

EastWest FilmDistribution presents

BARBARA HERSHEY  
IN

**THE BIRD CAN'T FLY**  
A FILM BY THREES ANNA






SHE UNCOVERED HER FUTURE  
BURIED IN THE SANDS

**PARADISE HOTEL**

EASTWEST FILMDISTRIBUTION GmbH presents a 24FPS FEATURES IMG PRODUCTIONS BORDERLINE PRODUCTIONS ANNA PRODUCTIONS production  
Starring BARBARA HERSHEY "THE BIRD CAN'T FLY" JOHN KAIN TONY KGOROGE YUSUF DAVIDS  
Producers ANTON SCHOLTEN JOEL PHIRI TOM MAGUIRE THREES ANNA Film Editor WOUTER JANSEN Director of Photography GUIDO VAN GENNEP N.S.C.  
Sound Design PETER FLAMMAN Post Production FILMMORE AMSTERDAM Production Designer BIRRIE LE ROUX Music PAUL HEPKER & MARK KILIAN  
Line Production Company RAZORSHARP FILMS Executive Producers MOSES SILINDA & HELLEN SHADEYI KALENGA Written & Directed By THREES ANNA

This Film Was Financed By ANNA PRODUCTIONS THE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION OF SOUTH AFRICA (IDC) THE NETHERLANDS FILM FUND HEAVEN'S GATE PRODUCTIONS.



EastWest        

## PRESS INFORMATION

## **THE BIRD CAN'T FLY**

Barbara Hershey (Melody), Yusuf Davids (River), Tony Kgoroge (Scoop), John Kani (Stone)

Netherlands, South Africa, Ireland 2007; Drama; 35mm colour; 89 minutes; aspect ratio 1:1.85; Dolby Digital sound; original language English

### **Synopsis**

After many years' absence, MELODY returns home to Fairlands, the little diamond-mining town she grew up in, for the funeral of her estranged daughter, JUNE. Confronted with the sorrow of having to bury her only child, killed in a senseless accident, Melody has to come to terms with the shock that she has a ten year old grandson RIVER, a child whose existence she knew nothing about.

Many things have changed in Fairlands, the desert has half-buried the town and the diamonds have all but run out. A curious group of surprisingly cheerful women remains. They're the wives of a few prospectors who manage to scratch a living from the abandoned diamond fields, coming home once a month with their meagre finds.

There's also a small gang of feral children who run through the town like a pack of wild dogs, led by Melody's grandson, River. He's got an ambitious plan to make money breeding the ostriches that he and his mother used to feed.

Melody is convinced that she must take River away with her to raise him properly in the West. But River will have none of it: his mother's death has sent him spinning out of control. SCOOP, his father, an idle but talented musician, urges her to leave without River. But he also has a secret to hide.

In an attempt to win River's favour Melody buys up the last items in the general store to bake a pie. But River won't take the bait, and the hungry ostriches hanging round what was June's house get the pie.

Scoop's resentment of Melody finally boils to the surface when she discovers why her daughter never contacted her after she left. He was taking the money Melody sent home, while keeping and hiding the letters June wrote to her mother.

Melody decides to go, with or without River. But a sandstorm is moving in. To make matters worse, River convinces his band of tearaways to attack Melody's house with stones and to drive her away just as the sandstorm hits.

River disappears in the swirling storm. Melody and Scoop go out to search for him. It's Melody who finds him and together they fall into the Paradise Hotel, her erstwhile workplace, which is now buried deep beneath the sand. Melody is brought face to face with her past, uncovering some painful memories about herself, and about her failed relationship with her daughter.

The following morning, the storm gone, Scoop has disappeared, another victim of the advancing desert. Melody and River begin to reach an understanding. River's beloved ostriches have laid eggs and in a role reversal Melody finally understands that the solution is not to take the child away but to embrace and support their relationship and to stay in Fairlands.

## Director's notes

Extreme places all around the world that keep me under their spell are the underlying basis for all my work. 'The Bird Can't Fly' is inspired by southern Africa, an extreme part of the world where people have the ability to express hate and hope in the same sentence. This ambiguous magic hit me for the first time when, during the nineties, I made three theatre shows with casts made up of international and local artists.

