

Toasting film-making success with Breadbin Productions

 By Leigh Andrews

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Garon Campbell, award-winning director, filmmaker and entrepreneurial founder at Breadbin Productions, shares how watching *E.T.* 50 times from the age of 6 sparked his love of the film medium, as well as the power of the storytelling value-add, and how he learned to stop stressing, even when facing the most stressful filming conditions.



Garon Campbell, director at Breadbin Productions, is one impressive individual. Not only was he nominated for a Young Directors Award in Cannes 2011, but he directed Nelson Mandela's 94th birthday song celebration, which entailed working with over 80 South African celebrities, musicians, sportsmen and actors, as well as 90 children.

Campbell also summited Kilimanjaro in 2016, where he filmed the entire seven-day journey to the top.

Here, he explains the industry gap Breadbin Productions is filling – so named because “in a creative space, unusual company names stick”...

■ Let's start with the basics: Talk us through the context of launching Breadbin Productions in SA and what gap you're filling.

I come from a storytelling background, having won numerous awards including a student Safta for a short film I co-wrote and directed. I realised that it's all about the story. I was lucky in that a Loeries award my Honours-year crew received for the student commercial I directed had me leave film school and go straight into directing commercials for Propeller Films.

I realised quickly that if the concept from the agency had no story, I would need to build one into the script, and thus won a lot of jobs like through the storytelling value-add. If there's no story there's no engagement.

Alongside directing commercials as a freelancer, I started Breadbin Productions. I incorporated everything I learned from the advertising and marketing world into my corporate work. Word of mouth spread and Breadbin quickly gained a diverse client base, most of which still work with us with today.

I feel clients appreciate us because we hone in on the essence of what they're really wanting to convey, and this wrapped up in an engaging narrative; creating an awesome journey in every project we work on.

■ ***You clearly love it, so tell us how you initially got into film making and made your break in the industry?***

Before the age of camera phones, I had a little stills cam that recorded incredibly low-res, pixelated video – it didn't even record audio! I used to take this everywhere and film everything with my friends.

My closest friend Garret had a 21st coming up, so I spent months recording footage and quickly learned how to edit in Windows Movie Maker, attached different tracks we loved at the time and pulled the video together. The video ended up as 7-minutes long. I had no idea what anyone would think of it, but I organised a projector and played it at his 21st.

Much to my surprise, the response was astounding!

“ People came up to me all night praising the video, asking me how I did it and applauded the fact that it took them on an emotional journey of friendship, dark times, lost girlfriends, comedy and inspiration. I had no idea that I had created such a meaningful journey of our lives together but I truly enjoyed the fact that I took everyone on a journey that they really enjoyed. ”



Garon Campbell, award-winning director, filmmaker and entrepreneurial founder at Breadbin Productions.

Only years later when I got to film school, after spending two years studying towards a BSC degree, did I learn about the art of storytelling. I realised that I had told the story of our lives in a rollercoaster of emotive moments created by the music, pace and shot selection.

After a few years at film school, I knew this was what I am meant to do and that everything in life, even what seems like the most meaningless and trivial moment, is all part of an untold story waiting to unfold.

■ ***You've certainly proven that, having gone on to direct commercials in several countries in the harshest conditions, from 40-degree Nigeria to filming in legitimate, unplanned, South African snow. From the top of Kilimanjaro to tiny boats in the Atlantic Ocean – which were the biggest surprise outcomes, and why?***

Well, at the young age of 27, after a few years of directing commercials, I developed a disease called Ulcerative Colitis and was told that it's attributed to stress, as there are no other proven causes. My gastroenterologist at the time asked me if I have a stressful career, and I told him that on any given day I have the sole responsibility of R500k to R4m on my

shoulders, and the outcome of the production rests on every decision I make.

“ He told me that I either need to change my career or change my attitude and the way I view the situations I find myself in. ”

The very next production saw us filming two Nigerian commercials in mid-winter South Africa.

The weather decided to bring with it the coldest night in 10 years, which happened to fall on a rain scene for the first ad at midnight, and another ad incorporating a hot workout, with people wearing shorts and crop tops while training. All of this was happening on a day that actually snowed!

From steam rising off people's bodies – something unheard of in Nigeria, which we had to stop – to the cast almost getting hypothermia, and us going three hours' overtime, I was stressed out like you can't believe, but we finished shooting the ads with some clever tricks, went to post and they turned out fantastic!



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What I learned is, the next time you find yourself in an impossible situation, when things are crazy and everything looks like it couldn't possibly turn out well, just look around, take a breath and acknowledge that you are surrounded by some of the smartest, hardest-working technicians the film industry has to offer. They want you to succeed as much as you do, so stress less.

It took me about six months to do but I changed my perception, stopped stressing and learned to accept the fact that everything will be okay.

