

BY JOANNE C HILLHOUSE

Creativespace

DE ARTISTRY, LYRICISM, MOVEMENT AND EXPRESSIONS OF THE CARIBBEAN

From James Bond to Jack Sparrow, Hollywood has long been lured by the beauty of the Caribbean; and the Caribbean has created celluloid magic of its own. With films like Jamaica's *Harder They Come* and Trinidad's *Mystic Masseur*, this magic making has been mostly a big island thing. But we in the 'small islands' are catching up.

According to documentary filmmaker Melissa Gomez, (one half of Antigua's Cinque productions), it was the move to digital video that did it; making it cheaper, if not exactly cheap, to dream of the big screen. And how we have dreamed – of everything from love sparked over a ripening mango to love gone wrong.

When the St Lucia-based 'Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States' staged a film festival in Antigua in 2006, it attracted filmmakers from Antigua (HAMA Films, producers of *The Sweetest Mango*, *No Seed*, *Diabliesse* and, in production, *The Skin*), Grenada (Anderson Quarless, director of *Blinded*), and St Lucia's Mathurine Emmanuel, whose gritty technique and grittier themes were a signature of *Troubled Waters* and *Ribbons of Blue*.

Several of these were firsts; and as they were screened our chests swelled up like the male Frigate in mating season.

For me, part of the behind-the-scenes of *Mango* and *No Seed*, each frame stirred memories... of waking up to meet the sunrise at Devil's Bridge or recreating a mango raid by absconding with a few mangoes of our own. It really was fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants filmmaking.

Audiences at home and abroad have readily peered through the window films



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SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE

provide to the passions of the Caribbean – passions like cricket à la Barbados' *Hit for Six*. These are deliberate choices. It's as Emmanuel told me once in an interview: "I believe that our stories should be reflective of our realities."

This is not to say that our films don't cross borders; Frances-Anne Solomon, artistic director of the Toronto-based 'Caribbean Tales Film Festival', described Gomez's *Share and Share Alike* – a story about the importance of family – as "sensitive, perceptive and entertaining."

Speaking of the Barbados festival, its 2005 birth and continued growth is a marker of our move from anansi story telling by moonlight to the big screen.

Of course, the industry isn't yet full-grown. "The Caribbean filmmaking industry is still very young," noted Gomez; adding that "every time a film maker goes against the odds and succeeds in making a film, slowly a history starts to be built."

More importantly, more and more interesting stories are being told. So next time you're thinking of a night at the movies why not check out one made in the Caribbean? ●

Above and top right: magic moments from the Caribbean movie, *Share And Share Alike*. Bottom right, Director Melissa Gomez at work

LAST LICK

My favourite movie soundtrack, bar none, is *The Harder They Come*. Jimmy Cliff is at his best on this album. I also love The Maytals' *Sweet and Dandy*, The Melodians' *Rivers of Babylon*, and – who am I kidding? – the whole t'ing... frankly, more than the film it complements.



Joanne C. Hillhouse (www.jhohadli.com) is the author of *The Boy from Willow Bend* and *Dancing Nude in the Moonlight*. She's also a lover of all things art – from the Carnival masquerade and the people's poetry that is calypso to theatre and the written word. In this creative space, she'll be sharing some of her favourites. Feel free to send your suggestions and invitations; she's always up for a new experience.