In 1998 I started 'The Bird Can't Fly' from a research angle by interviewing 55 completely different people in their own unique dwellings. I asked all of them exactly the same questions - about life, death, hopes and fears. Then I began to write.

'The Bird Can't Fly' isn't based on any truth. My writing is like cooking. I use all the different impressions and events, and mix them like the ingredients of a recipe to create a new and universal story. Like in all my work the story is on the edge of reality and fantasy, both believable and unbelievable. My work is never based on dialogue; the images, actions and metaphors have to speak.

A town populated mostly by women, who nearly all have male children, where cooking is done on an electric stove but they have to light a fire in it to cook anything, a white grandmother (Melody) coming from a rich fertile world, is brought together with her poor black grandson (River) living in a dilapidated town, nearly swallowed up by the encroaching desert.

For Melody the town means decay, for River it is abundance. For River the local ostriches and their eggs represent his future army; for Melody the eggs are just ingredients for her cooking, but in the end it'll be the eggs that represent new life. Every image I use has an opposite. Old and young. Fertile and barren. Black and white. Life and death. Also with the cast I create contrast; Barbara Hershey opposite Yusuf Davids, a little township boy. The tension between all these contrasts is my way of story-telling.

'The Bird Can't Fly' is a universal story about yesterday, today and tomorrow. The language and idiom is not related to a period and the setting is a white piece of desert, which looks like a snowy landscape. The production design of this film was very important: with the precision of a surrealist painter every small detail was placed in the frame because it's the visuals that have to speak.

'The Bird Can't Fly' is a linear story, covering a period of a few days. It starts in a rich and fertile world and moves to a world in decay. During the climax of the film we return to the luxurious past the town once enjoyed, which is very similar to the rich world of the beginning. In the end the world of decay gets new life. I see the world as a never-ending spiral. Therefore I also believe that from grief comes life.

## **Casting The Bird Can't Fly**

### *Atlantis Dunes, June 24th*

About 25 miles north of Cape Town, a small desert area is situated near the former township Atlantis. After we've shown our permits to the guard, the barrier opens and we're allowed to explore the site. Five years ago, the day my mother died unexpectedly, I'd been here too. That was the day I decided my film would be shot here. We climb dune after dune. From time to time we sink deep into the sand. Suddenly we descend into a small pan. Simultaneously we call out: 'This is it!' Here we're going to build the village.

### *Atlantis Township, June 29th*

Because we'll shoot near Atlantis, I want to start the search for the boy River here. When we are about to get in the car, I see three little lads walking past. Mickie has spotted them too. "The small one," I say. "That's him." She nods. Mickie steps up to them; she is one meter fifty-five and coloured like them. I know my skin colour will scare them off, so I join later. The small boy's name is Yusuf. He's got an uncommon face, with eyes that tell ten stories at once. I can see inquisitiveness, urge for survival, grief, fun, expectation, fear, vice, love, shyness, warmth. I'm instantly in love.

### *Atlantis, July 1st*

I've been dreaming about Yusuf. He is waiting with one of his friends and some other children plus their mothers in front of their door. I've devised a game, by which I can see a lot of their qualities. Yusuf doesn't disappoint me. On the contrary, he is by far the best; but his English...! It's a language he never speaks.

### *Cape Town, July 12th*

Seven boys I've selected for a second round, amongst whom Yusuf, for sure. And there is Ronny, a thirteen year old street urchin that has been in prison. Ronny rolls his eyes and wants to swallow his tongue. I repeat my question. His shoulders move. "Stabbing someone," he mumbles almost inaudible. I don't know if I'm getting this right. "What do you say?" I ask.

"Stab... stab..."

"What happened?"

"I stab a guy with a knife."

"Why'd you stab him?"

He shrugs.

"Were you angry?"

He nods.

"Where did you stab him?"

"In the heart."

"And he died?"

He nods.

### *Cape Town, July 18th*

Yusuf is still the best, but the more he is confronted with "whities" the more timid he becomes. He even appears to be terrified of ostriches.

