTH SENSE PRODUCTIONS in 2002. His work in the film industry spans over 10 years, working with companies such as Kennedy/Marshall, Silver Lion Films and Samuel Goldwyn Films. As a producer, Richard's philosophy is to create feature films of the highest calibre with mainstream, commercial potential, while also maintaining critical excellence. THE FIRST GRADER is his proudest work to date.

**Sam Feuer** is an Israeli/American actor and producer who moved from Israel to NYC to Hollywood to pursue a career in acting. He became a partner at Sixth Sense Productions in 2005 just before Steven Spielberg discovered and cast him in the five Oscar® nominated film, MUNICH. Together with balancing his passion for acting and producing, Sam's main goal is to find mainstream stories that inspire and produce them at the highest level. THE FIRST GRADER marks his producing debut and he's excited to see it go from the newspaper article he found all the way to the big screen.

Richard and Sam are currently developing their romantic comedy JUST THE BEGINNING, which is being produced with Oscar®-nominated producer, Gil Netter, and also THE MAN WHO SUED GOD, the remake of an Aussie film which is being produced with Will Smith's Overbrook and Mace Neufeld Productions. They have a slew of projects currently in development, including their horror remake of the Indonesian smash hit, JELANGKUNG, THE TRANSLATOR set in Darfur and THE BENGHAZI SIX. No matter the genre, SIXTH SENSE seeks to inspire and believes that a good story told well can truly make a difference in how one sees the world.

### **Joe Oppenheimer**

Executive Producer, BBC Films

Joe made the imprudent decision to leave the post of editor-manager of an internet start-up company in 1995 in order to pursue a career in film and television, thereby neatly missing the dotcom boom. He spent three years as a freelance writer and director before making the move into development and production.

Joe joined BBC Films' development team in 1998. Covering the full range of the department's output in the last ten years, he has worked with established auteurs and filmmakers as well as with up-and-coming talent new to the cinema. His work has been

across a wide range of genres, from contemporary drama to period biopic, taking in comedy, horror and documentary. For *THE FIRST GRADER*, Joe relied on his extensive experience with African-based production shoots, including previous films *SHOOTING DOGS*, *RED DUST* and *THE MEERKATS*; he continues to executive produce the internationally successful television series, *THE NO. 1 LADIES' DETECTIVE AGENCY* starring Jill Scott. Selected credits: *THE AWAKENING* (*in production*); *THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS*, *NATIVITY!*, *THE NO. 1 LADIES' DETECTIVE AGENCY*; *TORMENTED*; *THE EDGE OF LOVE*; *FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TIME TRAVEL*; *DEATH DEFYING ACTS*; *CONFETTI*; *SHOOTING DOGS*; *MILLIONS*; *RED DUST*; *MY SUMMER OF LOVE*; *THE LIFE AND DEATH OF PETER SELLERS*; *CODE 46*; *ANITA & ME*; *TRAUMA*; *KISS OF LIFE*; *THIS LITTLE LIFE*; *CONSPIRACY*; *LAST RESORT*

Executive Producer, **ANANT SINGH** is recognised as South Africa's pre-eminent film producer, having produced more than 100 films since 1984. Born and raised in Durban Singh began his film career at age 18 when he left his studies at the University of Durban-Westville to purchase a 16mm movie rental store. From there, he moved into video distribution, forming Videovision Entertainment and then progressed into film production in 1984 with *PALACE OF WEEPIING*, the first anti-apartheid film to be made entirely in South Africa.

He is responsible for many of the most profound anti-apartheid films made in South Africa, among which are *PLACE OF WEEPING*, *SARAFINA!*, *CRY*, *THE BELOVED COUNTRY* and *YESTERDAY* which received South Africa's first Oscar® nomination.

Nelson Mandela called Singh "a producer I respect very much...a man of tremendous ability" when he granted him the film rights to his autobiography, *Long Walk To Freedom*. Singh is set to film *LONG WALK TO FREEDOM* later this year.

