

# Sangoma of the silver screen: Jamie Uys as film maker 1950–1964

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## Abstract

It would be no exaggeration describe Jamie Uys as one of the most important role players in the development of the South African film industry. In his career of nearly half a century, he was responsible for more than 40 films: feature films, documentary films and educational short films. His legacy includes South Africa's single most successful film to date: *The Gods must be Crazy*. Without any training, his first film, although a blockbuster, was a rickety attempt, but by the sixties Uys became South Africa's leading expert in filmmaking. In 1966 he teamed up with Mimosa Films, and together they produced a number of international hits. This article provides an overview of Uys's career from his first film until he joined Mimosa Films (the Mimosa Films period, 1966-1996, will be discussed in a later article). Jamie Uys was an extremely private person, and hence very few (auto) biographies or history books have been published on him. The author was therefore dependent on newspaper and magazine articles, and Mimosa Films granted access to their private archive and history files.

## Introduction

In Jamie Uys's career, spanning almost half a century, he was responsible for more than forty pictures: full-length features, documentaries, and educational shorts. His legacy includes South Africa's single most successful film to date: *The Gods must be Crazy*. Having absolutely no training, his first film, although a box-office success, was a rickety affair, but by the 1960s, Uys's professional and technical know-how was unsurpassed in South Africa. In 1964 he teamed-up with Mimosa Films and together they made one international sensation after another.

This article presents a survey of Uys's career, from his first picture until the time he joined Mimosa Films.

Jamie Uys was an intensely private individual, and hence very few (auto)biographies, history books, or academic theses, dealing specifically with Uys, have been published. Source material was therefore mostly limited to newspaper and magazine articles, and Mimosa Films allowed access to its private archive. This article takes an historical approach, rather than the more analytical approach taken by Tomaselli (1992) and others.

## A profound parvenu: Venturing into films

On 17 October 1888, Thomas Edison patented the Kinetoscope as a device that will do "for the eye what the phonograph does for the ear." With the outbreak of the Anglo Boer War, one of Edison's co-workers, William Kennedy Laurie Dickson, clutching the abovementioned apparatus, joined Sir Redvers Buller and set sail for South Africa. Dickson was to document the military struggle on film; in the process founding the

country's film industry. Some thirty-three years later, on 30 May 1921, South Africa's most successful filmmaker was born: Johannes Jacobus Uys (Mimosa Films 2007). The family's Boksburg neighbours were Scottish and hence dubbed little Johannes, Jamie (pronounced Dj'ay'me.) (Mimosa Films 2007). Having finished school, Uys enrolled for a B.Sc. degree at the Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit (RAU) and received his Higher Education Diploma from the Pretoria Normal College. His father was a principle and the Uys brothers followed suit. "I don't think we had a vocation," Uys later said (Sutton 1983).

Despite his degree, he went to work as a gold miner for two years. In 1945 he married Hettie van Rooyen. After a stint as a school teacher, Uys joined his farther-in-law who farmed near Olifantsdrift, next to the Palala River. He managed his in-laws' trading posts along the riverbanks and at one stage also acted as Justice of the Peace. An avid filmgoer, Uys dreamt about movies but never dreamt that he would ever actually make one.

After some years on the farm he received a letter from his brother, Jok (Mimosa Films 2007). "I was three years with the trading posts when my brother Jok wrote to me that he could borrow a movie camera. And soon he would be on holiday," Uys reminisced, "I had to write a story and he would write a story, and then we would choose the best and make a movie of it. Well yes, I wrote a story and it was Daar in die Bosveld [Deep in the Bushveld]. My brother was a school photographer and at least he knew something about snaps, but nothing of movie cameras. But he came and we decided that we were going to make this story...We were raw..." (Barnard 1977:37). Daar in die Bosveld tells the story of a prosperous but befuddled farmer, who was completely out of his depth in courting the new school teacher, but eventually succeeds in winning the lady's heart (Uys 1951).