I know I will be flying back tomorrow to attend the presentation of my new novel. I have to cut the knot. Will he be able to do it? Will he?

As I am used to do, I use the only tool I have. My intuition.

## THREES ANNA

Threes Anna is a writer and director from the Netherlands who works in three fields - literature, film and theatre.

From 1989 to 1999 Threes Anna operated as the Company Artistic Director of Dogtroep. In this capacity she wrote and directed over 50 site-specific theatrical spectacles all across the globe. Her fascination with extreme situations and locations was roused during this period. From one of her shows, *Noordwesterwals*, a spectacular performance in which 1.2 million litres of water formed the lead, she made a short film. During the 90's Threes Anna also made several documentaries on visual artists and their work.

In 1998 she began to develop her first film script '*The Bird Can't Fly*'. In June 2003 her first novel, *De kus van de weduwe* (The Widow's Kiss), was published; in 2005 her novel *Motormoeder* (Motor Mother); both published by Vassallucci, Amsterdam. In August 2006 publishing house Querido published her novel *De stille stad* (The Silent City). In autumn 2007 the novel '*Vogel kan niet vliegen*' (The Bird Can't Fly) will be published.

Beside her own work Threes Anna gives lectures and workshops all around the world about directing and site-specific theatre.

## 24fps features

24fps features is a production company whose main goal is to produce feature films with co-producers all over the world. Apart from *The Bird Can't Fly*, the company is developing projects with co-producers in Germany, Norway, Ireland and Australia. The company's director, **Anton Scholten**, is also a co-owner of Filmmore, the leading Dutch postproduction facility for feature films and drama series for television.

Productions:            *In Orange*, 10 minutes, 2000.  
                               *Dick and Maria*, 13 minutes, 2000.  
     Nomination best Dutch Short Film 2000.  
                               *De Passievrucht*, 106 minutes, 2004.  
     Nomination: Dutch Film Festival Award for:  
     Best picture, Best sound, Best actress in a supporting role  
                               *Dilemma*, 10 minutes, 2005  
     Nomination for best Dutch short film 2005.  
     International premiere at Tribeca Festival.  
                               *The Bird Can't Fly*. 89 minutes 2007  
     Official selection in Zabaltegi section, San Sebastian festival 2007

Line producer: *The Girl in Hyacinth Blue*, feature film, 2003,  
     with: Ellen Burstyn and Glenn Close.  
                               *Five Fingers*, feature film, 100 minuten, 2005,  
     with: Ryan Phillippe and Laurence Fishburne.

**Anton Scholten** is a graduate of the Film Academy Amsterdam (1987) and the Binger Institute in Amsterdam. Beginning as Production Manager and First Assistant for various short films, feature films, documentaries and video clips, he started his first private company, 25fps commercial production in 1990, producing commercials for the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Denmark, Poland and Germany, becoming number 6 of the list of worldwide commercial production companies. 25fps has won all major advertising prizes in the world, including several Golden Lions in Cannes, Mobius Awards and a Euro Grand Prix.

His next company was 50fps post, a postproduction company, specializing in high end post production, now known as Filmmore, the leading postproduction house in Holland for feature film, television drama and documentaries. He founded 24fps features in 2000, together with Jose van Doorn.

Anton Scholten's work has taken him all over the world: Belgium, France, Spain, England, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Morocco, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Poland, Hong Kong, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa and the USA.

He has also taught classes in scriptwriting at the Art School in Rotterdam and production at the Filmschool in Amsterdam.

### **IMG Productions (Pty) Ltd**

**IMG Productions (Pty) Ltd** specializes in financing international co-productions that are produced partially or totally in Africa. **IMG's** focus is on commercial, challenging stories that are innovative and unique that will be suitable to be financed and produced in South Africa.