Among the films produced by Singh include: *THE ROAD TO MECCA*, with Kathy Bates; *FATHER HOOD*, with Patrick Swayze and Halle Berry; *CAPTIVES*, with Julia Ormond and Tim Roth; Tobe Hooper's *THE MANGLER*, with Robert Englund and based on a Stephen King short story; *PALJAS* (shot in Afrikaans, the first South African film to be selected for Oscar Consideration in the Best Foreign Language film category); and *RED DUST*, with Hilary Swank and Chiwetel Ejiofor, a drama focussing on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Singh's association with South Africa's number one box office star, Leon Schuster, saw the production of the Top Three Highest Grossing South African Films of All Time, *MR BONES*

2, MR BONES 1 AND MAMA JACK. The inspirational film, MORE THAN JUST A GAME which tells the story of organised football on Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned was supported by FIFA and was released in 2008.

In 2007, the Palm Beach International Film Festival conferred the **World Visionary Award** to Singh for his contribution to world cinema and his production of socially conscious films. The South African Film Industry honoured Singh for his significant contribution to the advancement of the industry with the inaugural Golden Horn Award for Outstanding Contributor at the first South African Film and Television Awards in October 2006. Singh is also a recipient of the World Economic Forum's Crystal Award and was conferred with honorary doctorates by the University of Durban-Westville and the University of Port Elizabeth.

**HELENA SPRING** (Executive Producer) is the worldwide Head of Production of Videovision Entertainment has produced more than sixty television projects and more than twenty feature films. Her most recent motion picture credits as producer include JOZI, OUTRAGEOUS, MR BONES 2, MORE THAN JUST A GAME and Darrell James Roodt's PREY.

She also produced the Academy Award® nominated motion picture, YESTERDAY (2005), starring Leleti Khumalo (SARAFINA!); RED DUST, the TRC courtroom drama starring Hilary Swank; the stylish Cape Flats gangster film, DOLLARS AND WHITE PIPES; the record-breaking box office performers MAMA JACK and MR. BONES, starring South Africa's number one box office star, Leon Schuster; THE LONG RUN starring Armin Muehler-Stahl (SHINE); THE THEORY OF FLIGHT starring Academy Award® winning Kenneth Branagh and Helena Bonham Carter; BRAVO TWO ZERO, (as co-producer), a BBC co-production starring Sean Bean, based on Andy McNab's best-selling book of the same title.

Helena also executive producer of the motion picture WAATI, directed by Palme D'Or winner Souleymane Cisse; THE MANGLER, directed by Tobe Hooper (POLTERGEIST); Katinka Heyns' PALJAS, which was selected as South Africa's first official entry in the 1998 Academy Awards® in the Best Foreign Language film category and Darrell James Roodt's SARAFINA! starring Whoopi Goldberg, which received a Christopher Award.

**ROB HARDY** (Director of Photography) is emerging as one Britain's hottest Cinematographers. He emerged from the U.K.'s Sheffield film and music scene. His first short film as director and DP was PUFFERFISH, which received a BAFTA award

nomination. In addition to being a prolific lenser for commercials, Hardy has, to date, shot six features including THE FIRST GRADER, most recently working in Albania on Joshua Marstons 'UNTITLED ALBANIA PROJECT' for Journeyman Pictures. His credits include Elliot Lester's BLITZ, and the award-winning RED RIDING: 1974, DOGGING: A LOVE STORY, EXHIBIT A, the horror film JELLY DOLLY, which won a special award in Berlin in 2004, and John Crowley's highly-acclaimed telefilm 'BOY A', starring Peter Mullan, for which Hardy won a BAFTA.

**ALEX HEFFES** (Composer) is one of the UK's leading film composers. Rising to international prominence with his score to Kevin Macdonald's Oscar®-winning ONE DAY IN SEPTEMBER Alex is a composer who has never been confined by musical boundaries. After graduating from Oxford with a first-class degree, Alex first worked as writer and arranger on projects covering the musical spectrum from steel band to symphony orchestra with artists such as Elton John and members of Blur. His versatility as a composer has led to a busy and varied movie-scoring career taking him across musical boundaries from the acclaimed BAFTA-winning film TOUCHING THE VOID to THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND. Other movie scores include DEAR FRANKIE (Miramax Films), the psychological thriller TRAUMA (Warner Bros.), starring Colin Firth and Mena Suvari, the Fox Searchlight romantic comedy IMAGINE ME AND YOU, and Steve Coogan's hi-jinx comedy THE PAROLE OFFICER. While scoring THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND, Alex travelled to Uganda to record and produce many of the bands featured on the soundtrack. His score to acclaimed thriller STATE OF PLAY, starring Russell Crowe, Ben Affleck and Helen Mirren, featured a collaboration with classic British rock producer Flood. He also collaborated with director Tim Burton on his screen adaptation of SWEENEY TODD starring Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter.