Jok Uys, camera-in-hand, visited his brother during the 1949 winter school holidays. The Uys brothers thought that the cinematic exercise would take about fourteen days and would not cost too much (De Villiers 1970:33). They had no idea how to make a film: There was a storyline but no script and no set dialogue, no technical production team, and although they had a lump sum, there was no actual budget. Not a single professional artist was involved; Jamie Uys and his wife portrayed the lead roles, while family, friends, and neighbours played the other roles. The Uys brothers and Hettie Uys took turns in operating the camera, and when everybody had to be in one shot, a small black boy from the farm stood in as cinematographer. The tiny youngster could not see through the lens and either looked over the camera or held it on top of his head and looked in the direction of the action. Nevertheless, he never missed a shot. Because Uys had not written a precise dialogue, at least one actor (Uys's neighbour) stood around and just opened and closed his mouth – Uys later decided what the character ought to say and, using his own voice, added the appropriate dialogue (Mimosa Films 2007). After weeks of shooting, the filmmakers drove to Johannesburg to develop the few minutes of film. However, the film was old and defective: some of it came out blue and other parts purple (Barnard 1977:37). The holiday was over and Jok had to return to his job, and the camera had to be returned to its owner. Jamie considered whether or not to continue, and with much effort he raised £30 and bought a home movie-like 16mm camera (Meiring 1985). Uys had to reshoot everything from the start, while financial constraints forced him to buy film on the black market. After finishing the film, he relocated to Johannesburg for specialist postproduction treatment. Uys was compelled to sell his farm (his in-laws were selling their land to the government's homeland development) (Mimosa Films n.d.). What had started as a holiday hobby was now destroying Uys financially. Editing, sound production and distribution cost more than initially envisioned, and the family was experiencing financial difficulties. They rented a small home in Bezuidenhoutvallei as Uys desperately tried to complete the production in its entirety. "Now you've got to realize: in those two years there was no income; only expenses. Later we had to borrow everywhere and had to sell our clothes and our vehicle, just to stay alive," recalled Uys (see Mimosa Films 1977 and Barnard 1977:37).

He might have had a film by now, but the impoverished movie maker still had no knowledge as to how to turn it into a proper feature. Uys did not even realize that something like an editing table actually existed. He figured out that the reels of film had to be spliced together. Laboriously screening rolls and rolls of

rough film on a wall, painstakingly scrutinizing the tiny film (damaging his eyes permanently), he cut and pasted the material into a logical whole. This was not only time consuming, but also tense work, since Uys only had one copy of the film; one mistake could mean the end of his first feature before it was even released (Mimosa Films 1986). Once he had finished with the visuals, the problem of the audio came into play. The procedure to create magnetic soundtracks had been discovered earlier and Uys wanted to import it for his picture, but there were however problems with obtaining permits from Pretoria, and the picture's financial viability had to be assessed first. A small committee of the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings [The Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations] (FAK) was shown the film, and committee members burst out with laughter. However, despite approval, Pretoria was notorious for taking its time with the permits (Anonymous 1986:109).

On advice from his neighbour, Uys held a special screening for the press so as to draw attention to the film (possibly spurring the authorities to grant the permits). Around 200 people showed up but only two newspapermen: a reporter from *Die Transvaler* and James Ambrose Brown, who worked for the *Sunday Times* at that stage. Both were apparently impressed by the (as yet unpolished) picture and gave it glowing reviews. Uys sent their newspaper reports to the responsible authorities in Pretoria, and eventually received the official documents. Having received the permits at last, Uys now lacked sufficient funds to import the desired equipment (he never got the magnetic soundtrack). As the South African film industry (more-or-less still undiscovered by the Afrikaners) was run by English executives, the aspirant Afrikaner film maker had to forego investments.