**IMG** has completed the following feature films:

- "Monsieur N"* (Berlin, Panorama Competition, 2003)
- "Wah-Wah"* by Richard E Grant (Edinburgh, Opening Night Film, 2005),
- "The Flyer"* by Revel Fox (Locarno, La Piazza Grand, 2005)
- "Crazy Monkey: Straight Outta Benoni"* by Trevor Clarence (2005)
- "The Bird Cant Fly"* by Threes Anna (2007)

**Joel Chikapa Phiri** is one of Africa's leading entrepreneurs in the film and television business. In 1992 he was instrumental in the production of the first independently produced and financed black UK feature film *"WELCOME TO THE TERRORDOME"* directed by Ngozi Onwurah, which he line produced. He produced Ingrid's Sinclair's *"FLAME"*, which was part of the Official Selection for the Cannes Film Festivals (Quinziane Des Realisateurs) Director's Fortnight in 1996. Joel has served as a board member on numerous industry boards.

### **Borderline Productions Ltd**

Borderline Productions Ltd was set up by producers Tom Maguire and Patrick FitzSymons in 2004. Based in Belfast, it has fast become one of Northern Ireland's leading film and television companies having already completed two feature films – *Johnny Was (2004)* starring Vinnie Jones, Patrick Bergin, Eric Le Salle and Samantha Mumba and *The Bird Can't Fly (2007)*.

Completed feature projects: *Johnny Was*  
*Queering the Pitch* (documentary)  
*Pretty Face, Squaddie, 20 or 22* and *Rick's Head* (short films).

Feature films currently in early stages of development with funders the Irish Film Board and/or Northern Ireland Screen are *Voyage of the Antelope* by writer Bill Murphy, and *A Girl Called Freedom* by China-based Irish writer, Ed Dawson. Feature co-productions with Zanzibar Films in Dublin which are in financing stage are *It Takes Three to Tango* by Audrey O'Reilly *Occi Versus The World* and *Lingling* by Paddy Jolley.

**Tom Maguire** started his film and television career in 1990 working in Germany as a researcher for RTL 5 in Cologne. Tom turned to a freelance career as a production accountant and worked on nine feature films including the Irish film, *Borstal Boy* for Hells Kitchen and Thomas Vinterberg's Danish feature *It's All about Love* and five TV series. He then moved into producing and has produced seven

short films, two feature films, a feature documentary and two stage plays.

### **GUIDO VAN GENNEP** – Director of Photography

Guido van Gennep (1963) graduated from the Rietveld Art Academy Amsterdam in 1992, with two short films. His graduation film FIGHTING was shown at the Rotterdam International Film Festival, and won the Prins Bernhard Fonds Prijs 1992.

Guido directed and shot several shorts after that, such as HAPPY AT LARGE, MISTER MAGIC, THE REVENGE OF THE SHADOW, DUTCHMAN, SHOPPING and FLICKA, the last two together with Marco Vermaas.

While he was doing camera for his own films Guido started to shoot commercials and shorts for other directors, like GITANES and MOËT & CHANDON for Mark de Cloe, FORBIDDEN EYES, THE HIDDEN FACE and STILL WORLD for Elbert van Strien and EXIT and BORIS for Simone van Dusseldorp.

In 1995 he directed the eight part satirical TV series THE PRIDE OF THE DUTCH with the famous dutch comedians Lebbis and Jansen.

In 1999 Guido started THE FANTASTS with Elbert van Strien and Djie Han Thung; they wrote a manifesto calling on the dutch filmworld to put more imagination in dutch cinema instead of social realism. More than 50 prominent dutch directors, actors and scriptwriters cosigned the manifesto.

Since 2001 Guido has been shooting mainly commercials and features, like MOONLIGHT and TIRAMISU for Paula van der Oest, CLOACA and SPOON for Willem van der Sande Backhuizen, THE SCHNITZELPARADISE for director Martin Koolhoven and THE BOTOX METHOD for Dick Maas.

### **BIRRIE LE ROUX** – Production Designer

Birrie le Roux is an award-winning film and theatre designer. She graduated from the University of Pretoria, majoring in Theatre Design. Immediately after graduating, she was given the opportunity to work with the innovative and controversial director, Manie van Rensburg. Her collaboration with van Rensburg was inspiring and provided Birrie with a solid grounding for many acclaimed film projects.

