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(l-r) Annetta Laufer, Shobu Kapoor

After good many years in the creative industry, and finding the usual frustrations when it comes to progression or lack thereof for women of colour, filmmaker Annetta Laufer joined forces with her friend, actress/producer Shobu Kapoor to launch a production company called Roman Candle Productions.

Their intention was to make films featuring women of colour who, in their words ‘*were not relegated to mothers of drug lords or oppressed Asian women in saris*’. Their solution to the lack of industry diversity awareness was to take matters into their own hands and make films they wanted to see, which were representative of the stories and people they wanted to see on screen.

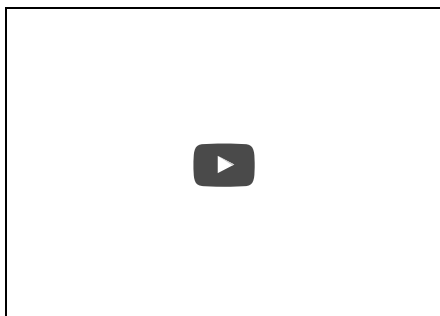
Their latest project is a short sci-fi film called ‘*Afro Punk Girl*’ for which they have started a crowd funding campaign.

We caught up with the Anetta to find out more about their journey and latest project...

Tell us a bit about your background within the industry?

I originally trained as an actress then moved into directing theatre before turning to film. I had been obsessed with films since childhood but never realised I could become a filmmaker, or even that it was a job, until much later. After I trained as a filmmaker in Denmark, I formed my own production company making low cost theatre and low budget films. Since then I have written and directed many short films that have screened at national and international film festivals including Encounters Film Festival, London Short Film Festival, PAFF and Women of Colour Film Festival in Atlanta, Underwire and The Indian Cine film festival.

You’re already an award winning filmmaker, what inspired you to found Roman Candle productions and go it alone and what’s the significance behind the title?



I suppose the same as everyone else who feels underrepresented within this industry. You become tired of seeing the same narrative being played out over and over, as if it’s an accurate representation of you when in fact it’s usually just old tropes being recycled. Shobu and I decided to found Roman Candle Productions because we wanted to see films with more authentic representation of diverse voices. We are also complete cineastes and wanted to create beautiful, well-crafted visual story-telling experiences that educate, entertain and empower viewers. The title of the company comes from a quote in Jack Kerouac’s book, ‘*On The Road*,’ which goes: *The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say*

live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say

a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles, exploding like spiders across the stars.

Some of your previous productions include ‘Winnie & the Duppybat’, ‘Winking Man Rock’ and ‘Scarlet’. Did your backgrounds inform on the narrative of these films? In what way?

I am Jamaican German who was born in the UK but grew up in Germany. I spent my summers with my Jamaican family, in particular my Jamaican Grandma who inspires every female character I create. The heart of my stories are inspired by Jamaican folklore, traditions and humour, whereas my filmmaking style is inspired by more traditional European filmmaking which I also feel very connected to. Winnie and The Duppybat began from a bereavement but led to my exploration of West Indian traditions of dealing with death. My starting point for Winking Man Rock was to explore the differences between black cultures – in this case West Indian and Somalian. As the daughter of two migrant parents, I feel very concerned about the dehumanising rhetoric around migrants currently sweeping the nation. My film Scarlet was an attempt to create a more human narrative of the migrant experience.

From your perspective, some would say that as a woman of colour and for being female things potentially can’t be that bad if you’ve managed to win awards and get your content into international film festivals etc. Has any of your diversity caused an issue for you, and how have you been able to navigate through / around it?

I think the greatest challenges I encounter are at the funding and distribution stages. To get commissioned and distributed in this country is challenging at the best of times, regardless of who you are. As a woman of colour, I find the biggest hurdle is convincing the commissioners/distributors that my stories are not ‘*niche*’ and therefore only attract a small, specific audience. There seems to be this strange notion that stories reflecting diverse e.g. black, Asian, female, gay experiences, can only attract an audience from that community and therefore cannot have a universal appeal. I find this attitude very frustrating.

You joined forces with Shobu Kapoor so between the two of you, you represent a range of diversity check boxes, is that what brought you two together?

Shobu and I went to drama school together and then our paths bifurcated, she carried on acting, achieving great acclaim in the UK, and I moved into filmmaking. We met up again after some years and decided to form Roman Candle Productions because we wanted to have more control over our artistic output and because we wanted to put out our work without it being diluted by the various demands of the industry moguls. As an actor of colour in this country, Shobu felt her range of roles was limited. She’s also a writer and a poet and she was seeking an independent outlet for her art as well.