A new film company, Swan Films, had heard of *Daar doer in die Bosveld* and its determined creator. Uys could work for them and instead of drawing a salary, the company would assist Uys in finishing the picture (Mimosa Films 1973). The arrangement was not without problems though: Swan Films was fundamentally English, and they did not understand the film they had intended to finish. As such, Uys could rely on Swan Films' technological resources but had to do everything himself. When finally redubbing and synchronizing the soundtrack of the original version, Jamie and Hettie Uys had to stand in for all the voices (luckily the sound quality was of such bad quality that audiences did not notice). Another dilemma was that Swan Films was in the midst of a severe financial crisis, and the production company would not be able to distribute the picture (see Mimosa Films n.d. and Anonymous 1986:109).

Jannie Raath, a wealthy businessman, made arrangements with Swan Films for the movie's distribution. Raath, who imported opera films from Italy, had the necessary infrastructure, including a couple of projectors, and organised drivers to crisscross South Africa with ten copies of the film. It was shown in every conceivable type and size of venue throughout the country.

Released in 1951, irrespective of its many technical flaws, the popularity of *Daar doer in die Bosveld* spread like a wildfire, especially in the rural farming areas (Mimosa Films 2007). The picture's music was composed by Anton de Waal, including the theme song (which shared the film's title), which turned out to be a big hit (Uys 1951). The Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns (South African Academy for Science and Art) gave its official praise (Anonymous 1973c).

Instead of the proposed two weeks, the picture had taken two years to make. Instead of being a bit of frivolity during the holidays, it had wrecked the family financially. Instead of costing a few hundred pounds, *Daar doer in die Bosveld* had cost £3 000 to make. In spite of the picture's extreme popularity, it was not a financial success (Anonymous 1985). In the end, Uys made a successful debut but his successes, not to mention troubles, were far from over.

## **Fame without fortune: Searching for producers and protection**

An Englishman and an Afrikaner go on a bus tour. They cannot stand each other, but constantly end up involved in each other's affairs. Eventually they are forced to get along. This was the basis of Uys's second film, a comedy that was a cross between a road movie and a buddy movie (Uys 1952). In *50/50*,

South Africa's first bilingual feature film, Uys tackled the animosity that existed between the Afrikaners and English of that period for the first time (Anonymous 1973b:10). The conflict that had existed between these two groups might have thawed somewhat since the days of Jan Smuts and J.B.M. Hertzog, but there remained a good deal of political animosity and cultural squabbles (see e.g. Giliomee 2004). Throughout the 1950s, Uys would repeatedly return to this theme.

As with his first film, Uys approached the picture as something of a one-man show. He was producer, director, scriptwriter and editor, and he also played the lead role of the Afrikaner character. Hettie Uys once again starred as the love of his life. The film was shot entirely on location; not a single studio-scene. *50/50* was released by Raath Films in 1952, and Uys was so excited about the new film that he and Raath rented Pretoria's huge Afrikaanse Koffiehuis for the première (it turned out to be a comedy of errors). The fact that cabinet members and other South African luminaries attended, keeping in mind that this was only his second film, illustrates the impact of *Daar doer in die Bosveld*, but also how quickly Uys was making a name for himself (Joubert 1968:30). Although his second film was another popular success, Uys was still desperately trying to recover from the past few years' debts. Financial matters and an overactive imagination obligated him to work without rest.

The next feature was somewhat of a sequel to his first. *Daar doer in die Stad* (Deep in the City), released in 1953, tells of a happy Bushveld family whose lives are turned upside down by the mother's death. The father, his young daughter, and their pet dog have to move to the city so he can try and patent a bean-machine. The urban world is foreign and foreboding with much danger. The father perseveres, and triumphs in a comical manner. The credits of this film read like a family tree: He starred as the father, his real wife (again) starred as his onscreen wife, his daughter, Marietjie, starred as his onscreen daughter, and even the dog was the Uys's family dog. It was the first time that Uys worked with a 35mm camera and he eagerly explored its various possibilities. Once more Uys's cinematic recipe was a success (Anonymous 1973b:10).

