

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

My name is Stephanie Alexandria and I'm the writer, director and producer of the short film The Perfect Knight. The Perfect Knight is a short film that is a comedy drama and in terms of how we get to our main character, we find Ali, who's our lead character in this, on the phone call with her best friend. And prior to that, she's just on her bed reading and writing in her diary. Journaling is a big part of her life. And so, yeah, that's kind of what we first sort of see of her is her journaling and leading into an interaction with her and her best friend on the phone.

[FILM CLIP]

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Ali is a hopeless romantic. The film kind of follows her as she's sort of very open in her heart to exploring what that is. And how we open up the story is by her being on a blind date with a gentleman that her best friend has set her up with, and her anticipation to go on this date, as many of us who have ever been on a blind date, there's so much anticipation and questions and reassurance that we might need from our friends. And so in this moment, that's what's happening with Ali. She's gearing up to go on this date, has no expectation of what to expect, limited information on who the individual might be, what they look like, their name, their number, nothing at all to go off, and is about to set off on this journey. The reason I wanted to make the perfect night, well, there's several reasons, but the first one is it serves as a proof of concept for a TV series, actually. So it's a proof of concept, and it really lives as a scene, almost, and a standalone film, but as a scene as to what you might see in the episodic series of Ali, which is the title of the series. The reason why for me this was such an important and is an important story to tell is as a black filmmaker, as a Black female, I have grown up watching so many amazing rom-coms from The Preacher's Wife to The Holiday to While You Were Sleeping with Sandra Bullock and Bill Pullman. And growing up watching those films, I've always felt this love and this magic. And what I missed most was actually seeing that represented in the UK. And when I talk about representation, I'm talking about Black love. And I'm talking about it being whimsical and goofy and sexy and, you know, all the things that we see on our screens very, very regularly and I have been part of Hollywood and television for many, many, many years. Being able to create something that was culturally relevant to me and see people that look like me and hear music that people that look like me sometimes create and bask in and enjoy was so important for me because it's a story I've always wanted to see on screen. Music is such a big part of my journey as the creator and actually it is one of the first things that I scope out whilst in the scripting process. I think music plays such a big driving force in how you move and set up a scene and how

you tell the story and that for me is a big part of my storytelling as a creative and so one of the first things I did was create the Spotify playlist that had a vast range of artists that I loved and reminded me of what I deemed to be Black love. And so I would be driving and hear this playlist and part of the artist that sort of inspired this song called Last Night, Bice, who is a Jamaican artist, Lapsley, Cynthia Erivo, Toni Braxton, The Towns, Miles Davis and John Coltrane are milestones. And it's this combination of all these different sounds, such as like the drifters under the broadwalk. And as you hear that the beat and the tempo and, and all the rhythm that you have in that, and how that embodies the anticipation of love and magic and classic love as well, you know. And that was a big part of it. And I was very lucky to be able to get Talia, who is a recording artist who has been around for a very, very long time. Her and Amy Winehouse went to school together with Adele and, you know, her music is, for me, it speaks to me. And so to be able to get her to be in the film and perform her song Watch Out, which is about hopelessly falling in love and not even realising that you are in that moment and just going down this journey of, you know, two individual souls being present, it was so exciting to be able to have that music kind of drive the soundtrack of the film. And so yeah, music played a very big role in this film and I think it's such a beautiful way to tell stories and add to stories, add to words. Casting this was very easy for me actually. I had always known, having seen my lead actress Jessica Rolaine in The Laundromat, that I wanted her to play Ali as the lead character. CJ Beckford, who plays Daniel, I had seen him in quite a few different things, I think, sitting in limbo. But I'd also worked with him on a series called Drunk History, Black Stories for Comedy Central, and he played one of the characters in that. And so I had always known, without even them having a screen test, that they would be my lead characters. And it was bizarre because neither of them read before, none of them had a chemistry test, but I just knew exactly what it was going to be with the two of them, and it was just that. And so being able to have these two amazing artists create this world, and one thing everyone says is they're so believable, they are so dedicated to their craft, and they are so gifted and they're so talented, and so I feel so blessed and honoured to be able to have them represent this idea of Black love in London. And then Lauren Foster, who had just come out of drama school, plays Leila in this. And for me, that was a really exciting opportunity. I auditioned probably around 30 different actresses for this role. And Lauren was somebody that had a regional accent as well, but she was feisty, she was somebody that I knew that would represent what I want this character to be, and it's someone who is very fluid in their thinking, in their sexuality, in their opinions. They take, you know, big leaps and chances, and almost the complete opposite to Jessica, who plays Ali in the series. And then we have these really special moments where people I've worked with over the years have sort of little small appearances, such as Papaya Jarrett, who is also known as Scorcher, who is a UK rapper. Eleanor Lawrence, who you might know from Skins, plays the restaurant hostess. And then you have Thomas Zanadopedjie, who is a director and writer in there actually, who I've worked with and played the waiter at one point. And then Benjamin Sarpong Brony who is in Rhyll Lame and Ajani Salman who plays Rastabeh and Benjamin plays Smartbay. So it was really lovely to be able to work with friends and peers in the industry as well and have them kind of play a part and also pay homage to them and their contribution to me as a writer, director and producer over the years. So yes, casting was very fun for this.

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.