Tell us about the inspiration for your latest project Afro Punk Girl which has many themes – segregation, migration, politics, female empowerment. Why is this film is important now? Who is it for?

My first inspiration for this project was from a short story by the French writer Guy De Maupassant about two men finding a moment of humanity on a fishing expedition while their city lay under siege. My other inspiration for this project started during a distressing news report about civilians in a village under siege in Syria, slowly starving to death at the hands of their own government. I was overwhelmed by the extreme lack of humanity of this situation and how no country seemed willing or able to step in. Since I wrote the film, Brexit has happened, xenophobia and hate crimes have increased in the UK, Dallas, USA has gone into meltdown after the terrible shootings of two black men. desperate people continue to flee war torn countries seeking refuge from their violent oppressors. Afro Punk Girl may be set in the future but the themes are happening right now. So who is this film for? For people wanting to see a tale of hope amidst all the chaos.

What message are you trying to get across to the audience with this film? How successful do you think you have been in that endeavor?

I always find it difficult to define a message of my work because I do not want to dictate what people should think when watching my films. I prefer to talk about themes and then people can make up their own minds about what they think the message of the film could be. For me, the biggest question while making this film was what are we human beings capable of?

The protagonist in the film, Lilly White (played by Danielle Vitalis) is described as an “afro punk rebel”. Who is she symbolic of? What does she represent?

Lil is symbolic of the human spirit that will do anything to survive. I decided to embody that spirit in a female character because I believe that many women face the challenges of survival on a daily basis, whether it be to protect themselves against patriarchal oppressive regimes, war or even protecting and feeding their families on low incomes. Most women are resourceful and know how to survive.

How did you find the cast, and crew to shoot the film what was that process like?



Danielle Vitalis as Afro Punk Girl

As I have made quite a few short films, I have a number of amazing people I work with on a regular basis. Robin Whenary, my cinematographer, is one of them. He is a wonderful talent who can make anything look epic! Charlie Hanson, our Executive Producer, originally suggested Danielle Vitalis as the lead. When I met her I immediately knew she was right. There was a mysterious and complex feel about her and then a minute later she had you howling with laughter! Then of course the legendary Larrington Walker as Mr Dandy, who brought such experience and elegance to our film. We were over the moon when he decided to work with us.

You've decided to make a short, are there plans to turn it into a feature?

We think that Afro Punk Girl has potential to be a feature, so we are definitely looking at developing the story beyond the short. It all depends on how the short does and the interest in the story that accrues from that.

You've also started a crowd fund to complete the project, why did you choose to go this route and how has support been thus far?

We were one of only 5 projects chosen by Film London's London Calling Plus scheme and the film has been funded by them. The idea behind the crowdfunding campaign is twofold: to raise post production funds as this is a sci-fi film and we want to polish it to the highest standards possible and also to spread the word about the film and expand our audience base. We're doing well, we've achieved 20% of our target in less than a week and momentum is gathering. If we achieve our target of £5,500 we can keep the project on Indiegogo indefinitely, in their In Demand section, and continue to raise funds towards developing the feature and also carry on expanding our audience base for the eventual cinema release of the feature.

Upon completion what are your plans for Afro Punk Girl?

Most importantly – to find an audience. It will be submitted to the London Film Festival via our funders, Film London and then will go on the festival circuit for the next 12-18 months.

What is your vision for the next 5 years for yourselves professionally and Roman Candle what other projects can we expect from you guys?

We have a slate of films, television programmes and web series on our slate and are in various stages of development talks for them. As Roman Candle Productions I hope for us to continue making the films we are passionate about and through stories give marginalized voices a creative platform to be seen and heard. Professionally? Continue to grow as artists and make some awesome movies!

How can our audience keep up to date with Afro Punk Girl and future Roman Candle projects?

The best way to keep in touch with our projects is to visit our various social media outlets: Our website: www.romancandleproductions.com, Facebook – [romancandleproductions](https://www.facebook.com/romancandleproductions), Twitter – [@FilmRCP](https://twitter.com/FilmRCP). But most importantly, right now, visit our Indiegogo page for up to date information on the progress of our campaign, and to see how you can become an Afro Punk Warrior: <http://bit.ly/afropunkgirl>.

Afro Punk Girl Campaign Video



Interview with For The British Blacklist by Jennifer Appiah-Akins | [@ghbritnatural](#) & Akua Gyamfi

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