Uys made the picture for Killarney Film Studios / African Film Productions. In 1954, Uys was awarded The Schlesinger Drum Award (then the local version of the American Academy Award, or Oscar). The award was named after the Schlesingers who controlled African Film Productions, the first company in South Africa to produce feature films (Le Roux and Fourie 1982:2). Although Uys's films were increasingly becoming financial successes, the filmmaker still suffered financially. The Schlesinger organisation was paying him (irrespective of the various positions he held when making a film) a flat rate of £100 a month – less than what a professional sound technician was paid. He endured the treatment as the remittance was at least guaranteed, and because he was addicted to his storytelling. Uys's next film, his second for African Film Productions, was to deal with a traitor during the Anglo Boer War (Mimosa Films n.d.).

The Schlesingers and their board evaluated *Hensop* and regarded it as too controversial (in other words not financially viable). However, the picture was already past the developmental phase when the Schlesingers summarily halted the production. Uys had had enough. "That's when I decided to quit and form my own company," Uys said. He abruptly resigned. The Schlesingers summoned Uys and fiercely berated him for his impertinent resignation, after which Uys stood up and walked away for good. Three months later they tried to entice him back, without success (Mimosa Films n.d.).

## Calling his own shots: Jamie Uys Films

As one of the country's most popular filmmakers, Uys finally launched his own production house. Friends advised that he tie it with his celebrity persona and so the new company was called Jamie Uys Films, and Jok Uys joined his brother's business venture. Irrespective of its creator's box office triumphs, Afrikaner consortiums were not interested in backing the new company, since the movie industry was too unpredictable. The Uys brothers ferociously marketed small bundles of shares and begged for investments. Arguably, those that did give money were doing so more for Uys's cinematic cause and from cultural

convictions than for business reasons. The brothers collected about £14 000 and in 1954 Jamie Uys Films Limited was operational (Anonymous 1973a:5).

Jok Uys starred with his brother in the 1954 comedy *Geld soos bossies* (Money to Burn), which covered the lives of two road workers, also brothers, who are determined to make a fortune and devise a scheme using a chain letter. As usual, Jamie took on various responsibilities, including that of lead actor, scriptwriter, director and producer (Uys 1954). Uys, who later would be disappointed in the film (feeling it was obvious that the picture was a rushed job) made South African history by supplying the film with English subtitles, and it was the first South African-made picture to be sold for overseas distribution (under the name *Money to Burn*). The movie was screened in Britain and New Zealand. Production costs were covered by local ticket sales, and the R15 000 it made abroad was therefore net profit. Jamie Uys Films used the international earnings to buy cutting-edge cinematic equipment and technology (see Anonymous 1973b:10 and Van Deventer 1985:9).

According to the stipulations of the Entertainment Tax Law, Jamie Uys Films would have to pay R6 000 tax on *Geld soos bossies* although it cost roughly R10 000 to produce. The system was in effect targeting local films; imported movies were exempt from the particular tax. Uys the activist made an appointment to see the Prime Minister. He held talks with J.G. Strijdom and relevant state officials. The result was a subsidy scheme for home-grown movies. Uys was at once overjoyed and sceptical. He believed (in part correctly) that such a system would trigger opportunists to suddenly enter the industry with second-rate movies just to cash in on the system. Nonetheless, the government subsidies – thanks to Uys's lobbying – marked a turning-point in the South African film industry. The local film world, in the period after Uys's change of the legal status quo, would experience vigorous growth (see *Mimosa Films* n.d. and 1973).

Along with *Geld soos bossies*, Jamie Uys made a unique (20 minutes long) short film, released in 1954, about South Africa's distinctive multicultural indigenous music. *Jabulani Africa*, featured striking visuals and accompanying music – no dialogue whatsoever. South Africa's Department of Information saw it and took it to the international film industry's most revered trade show at Cannes, France. The international distributors were impressed, and bought the short for about R12 000. *Jabulani Africa* was (measured both in popularity and critical acclaim) successfully screened throughout England, France and Germany. Jamie Uys was starting to attract international attention (see *Mimosa Films* n.d. and 1973). After the success of *Jabulani Africa*, Uys frequently ventured into making short films. He was also regularly commissioned by various state departments to make educational pictures and documentaries on a remarkably diverse number of topics.