In the eighties Birrie collaborated with director Katinka Heyns, acclaimed for her cinema of magic-realism. This collaboration was highly successful and led to a Vita award for best production design for the film Fiel's Child. Birrie designed Paljas also directed by Heyns and produced by Annant Singh which was nominated for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Language Film category.

Other prominent film projects that Birrie has been involved with, as a production designer include: Malunde, directed by German, Stephanie Schycolt, After the Rain, directed by Los Angeles based Ross Kettle who also wrote the script, adapted from his successful stage play Soweto's Burning; and more recently Story of an African Farm, starring Richard E. Grant and Armin Müller Stahl.

After finishing Bird can't fly with Threes Anna, Birrie worked on The Deal, starring Meg Ryan and William H. Macy and is currently in production with Hansie (working title), the story of a tragically fallen sports hero, to be shot in South Africa, the UK and India.

Birrie lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa.

**DIANA CILLIERS – Costume Designer**

Diana has a bachelors degree in Theatre Design,History of Art and Psychology.

She started her career at the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) as a Costume and Textile Artist where she worked with numerous local and international opera theatre and ballet designers, amongst them Peter Cazalet, Bruno Santini and Raymond Schoop. After spending 4 years at CAPAB she joined The Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) during the opening of the State Theatre and spent 2 years there. She started her film career as a costume assistant on various SA films and TV dramas in 1983.

She has designed costumes for over a hundred and fifty feature films as well as numerous commercials and television dramas, including the award-winning South African features directed by Katinka Heyns "FIELA SE KIND", "DIE STORIE VAN KLARA VILJEE" , "PALJAS" and 'PROMISED LAND " directed by Jason Xenopoulos. Her international credits include SA Wardrobe Supervisor on "ALI" by Michael Mann starring Will Smith and John Voigt, costume designer on 'BOPHA" directed by Morgan Freeman starring Danny Glover and Alfre Woodard, "BOESMAN AND LENA" directed by John Berry starring Angela Basset, "RED DUST " directed by Tom Hooper starring Hilary Swank and Chiwetel Ejiofor, "PROTEUS" directed by John Greyson and "STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM" starring Richard E. Grant. Her latest credits include 'GOODBYE BAFANA' directed by award winning director Bille August and starring Joseph Fiennes and Diane Kruger as well as 'THE DEAL' starring Meg Ryan and William H. Macy. She was nominated for a Canadian Gemini Award for Best Costume Design for the award winning Canadian TV series 'HUMAN CARGO'. She is the owner of Theatre and Film Costume Workshop.

**CREDITS**

Cast: Barbara Hershey (Melody), Yusuf Davids (River),  
 Tony Kgoroge (Scoop), John Kani (Stone)  
 Producers: Anton Scholten, Joel Phiri, Tom Maguire, Threes Anna  
 Writer/Director: Threes Anna  
 Line Producer: Rachel Young  
 DOP: Guido van Gennep  
 Prod Man: Edwin Angless, Lesley-Anne Mulder  
 1st Assist Dir: Leigh Tanchell  
 Casting Dir: Mickie Birkett, Moonyeenn Lee, Leila Bertrand  
 Prod Designer: Birrie Le Roux  
 Key Grip: Craig Bekker  
 Gaffer: John McKay  
 SFX & Stunts: Daryl Andrews  
 Wardrobe: Diana Cilliers  
 Make Up: Nicolette van Wyk  
 Animal Trainers: Spud Murray, Luke Cornell, Mark Murray, Garin  
 van Munster and William Filby  
 Original Music: Paul Hepker and Mark Kilian  
 Editor: Wouter Jansen  
 Post Production: Filmmore (Netherlands)  
 Soundmix: Peter Flamman (Netherlands)

**STOP PRESS**

The Bird Can't Fly will receive its world premiere in the Zabaltegi – New Directors competition at the San Sebastian IFF (20<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> September 2007).

Threes Anna has been nominated in the Best First-time Director category at the Dutch Film Festival in Utrecht which begins on September 26<sup>th</sup>.