Alex's scores have been nominated for BAFTA, Ivor Novello, European Film Academy and ASCAP awards. On the concert platform Alex's music has been featured at venues as diverse as Symphony Hall Birmingham, the London Jazz Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. He was composer in residence at the Sangat Music Festival in Mumbai, India and in 2003 was invited to the Sultanate of Oman to attend the premiere of his overture commissioned by the Oman Royal Symphony Orchestra. His band, the Alex Heffes Trio, was featured on the soundtracks to WOMEN TALKING DIRTY (Rocket Pictures) and CIRCUS (Columbia Pictures).

**PAUL KNIGHT** (Editor) has worked with Justin on the award-winning BLEAK HOUSE, for which Paul won both the BAFTA and the RTS award for best editing. A television regular with credits that amongst others include DESPERATE ROMANTICS, THE FIXER and "The

Passion". His feature film credits include HEARTLESS, THE OTHER BOLEYN GIRL and ALI G.

**MOONYEENN LEE** (Casting Director) was trained by James (Jimmy) Fraser in 1974 (then head of Fraser and Dunlop, London) to be an agent representing actors, writers and directors. She has practiced as an agent for the past thirty four years—heading up the largest and most successful talent agency in South Africa, MLA. She now practices as a manager for the artists represented by the company. MLA represents over two hundred clients, many of whom are multi-award-winning artists. MLA places actors in film, television, theatre, commercials, voice-overs, industrial theatre, training films and corporate videos.

MLA's aim is to promote South African talent and South African stories.

In 2003 Moonyeenn was nominated to the National Executive Committee of The Independent Producers Organization and to the Film Board of Create South Africa.

#### **KENYAN CREW**

In order to make the film feel as authentic as possible Justin Chadwick and the Producers opted not to bring over Western head of department but instead chose to hire Kenyan based crew that would understand the needs of the production these included:

**VITTORIA SOGNO** (Production Designer) an Italian Art Director now based in Kenya, he was given his first Production design job on THE FIRST GRADER. Previously, Vittoria had worked on numerous Italian and English films as an Art Director and props buyer.

**SOPHIE OPRISANO** (Costume Designer) a Kenyan based costume designer whose credits include MALOONED, TAKING THE FLACK and TOGETEHRNESS SUPREME

**MARGIE KIUNDI** (Local Casting Director) was instrumental in helping to cast the local people and children in the film.

### **CREDITS**

With thanks to all of the children from  
The Oloserian Primary School  
and the Masai Plainsview Primary School  
who played Maruge's classmates

Kimani Ng'ang'a Maruge	Oliver Litondo
Young Maruge's Wife	Emily Njoki
Maruge's Daughter	Hannah Wacera
Maruge's Baby Son	John Kimani
Young Maruge	Lwanda Jawar
DJ Masha	Daniel Ndambuki (Churchill)
DJ's PA	Macharia Kamau
Boie	Abubakar Mwenda
Old Codgers	Tom Gitau
	Watson Mbirua
	Shadrack Murimi Gachuhi
	Mwenga Matilika
Agnes	Agnes Simaloi
Teacher Alfred	Alfred Munyua
Jane Obinchi	Naomie Harris
Teacher Elizabeth	Shoki Mokgapa
Teacher Katherine	Kathylene Ndogori
David Chege	Israel Siphon Makoe
Kamau Chege	Kamau Mbaya
Mother Wanjiku	Shirlen Wangari
Mother Benta	Benta Ochieng
Jonas	Peter Emera Pious
Joel	Joel Rempesa
Peter	Peter Marias
Village Woman	Eunice Tekero
Village Girl	Jackie Musimbi
Young Mother	Susan Sisian
Charles Obinchi	Tony Kgoroge
Maasai Store Owner	Kurenda ole Kureya
Officer Johnson	Nick Redding
Mau Mau Oath Giver	Nick Ndichu
Mau Mau Leader	Paul Mbogo
Mau Mau Warriors	Zingaro Percussions
Plantation Owner's Wife	Jeannette Elsworth
John Gambe	Kamau Ndungu
Mr Kipruto	Vusumuzi Michael Kunene
Stall owners	Mary Mbirua
	Catherine Njiru
Education Secretary	Mumbi Kaigwa
Adult School Teacher	Charles Ouda
BBC Journalist	Rachel Jones