He would go on to make almost 20 short films. This creative avenue allowed Uys to experiment technically and develop his creative flexibility (in his *Mimosa Films* period, Uys would utilize his documentary-maker skills in making Africa's most successful pictures). Furthermore, it heightened Uys's already high profile as film maker, attracted critical acclaim, and supplemented the company's (usually strapped) finances. As with commercial features, Uys would excel in this cinematic genre. In 1956, tasked by the Department of Information, Uys made *The Condemned are Happy* (also known as *The Urgent Queue*). It dealt with a family living amidst squalor in a Port Elizabeth slum. The film was dramatic and its impact effective: The picture was hailed by the jury at the Edinburgh Film Festival as 1956's Outstanding Film of the Year (*Mimosa Films* n.d.).

However, Uys in this time not only made films. Amongst the local acting legends that starred in Werner Grünbauer's *Paul Kruger* (1955) was André Huguenet, James Norval, Siegfried Mynhardt, and Jamie Uys (Grünbauer 1955). It was exceptionally rare to see Uys in a film he did not make himself. The famed actor-director detested acting even in his own pictures; let alone someone else's. When Uys started his career, the struggling storyteller could not afford to pay professional actors. Now that he could, Jamie Uys had become such a well known and loved screen personality that commercial logic dictated that he had to act (Van Deventer 1985:9). If he had no choice about acting, then he would rather star in his own films. Jamie

and Jok Uys's next film was a proper remake of Daar doer in die Bosveld – entitled Die Bosvelder (The Bushvelder): Shot in 35mm film, and colour, with decent production facilities, not to mention a proper budget. Tried and tested, South Africans in 1955 once again flocked to see Uys's fumbling-but-loveable Bushveld farmer (Uys 1955).

As the popularity and critical acclaim, at home and abroad, of his works (of whatever kind) increased, aspiring filmmakers jostled for an opportunity to work with and learn from Jamie Uys. In 1959, Uys gave one aspiring filmmaker such an opportunity: Elmo de Witt (who had joined the Uys team as assistant cameraman in 1954) made his debut as director with Uys's Satanskoraal (Satan's Coral). Uys wrote and produced this adventure-drama, which told of illicit coral poaching. Quite a feat for that time was the many underwater scenes, which were shot by cameramen Judex Viljoen and Vincent Cox (De Witt 1959).

After having completed a few documentaries, Uys created one of his most memorable films: Rip van Wyk (Nofal 1960). Based on the folktale of Rip van Winkle, the film tells the story of a farmer who sleeps for a hundred years and wakes to find a vastly different world from the one he fell asleep in: Sasolburg now stands where his tranquil farm had been. The script of this Jamie Uys Films's production was written by Emil Nofal, who also acted as director, while Van Wyk was played by Uys. The production was exceptional in the sense that it was filmed twice – once in Afrikaans and once in English (Cave 1973). Apart from its local success, the film had a good reception in England, where it was shown at London's National Film Theatre. The picture was officially heralded at the subsequent London Film Festival as the Outstanding Film of the Year, and awarded the Commonwealth Film Award by the Royal Society of Arts (see Mimosa Films n.d. and Le Roux and Fourie 1982:80).

Decades later, following the astounding worldwide success of The Gods must be Crazy, Uys considered remaking the picture, having been offered a vast Hollywood budget. Instead, by popular demand from the USA, he had to make a sequel to his so-called Coke bottle movie and passed away before he could resurrect his Rip van Wyk (Mimosa Films n.d.).

With an unprecedented upshot in the number of new production houses (wanting to cash in on the lucrative subsidy system), Uys had to be quick in delivering a new picture (Joubert 1968:3). Uys, who financially could not afford to take long pauses pondering new movie concepts, again decided on a remake: Hans en die Rooinek (also released in English as Sydney and the Boer), which was a remake of his earlier 50/50. It premiered in 1960 (Uys 1960).

