

INTRO

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Jess Brough: Welcome to Before the Applause - an audio programme for hybrid arts festival Fringe of Colour Films. We are going to be hearing from the filmmakers and artists who are behind the films in this year's festival programme. Some of these films will make you laugh, many will challenge you, and others will be thoroughly dismantling in their ability to find their way straight to your heart. Please enjoy hearing from the people behind these remarkable films and this continuation of their stories.

DIALOGUE

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Michael Jenkins: Hello, people. My name is Michael Jenkins, and I'm the writer director of Pickney. So Pickney is a short film that I've written and directed. And it's about Leon, who's a mixed race teenager trying to work out and figure out where he fits in. He's close to his nan. His nan is the only person he knows from the Black side of his family. And he has to eventually go on a journey to reconnect with his nan and get more of an understanding about who he is and where he fits into the world.

[FILM CLIP]

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So the film starts in a dream, or a nightmare, depending on your perspective. And I think, for me, delving into that world, the world of dreams, the world of where we're asleep and our subconscious, I think that's what it speaks to. And in the beginning of the film we're dealing with, we're looking at Leon's subconscious and a shadowy figure that we don't quite know who they are. Basically, for me, when I went on this journey of making this film, I wanted to explore themes of belonging, which I think is a universal theme. Also, other universal themes of loss and family and how you heal wounds. Essentially, I think through this film I was speaking, of course, I got into making films because I wanted to see different stories, things from my community reflected on screen. I've always been fascinated by the notion of a Nine Nights. Unfortunately, I've been to many funerals, and I've been to many Nine Nights, and I think in this country, people might associate a Nine Nights with a party, almost, um, like a farewell party. But I wanted to really explore, um, some of the older traditions around the Nine Nights, and how that was quite integral to burial rights and quite important to people of the African Caribbean diaspora. So, actually, it has some reflections of things past that we don't know, that we're not really connected to. And I feel like I wanted to show in Nine Nights in a bit of a different way and incorporate some of those traditional, more traditional themes in it. So it's not just a dance, it is a coming of age story of Leon sort of coming into who he is and having a better relationship with who he is, or establishing that relationship with who he is through a traumatic event that he goes through in this short film. And I only had 15 minutes to tell this film. And, shooting it in Bristol was really important just because that's where I'm from. I'm from Bristol, and I wanted to see Bristol on screen. So shooting it by the water is quite fluid. It's moving, it can transcend, it has different meanings. So we shot it down by the Bristol Harbor as well and around other areas of Bristol, which I just feel that you don't really get to see on screen. You might see the iconic sort of suspension bridge. We're all going to see that. But I purposely didn't really want to put that in my film, because

obviously, it's not about that. It's about Leon and his journey with his family that he's just encounters for me, identity. And that's one of the sort of taglines for the film. Identity is more than just skin deep. And his connection with his nan from the Caribbean was literally his only sort of source of his identity. I mean, he didn't know in the film, he lives with his mum and he doesn't know any other family apart from his nan. That is the connection that he has. And for me, it does represent the elders, specifically the elders from the Windrush generation. My nan was part of that generation. She came here in the late 50s from Dominica. My granddad, came from Jamaica. Their stories, their struggles, we don't really know much about that. And I think coming from my age, I was born in the late 80s, so I'm like, second generation. There is a bit of a disconnect between the people that came from a different country and migrated here to the people that have been whose parents were born here and they were born here, which was me. And I felt like I wanted to use that sort of, um idea of, like you are who your family being your connection. And having a connection is more than just your identity, and what makes you you is more than just your skin color. It's all about your family, your heritage, your stories, the stories that exist. We have got a character in here that does come from a voodoo belief system. And I wanted to incorporate that into my film because I feel like it's these sorts of things around our stories and our myths. I feel, personally, that this is what, in order for us to get a better sense of who we are, we need to have a reconnection to. So I really wanted to bring forth some of these elements in this film and it's really worked because audiences have really gravitated to it and are feeling it. And I think loss is something that everybody goes through, no matter who you are. But I think the way I just wanted to explore loss in a different way through sort of looking at what a Nine Nights actually is and bringing back some of those traditional elements as far as stepping over the threshold, allowing the spirit to leave, to go to the other realm, sort of thing. There's obviously lots of different dynamics in families. And for me, I would think that Leon's presence would be a bit of a shock to some people. And he does have a bit more of a conflict, a direct conflict with someone who he later finds out, they find out that they're cousins, but they have a conflict sort of at the beginning. And also his uncle sort of shoes him away from his house, but doesn't really know who he's like telling to go away. And then once they sort of come back and through sort of their connection, through his story, I mean, the song that they sing, the song that is hummed right at the beginning, all the way throughout the piece is a symbol of that connection to something else. Something else which you can't really explain, but it's there. And I think people in the family know. And I think once they understand that Leon knows this song, then they understand that, okay, we are together, we are one in this moment. And that's obviously what the matriarch of the family, which is the nan, that's what she would have wanted. So that is you know, I think conflicts, you can't have a good story without conflicts. Every story has got to have conflicts. And I do feel like within families, it was a little bit of a touch on colourism. There's a little bit of a talking point to that, which I think is something that definitely is in the black community, which we don't really talk about enough. So that was a little bit about where the conflict came from and also the fact that you have hierarchies and families, people debating about privileges that the firstborn can have, the last born, the differences with the siblings in between. There's all sorts of politics like that. Obviously, it's only a 15 minute film, so there's only so much you can only really touch on these themes really in 15 minutes. But I just hope and I'm just glad that these themes are coming through and people are recognising the little nuances that I've put in this film to really make people connect with it. I think there is like a light skin, dark skin privilege. There is this dynamic within Caribbean communities and we hear about our people bleaching their skin and it's taking on a big effect in Africa now. And I feel like it's one of those sorts of I wouldn't

say it's taboo because obviously with social media, people are talking about a lot more. But there are things, family dynamics can be affected by this. People making comments about the texture of your hair, the shade of your skin tone could dictate how well you do in life. And because of that, that can breed animosity. I think these things really do exist. Initially, the whole film was a little bit of a commentary on colourism that was, like the core theme. That's where it started. But then through exploring sort of a family situation and taking bits from my own experience, it evolved into Pickney into this film that we've got today.

OUTRO

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Jess Brough: Fringe of Colour Films 2023 takes place from the 23rd to the 29th June, but this audio programme will be available in perpetuity. If you are listening to this before the festival, we hope you can join us either online or in-person in Edinburgh, and if you are listening after the festival, you can stay up-to-date with our work at fringeofcolour.co.uk. This podcast was brought to you by Fringe of Colour Films, a hybrid arts festival for Black people and People of Colour. This series is presented by me Jess Brough, produced by Halina Rifai and Fringe of Colour, theme music by Xavier LaCroix and is supported by Creative Scotland. Thank you for listening.