CNN Journalist	Lydia Gitachu
American Journalist	Sam Feuer
Mr.Mutahi / Politician	Gilbert Lukhalia
Mr.Mutahi's Aide	Melvin Alusa
Mrs.Muthumba	Irene Kariuki
Jacquie (P.A To The Chairman)	Rosemary Nyambura
Education Official	Ainea Ojiambo
Newsreader	Michael Oyier

#### Associate Producers

Nicola Blacker

Ed Rubin

1 <sup>st</sup> Assistant Directors	Deborah Saban Tosh Gitonga
2 <sup>nd</sup> Assistant Directors	Ezekiel Onyango Sarah MacFarlane
3 <sup>rd</sup> Assistant Director	Kevin Gatheru
Set Runner	Stephen Mukora
Focus Puller	Jennie Paddon
Clapper Loader	Andrew Greenan
Key Grip	Sam Phillips
Camera Assistants	Mike Chege John Mungai
Video Operator	John Agina
Sound Recordist	Nico Louw
Boom Operator	Bertrand Roets
Script Supervisor	Jayne Spooner
Associate Producer (Sixth Sense)	Denise Tran
Make up Artist	Gillianne Obaso
Make up Assistant	Maureen Shiko
Wardrobe Assistants	Chris Kariuki Stephen Musembi Charles Mutiso Sarah Nduku

Assistant Casting Director Kenya	Muthoni Kiromo
Casting Assistant Kenya	Lawrence Muasa
Casting Assistant South Africa	Belinda Kruger
UK Production Accountant	Evelyn Atsiaya
UK Production Accounts Asst.	Penelope Reiffer
Production Accounts Asst.	Maryann Murugi
Production Cashier	Margaret Muthoni
Stills photographer / EPK Cameraman	Kerry Brown
Location Managers	Bernard Gathogo Yahya Chavanga
Location Assistants	Faiz Kamuzu Khalid Dutch Daniel M. Oinepu
Unit Manager	Patrick Musyimi
Unit Foreman	Wycliff Obote
Unit Assistants	Godwin Muhati Joel Karo Mike Were Nicholas Shinabuya Titus Mwema
Set Nurse	Naomi Njeri
Fire Dept	Hack Wiganjo
Production Assistants	Kate Mumbua Phylis Andika Benta Ochieng Jerusha Munyuthe Beryl Ringos Mark Kabacho
Production Trainee	Christine Njeri
UK Production Runner	Ed Macdonald
Gaffer	Elliot Sawape
Best Boy	Francis Ouma
Electricians	Ezekiel Andika Saul Ogada

Generator Operator	George Otieno
Grip	Jacky Tela
Assistant Grip	Victor Onyango
Crane Operator	Peter Juma
Standby Art Director	Chelangat Lebo
Props Master/Set Dresser	John Silva
Standby Props	Hatibu Kelly
	Charles Maasai
	Chelangat Lebo
Props Assistants	Patson Wanyangi
	Collins Otieno
Construction Foreman	Paul Njonjo
Construction	Fred Kagio
	Helron Mwangi
Mason	Julius Mwaura
Carpenters	
Bernard Ndegwa	David Kiniu Njoroge
Francis Karimi	Francis Wanyoike
George Mbithi	James Birir
James Wachira	Julius Gateri
Naftali Macharia	Simon Mwangi
Standby Carpenter	John N Kimani
Painter	James Kibiru
SFX Assistant	Zuberi M. Mohamed
SFX Assistant	Hussein Mohamed
Stunt Co-ordinator	Charles K. Kembero
Stunt Men:	Joseph Kuria
	Maina Kariuki
	Evans Omondi Sanda
	Mathias Nyamai
	Matthew Anaani Muubwa
	Thomas Odhiambo Misango
	Patrick Pylip Owour