Having had some success overseas, Uys was contacted by Warwick Films in England, who wanted Uys to make a feature for them. The Hellions (Uys 1961), starring, amongst others, Richard Todd, Ann Aubrey, Patrick Mynhardt and Jamie Uys, was an action-thriller set in the pioneering days of South Africa. The small town of De Wylt is terrorised by a gang of ruffians until some of the townspeople take a stand. Thought to have the potential to be Uys's overseas breakthrough, the picture, directed by Ken Annkin and co-produced by Jamie Uys Films, almost destroyed the film maker forever: "I suppose I was naïve... They offered me a contract in terms of which they were responsible for above the line expenses (lead actors and producers fees), while I carried the below the line expenses (everything else) – without having any control over what was spent. It looked good to me. I suppose I was flattered, too. So I signed." (Sutton 1983). Warwick Films made a substantial profit while Uys was left with bills in excess of R250 million. Jok Uys left the uncertain financial world of filmmaking and returned to the corporate world (Mimosa Films n.d.). Jamie – despite his sustained box office hits and across-the-spectrum popularity – once again faced financial ruin.

The Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Societies or FAK) organised a national festival, Die Wonder van Afrikaans (The Wonder of Afrikaans), commemorating the birth of Afrikaans. Uys was commissioned to make a film on the language's history. Doodkry is Min (Never say Die) combined weighty history, light-hearted humour, and striking visuals. The open-air

premiere on 29 April 1961 was staged at the Voortrekker Monument, where State President C.R. Swart sat next to Uys. Opera diva, Mimi Coertze, sang *O Boereplaas* to the audience of 50 000 (Breytenbach 1975). The organisation awarded the film maker R20 000 (which he desperately needed), and its Besembos Award for cinematic excellence (Joubert 1968:3).

## Lights, camera and (renewed) action: Jamie Uys Films, 1961-1964

Tommie Meyer joined his board, and together with Uys, convinced Afrikaner-dominated consortiums like Bonuskor and Sanlam to invest. “When I was making money they wouldn’t touch me. Now that I was in trouble they had a change of heart,” the film maker recalled (Mimosa Films 2007). In 1962, Uys’s company released what can be described as a Western, set in the immediate aftermath of the Anglo Boer War: *Voor Sononder* (Before Dusk) starred Vonk de Ridder as the hero and was written and directed by Emil Nofal (Nofal 1962). Uys and Nofal also co-wrote the script and Uys directed *Lord Oom Piet* (also released as *Lord Uncle Piet*). Again lampooning the complexities of South Africa’s Afrikaner/English relationships, the story revolves around two affluent farmers. The Afrikaner is a staunch Nationalist (Uys); the Englishman is a staunch United Party supporter (Bob Courtney). They are quarrelsome, neighbours, and fervent opponents in an upcoming election. The Afrikaner learns – to his shock – that he has inherited a British Lordship. At all costs it must remain a secret but, of course, leaks out and so the merriment begins (Uys 1962). At the time, this was the most expensive film made in South Africa to date, costing R70 000 (Oosthuizen 1979:23). The film was a national phenomenon: No other picture had hitherto sold as many tickets in its first month, and within six weeks, more than 50 000 people had seen the film – more than for American films at the time (Oosthuizen 1979:23). Within six months, half a million South Africans saw the film, which was another South African record. English South Africans, in general, did not care for local pictures and certainly not Afrikaans movies. However, they flocked to see this film in record numbers – another South African record (Joubert 1968:4). Oosthuizen (1979:26) argues that, along with *Ses Soldate*, *Lord Oom Piet* was an important film from a sociological perspective as well,

Hoewel *Lord Oom Piet* en *Ses Soldate* vanuit ‘n suiwer artistieke oogpunt beskou, miskien nie die beste films is wat nog in Suid-Afrika gemaak is nie, het hulle tog ‘n baie belangrike sosiale funksie vervul. Elkeen het op sy eie manier ‘n bydrae gelewer ter bevordering van beter verhoudings tussen Afrikaners en Engelse in Suid-Afrika: die een [*Lord Oom Piet*] deur op die belaglikheid van die tradisionele konflik tussen die twee bevolkingsgroepe te wys, die ander [*Ses Soldate*] deur te illustreer hoe alle bevolkingsgroepe saam kan werk in die verdediging van hulle gemeenskaplike vaderland.