You've worked your ass off to get to where you are and you've planned this shoot for over a month, which means anything this set throws at you, you should be able to deal with or work around to achieve the same, if not better, outcome.

🎬 **Truly inspiring. You've also worked with the top visual-effects teams in the country, understanding what it takes to direct entire scenes with foreground and backdrops that are only built-in post-filming. Share some of the challenges of doing so!**

I am the type of person that has worked flipping hard in my career honing my craft, learning as much as I can wherever I can. So when it comes to taking advice from the people around me, I assume they have done the same and I always respect their vision and the wealth of knowledge and experience they bring to the table.



Garon Campbell and Ben Arredondo, NYC Picturestart Film festival director.

My advice to people in the industry, especially youngsters, is not to feel as though you have the weight of the world on your shoulders. Trust the professionals around you, as they want to achieve greatness, too.

When it comes to technically difficult scenes, I research everything I can, watch 'behind the scenes', go to post-production facilities and get ideas from everywhere and everyone. By the time I get to set, I'm so prepared that the scenes no longer seem overwhelming and I know exactly how I'm going to tackle them.

■ ***No wonder you've won multiple awards for your work, especially for your 26-minute short film 'Umkhumbi Wethu' (Our ship). Share its nutshell synopsis; as well as which award you are most proud of, and why?***

This drama follows an illiterate 'trolley pusher' or South African trash collector, who makes money from recyclable goods. He collects cardboard to pay for his son to get the education he never received in life.

The film's opening scene has them evicted from their tiny room, so they're forced to live on the streets and survive these harsh conditions while the tension between them rises.

“ It’s a father-son story of a man who tries to navigate life without being able to read, and a boy who eventually learns to accept his father and appreciates the sacrifices he’s made for him. ”

I have two ‘proudest career’ moments. The first one saw me going up on stage in front of South Africa’s greatest filmmakers to accept the Safta for Best Student Film.

The second was when I entered the film into an international short film competition – not as a student film – where it was awarded Best Director and Best Actor amongst several foreign countries and some incredible films, so I went up on stage in New York to receive the awards.

This was truly an achievement as it credited my discipline and the strong relationship I had built with my difficult but talented lead actor.

■ **Love that. There’s no denying the production industry is intense – it requires high energy, results in high stress and works to strict deadlines – often not even getting the glory for the work done for clients, as the ad agency gets all the limelight. What does it take to succeed in this field?**

It’s true that the agencies get all the praise – I have heard of some awards I have won by chance, only months or sometimes years later! This is the nature of the beast though, and you need to find within it something that’s important to you.



I’m left-brained and work very hard at being creative, so I see everything as a challenge to do the best that I can for the product, client or brand.

When I walk away from a project I’m happy knowing that I have given my all to it and that I literally couldn’t have done a better job with the resources I had in that particular time. You need to look past all the politics, as you will face this in any career, and find in that what makes you truly happy.

■ **Love that, as well as your statement: “We as filmmakers are in a position where we have the power to change perception. We have the ability to change the world, and it is with this ability that we must use our talents with the time we have to do the best we can.” Can you elaborate on how exactly filmmakers can make this a reality through their work?**

Yes, this long-winded statement encapsulates me so well, but there's another quote that's always stuck with me in life. I heard it when I left the over-lit labs of studying biochemistry and travelled to Europe for a year, where I spent time in Brussels with my brother Kendell, who is a famous and successful artist.

I was wondering what I should do with my life when Kendell said to me: "Whatever you decide to do, even if it's not easy – make sure it makes you happy". So I thought back to when I was 6-years-old and watched *E.T.* for the 50th time.

I wasn't like the other kids who imagined being the boy that found the alien. Instead, I always wondered what it must have been like to create that story and how on earth they pulled that thing together to make me feel that way.



Only years later, I realised that the reason I thought like this was because my mom would let me watch any film of any age restriction, from the moment I could fix my eyes on a screen.

When I got scared, she would always tell me that there are people all around the actors with cameras, and they're watching them play a role, so there's no reason to be scared. Little did I know that this was the thinking that got a 6-year-old wanting to be a film-maker.

So yes, you have the ability, through your past experiences and childhood stories, to use the time you have to change the views of the people around you and ultimately the world.

“ Look back at what made you want to pursue this path, because you'll want to hold onto the moment that sparked the passion that made you want to take on one of the most difficult and competitive careers! ”

Therefore, another quote that is one of my favourites and resonates with me, is: "Enjoy what you do and you'll never work a day in your life."

■ **Let's end on your future plans and where you'd like to see the business grow.**

I'd like to see the company get 50% bigger, bringing on another full-time director and also increasing the size of the post-production team so that we can take on more challenging post-work and also free up time to work on the feature films we have in the pipeline.

Sounds like they're set to become the toast of the town. Follow Breadbin Productions' latest updates on their [press office](#), [website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) feed.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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