	Bernard W. Thinguri
Stunt Woman	Judy Karani
Transport Coordinator	Rashid Mohammed
Drivers	
Abelu Charles	Andrew Kimani
David Omondi	Ferdinand Yeswa
George Gitau	George Kimani
George Olukoye	James Muturi
Joel Njuguna	John Mainia
John Obondo	John Wachira
Lawrence Macharia	Macharia Kamau
Paul Mbaya	Samuel Kombo
Samuel Ndafo	Shem Kiyaka
Simon Wambiri	Stephen Nderitu
Stephen Wambiri	Wilfred Kamau
Post Production Supervisor	Gisela Evert
VFX Editor	Robert Redford
Digital Intermediate by LipSync Post	
Post Production Manager	Lisa Jordan
Digital Colourist	Stuart Fyvie
Online Editor	Scott Goulding
D.I. Supervisor	James Clarke
Senior D.I. Operator	Daniel Tomlinson
D.I. Operators	Chris Bentley
Head of VT	Zoe Cousins Rick White
Visual Effects by Lipsync Post	
Visual Effects Supervisor	Sean Farrow
Head of Visual Effects	Stefan Drury
Visual Effects Producer	Lorea Hoye
Visual Effects Co-Ordinator	Samantha Tracey
Digital Compositors	Angela Rose Tom Collier

	Luke Butler
	Naomi Butler
	Richard Nosworthy
Senior Systems Engineer	Jon Stanley
Systems Engineer	Yanni Goudetsidis
Head of VT	Rick White
Title Designers	Julia Hall
	Howard Watkins
Re-recording Mixers	Paul Cotterell
	Rob Hughes
Sound Supervisor	Julian Slater
Sound Effects Editors	Ben Meechan
	James Harrison M.P.S.E
Dialogue & ADR Editor	Ian Wilkinson
Foley Recordist	Robert Brazier
Foley Artists	Rowena Wilkinson
	John Fewell
Dolby Consultant	Mark Beverley
ADR Recordings Nairobi	
ADR studio	Decimal Media
ADR Engineer	Eric Musyoka
ADR Recordings Johannesburg	
ADR studio	Fine Tune, The Refinery
ADR sound recordist	Warren Burley
Post Production Producer	Lauren van Rensburg
ADR Coordination	Videovision
Post Production Superviso	Charmaine Lautré
Co-ordinator	Noxolo Dlungana
Sixth Sense	
Legal Services	Greg S. Bernstein
Origin Pictures	
Head of Production	Joanie Blaikie
Legal Services	Billy Hinshelwood

	Phil Rymer
Post Production Executive	Katie Goodson-Thomas
Assistant	Neeral Patel

#### BBC Films

Production Executive	Jane Hawley
Legal & Business Affairs Manager	Livy Sandler
Development Editor	Jack Arbuthnott
Production & Delivery Co-ordinator	James Buckler

#### UK Film Council

Head of New Cinema Fund	Lenny Crooks
Senior Production Executive	Emma Clarke
Senior Business Affairs Executive	Geraldine Atlee
Head of Production Finance	Vince Holden
Head of Production	Fiona Morham

#### Worldwide Sales by Videovision Entertainment

##### Videovision Entertainment

Executive	Sudhir Pragjee
Executive	Sanjeev Singh

##### Blue Sky Films

Production Services in Kenya	
Executive	Jim Shamoon

##### ARTE France

Direction de la Fiction	François Sauvagnargues
Chargé de Programmes	Pierre Merle
Associate Producer:	MACT Productions