[Although *Lord Oom Piet* and *Six Soldiers* are, from a purely artistic point of view, maybe not the best films ever made ??in South Africa, they served a very important social function. Each in its own way made ??a contribution to promote better relations between the English and Afrikaners in South Africa: the one [*Lord Oom Piet*] by showing the ridiculousness of the traditional conflict between the two population groups, the other [*Ses Soldate*] by illustrating how all population groups can work together in defence of their common homeland.]

Jamie Uys and his production house next ventured into musicals. Jim Reeves, the well-known American country singer, played the lead in 1963’s *Kimberley Jim*. In the pioneering days of *Kimberley*, two shady card players scam miners and get into trouble. Emil Nofal, assisted by Jans Rautenbach, was scriptwriter, and director. Uys oversaw an elaborate show: a budget of R250 000, some 1 000 period-costumes, and 18 original songs (composed by Nico Carstens, Gilbert Gibson and Anton de Waal) (Le Roux and Fourie 1982:83). After starring in his only musical, Reeves died in 1964, giving the film a certain sentimental appeal. The picture became one of the most successful locally made films of that period and also thrived abroad (Anonymous 1967).

While making *The Hellions*, Jamie Uys discovered a young black actor: Ken Gampu (Anonymous 1976), and cast the future celebrity in one of the leads in his next movie. *The Fox has Four Eyes* (a short film Uys made in 1958) served as the basis for *Dingaka* (*Witch Doctor*), and tells the story of the murder of a black man's daughter during a tribal ritual, who subsequently hunts down the killer to take revenge. The father's quest takes him to the big city where the white man's ideas of justice clashes with his. Actors included Gordon Hood (father of Oscar-winner Gavin Hood) and Paul Makgoba. Jans Rautenbach, Ivan Hall, Manie Botha and Elmo de Witt were all involved. Bertha Egnos supplied enthralling traditional music (Uys 1964). Uys wanted the scenery to be green, but it was filmed in winter, and so Uys instructed the extras to paint a koppie green. Once more Hollywood winked: Paramount Pictures and Embassy Pictures managed overseas distribution. The Americans demanded big names, and so Juliet Prowse (then Frank Sinatra's love interest) and Stanley Baker starred in the lead roles (Le Roux and Fourie 1982:78).

At R975 000 – in 1964 – *Dingaka* was Uys's most expensive film (until the *Mimosa* period). It was regarded as one of the best produced films ever to have come from South Africa. Popularly and critically it fared exceptionally, both locally and abroad. In some overseas countries, Uys was thought to be black, and it was hailed as a bold stand against Apartheid. An international production meant international rates, and although the film was a hit, it would take Uys years to make up the tabs; this was another disappointing international success (see Gibson 1967, Joubert 1968:4 and *Mimosa Films* 2007). Following the epic, Uys vowed to never again use international stars, arguing that if his cinematic whole could not stand on its own – irrespective of the cast – then it was not worth making. Uys undertook to (and did successfully) write so-called "star proof" scripts (Anonymous 1980:13). Ironically his next film starred one of the most famous individuals of the twentieth century.

*All the way to Paris* (also known as *After you Comrade*) was the third remake of *50/50* (Uys 1966). Uys, while in New York, got the idea simply by chance, examining two (ideologically opposed) diplomats trying to avoid each other in an eatery: A Russian (Uys) and an American (Bob Courtney) challenge each other to walk from Greece to Paris. They detest each other but come to a mutual understanding through their ensuing adventure. Uys filmed the picture in almost ten European countries, and the logistics were a nightmare: official permission had to be obtained from Italy to Lichtenstein to Greece, etcetera. Filming in France, the Uys team learnt that before the image of General Charles de Gaulle could be reproduced in a film (as this script called for) it had to be approved by Paris. Somehow the French President got hold of the script. The presidential offices contacted Uys: General Charles de Gaulle would star as General Charles de Gaulle. In the movie, the French legend as well as Prime Minister Georges Pompidou star as themselves (see Le Roux and Fourie 1982:84 and *Mimosa Films* 2007). Production costs were recovered from the South African box office while it made R200 000 internationally (*Mimosa Films* n.d.).