Avec la participation d'ARTE France

##### LipSync Productions LLP

Executives	Jon Diamond
	Peter Hampden

Legal Services for Lipsync Lee & Thompson

Music Services provided by Cutting Edge

Music Executive Producer for Cutting Edge Phil Hope

Assistant to Composer Lewis Morison

Music Orchestrated by Julian Kershaw

Conducted by Alex Heffes

Music Supervisor Maggie Rodford

Assistant to Music Supervisor Helen Yates

Music Recorded by Geoff Foster

Assisted by Lewis Jones

Pete Hutchings

Music Recorded at Abbey Road Studios London

Music Mixed at Air-Edel Recording Studios London

Music Mixed by Nick Taylor

Assisted by Tom Bullen

Additional vocal recording at: Black Smith Studios

Engineer Sam Bisaso

Music Preparation Colin Rae

Musicians & recording co-ordinated by Hilary Skewes and Clarissa Farran

On Behalf Of Buick Productions

Featured Vocals Kawesa

Sona Jobarteh

Kora Tunde Jegede

Guitars Leo Abrahams

Solo woodwinds Dirk Cambell

Gospel Choir Beverley Skeet

Sara-Jane Skeete

Ricci P Washington

Andy Caine

"Courage "

Artist: Vieux Farka Toure

(feat. Issa Bamba and Eric Herman)

Composer: Eric Herman

Master: Modiba Productions LLC

'Uhuru Freedom Song'

Composer & arranger: Paul Mbugi  
Wambogo

Master and Publisher:

Resonant Music (1) Limited Partners.  
Administered by Fintage Music  
Publishing & Collection BV.

Publisher: Eric M Herman Publishing

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Zingu 7'

Kikuyu Love Song

Arrist: Zola

"Mwendwa Wakwa"

Composer: Bonginkosi Dlamini / Kabelo  
Ikaneng

Resonant Music (1) Limited Partners.  
Composer & arranger: Paul Mbugi  
Wambogo

Master: Courtesy of Ghetto Ruff International  
Publisher: Ghetto Ruff Publishing Limited and  
Guluva Entertainment

Administered by Fintage Music  
Publishing & Collection BV.

Sub-publisher: Fintage Publishing &  
Collection B.V.

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'Keep on Walking'

Artist: Kawesa

Composer: Alex Heffes

Master and Publisher: Resonant Music (1) Limited Partners.

Administered by Fintage

Music Publishing & Collection BV.

Completion Guaranty Provided by Film Finances UK  
Paul Raleigh  
Ruth Hodgson  
Monica Keys

Insurance Provided by Media Insurance Brokers Ltd

Audited by AGN Shipleys  
Stephen Joberns

Collection Account Management by Freeway CAM BV  
Payroll Sargent Disc

Neg Checks Capello Media Services  
Tonia Cohen

Penelope Cameras Ice Film

Film Stock FUJI

Lighting Equipment Film Studios Kenya

Grip Equipment Kenya Grips Ltd

Laboratory Services (UK) Soho Film Lab

Shipping Services DHL Global Forwarding

Creative Couriers  
Clearing Agent Film Line Ltd, Kenya  
Film Frieght, South Africa

SPECIAL THANKS

The Maruge Family  
The Obinchu Family  
Jane Obinchu

The Headmistress, Teachers and Students of Oloserian Academy

The Headmistress, Teachers and Students of - Masai Plainsview Academy

Teacher Catherine and Teacher Mary

The community and elders from Kisames village  
and Kimuka village

James Mpyoe  
Grace Kinuthia  
Sam Sakuda  
Naftali Njoroge Thaithi  
Masai Lodge Hotel

Office of the President – Provincial and Administration

The Kenya Police –Armoury Department

The Kenya Police – Administration Police

Ministry of Information

Ministry of Education

Kenya Film Commission

Film Production Department

Hon. Samson Kegeo Ongeru, M.P.

Dr. Bitange Ndemo

K24

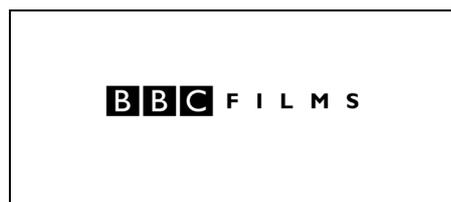
Haco Industries- BIC Biro

Philip Coulson and Gituro Wathingira at Coulson Harney

Karen Lindsay Stewart  
Jenny Pont  
Lenny Juma

Developed by BBC Films

Made with the support of the UK Film Council's Development Fund and New Cinema Fund



**LIPSYNC**



Filmed entirely on location in Kenya with the kind support of the Kenyan People and the Kenyan Government

Although this film is based on real events some characters and scenes have been invented.

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