Elmo de Witt directed *Debbie* for Jamie Uys Films. Based on the book, *Groen Koring*, by Tryna du Toit, it tells of an unwed teenage girl that falls pregnant. The film caused a ruckus as the censors slammed it with a 2-21 age restriction (De Witt 1965). Uys convinced the public and the authorities that the picture was harmless, and the age restriction was subsequently lessened (see Joubert 1968, Van Zyl 1985:19, and *Mimosa Films* 2007).

## **And cut: Jamie Uys leaves Jamie Uys Films**

While Uys was making or overseeing one after the other hit, a rift was brewing between him and his board. He grew tired of their insistence on productivity, and longed for thorough and intimate processes, which would shift his emphasis from box office successes to high quality. Jans Rautenbach and Emil Nofal had left to make their own brand of films, leaving Uys with more pressure to produce, and in quick succession. The board was unimpressed that he had made *All the Way to Paris* – an expensive third remake of *50-50*. Uys was increasingly upset by the pictures the company was releasing, per implication, under his name – especially *Debbie*. These were just some of the factors that prompted Uys to resign from his own production company (with the entire staff following suit). As he exited in 1966, Uys demanded that the

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company drop his name, and so Kavalier Films was born (Mimosa Films n.d.).

In the next three decades, Jamie Uys and his new partners, Boet Troskie and his Mimosa Films, would create the most successful films to come from South Africa.

Uys's thirty years with dr. Boet Troskie's Mimosa Films will be dealt with in a follow-up article: Sage and Screen.

## That's a wrap: Conclusion

In the period under discussion, Jamie Uys, having struggled to make his first picture, became one of South Africa's most productive and prominently popular filmmakers. In itself his original stories and unique cinematic storytelling contributed to the cultural treasure trove of South Africa. In these troublesome but ground-breaking decades he honed his technical expertise and sharpened his creative abilities. With every Uys movie came an increase in the diversity and quality of local films. After joining Mimosa Films, Uys would draw on these pioneering years (both creatively and technically) to make films of global acclaim and worldwide popularity.

He discovered and/or trained some of the country's best and/or best known actors and filmmakers, including Ken Gampu, Jans Rautenbach, Emil Nofal and Elmo de Witt – a network of professional relationships that is described in detail in Senekal and Stemmet (2014). He staked a claim for Afrikaans speakers in a predominantly English-dominated establishment. Furthermore, Uys's films inadvertently promoted Afrikaans as cinematic language. Having been the first to sell a South African movie (an Afrikaans one at that) abroad, he proved that although the local industry could not compete with Hollywood's budgets, its stories were unique enough to attract international audiences. His own international productions proved that the country's small film industry could facilitate international productions with professional acumen. As documentary maker

Constraints on space prohibited even a thorough list of all his works. he developed the art locally with international success.

The film maker was responsible for Pretoria's subsidising local films and as such was responsible for the acceleration in the development of the local film industry. Together with Jamie Uys Films, he was responsible for drawing mainstream corporations (specifically Afrikaner-dominated consortiums) into the film world.

Jamie Uys's favourite theme in this period was throwing together conflicting cultures (in most cases the Afrikaners/English) in difficult scenarios. Side-by-side in bioscopes across South Africa, he brought together (antagonistic) peoples. They laughed at each other – and at themselves – showcasing the power of film (more specifically, humour) in bridging socio-political disparity. As far as filmmaking was concerned, by 1966 Jamie Uys was the local Sangoma of the silver screen. In the next decades he would become South Africa's Sage of the silver screen.

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