



KINO LORBER

NEPTUNE FROST

Directed by: Saul Williams and Anisia Uzeyman

Written and Composed By: Saul Williams

Executive Produced by: Lin-Manuel Miranda and Stephen Hendel

Starring: Cheryl Isheja, Bertrand Ninteretse "Kaya Free," Eliane Umuhire, Dorcy Rugamba, Rebecca Mucyo, Trésor Niyongabo, Eric Ngangare "1Key," Natacha Muziramakenga, Elvis Ngabo "Bobo," with the special participation of Cécile Kayirebwa



RWANDA / U.S. • 2021 • 105 mins

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SYNOPSIS

Multi-hyphenate, multidisciplinary artist Saul Williams brings his unique dynamism to this Afrofuturist vision, a sci-fi punk musical that's a visually wondrous amalgamation of themes, ideas, and songs that Williams has explored in his work, notably his 2016 album *MartyrLoserKing*. Co-directed with the Rwandan-born artist and cinematographer Anisia Uzeyman, the film takes place in the hilltops of Burundi, where a group of escaped coltan miners form an anti-colonialist computer hacker collective. From their camp in an otherworldly e-waste dump, they attempt a takeover of the authoritarian regime exploiting the region's natural resources – and its people. When an intersex runaway and an escaped coltan miner find each other through cosmic forces, their connection sparks glitches within the greater divine circuitry. Set between states of being – past and present, dream and waking life, colonized and free, male and female, memory and prescience – *Neptune Frost* is an invigorating and empowering direct download to the cerebral cortex and a call to reclaim technology for progressive political ends.

In Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Swahili, French, and English with English Subtitles

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT, SAUL WILLIAMS

I began working on this project in 2013 as a graphic novel and a musical. I wanted to center my writing around the social and global issues flooding my actual and virtual timelines and their countless intersections through a story, character, and project that would allow me to focus all of my observations, insights, rants, and talents under one heading: The MartyrLoserKing project, which has three albums, a graphic novel (01First Second Books), and the film: NEPTUNE FROST.

We put our energy into everything we touch, everything we focus on, and maybe even into the things we ignore, but conscious energy is an investment. It's what some mean when they type "thoughts and prayers." Many artists embed and charge their creations with "thoughts and prayers", an energy you feel when it reaches you. Maybe it unlocks something. Perhaps it's the sincerity of the artist emitting a frequency that couples with our own to heal or release the moment. Maybe the beat or melody offers something unsaid, a sensation we never knew we had or needed touched. Maybe it does nothing, just like typing "thoughts and prayers," but that data holds space. It holds the space for us to be moved beyond convention, to experience and explore new stories, maybe even other forms of storytelling.

NEPTUNE FROST is a story that demystifies the connection, that highlights technology as awareness, that shatters convention and honors the means through which this conversation is taking place.

How many longwinded pitches would it take to convince large-scale investors that a story that takes place in a little-known country, with rebellious and anti-establishment themes, and draws inspiration from many socio-political movements happening today, should be left in the hands of a poet? A poet who isn't interested in making films by committee, who has more critical acclaim than sales, who has never directed a film, who dreams to "spark the brain that will change the world." A poet who thinks the formulaic aesthetic that births reality stars and super-heroes alike takes its cues from a cultural mythos that is more invested in the bottom line than illuminating the rut at the bottom, who thinks the bottom is the top, who sees each high-priced tick in the stock market in association with the African country where the commodity is sourced then marks its ranking on the list of poorest nations, who thinks: "Wait a minute. If it's that rich in resources, then how..." But who knows the answer, who sees how power corrupts and obstructs, who isn't

interested in disaster and poverty porn, who thinks it's a kind of colonial projection when dreams of distant galaxies are embedded with fears of being colonized by aliens, who thinks the internet, like poetry, is undefeated, who thinks the job of the poet is to decode, who calculates algorithmic swagger by those who don't follow, who knows the connection was there before the machine, who has never truly danced in a movie theater and thinks it's a shame, who knows each rhythm tells a story, who has a story to tell...

Writing the music has written the story. My love of music and theater are as separate as they are together, but musical theater in film and on stage has left its mark on me. I went to see Sarafina on Broadway seven times. The mix of raw politics, story-telling and music was everything. Those actors risked being exiled from their country and separated from their families for daring to perform truth to power. I was transfixed. I began writing my first musical for film when I was sixteen and living in Brazil as an exchange student. It was actually a mix-tape musical, 'though I referred to it as a "hipopera". Corny, I know, but I was sixteen. The MartyrLoserKing project has three albums (MartyrLoserKing : Neptune Frost : Unanimous Goldmine). Each album contains songs from and inspired by the musical. The graphic novel is from the perspective of the coltan miner, The film is from the perspective of Neptune. OK, enough already. Maya Angelou once said that anything an artist writes should be written with the urgency of what they would write if someone were holding a gun in their mouth. The state of this country and the world has my mouth propped open enough to swallow whole timelines. We need art that is unafraid to challenge the narrative structure of our programming. Computational propaganda circulates at the speed of colonial diseases through indigenous populations. Music is a time-machine.

This project wouldn't be shit without the music. Music is the door hidden within each door. It's how I met Stephen Hendel, producer of FELA!, with whom we've teamed since the beginning, soon joined by Lin Manuel Miranda amongst others and finally QUIET to make sure this film got made with an entirely Rwandan and Burundian cast and crew.

I'm excited to finally be at the point of sharing more of the story with you.

ABOUT SAUL WILLIAMS (COMPOSER, CO-DIRECTOR)

Saul Williams is an American poet, musician, and actor. He made his acting debut in Marc Levin's *Slam*, which he co-wrote. The film won Sundance's Grand Jury Prize and the Cannes Camera D'Or in 1998. Saul was a series regular on *Girlfriends* and has appeared in films including: *K-Pax*, *Lackawanna Blues*, *New York, I Love You*, *Akilla's Escape* (TIFF 2020) and *Aujourd'hui- TEY* (Alain Gomis) which won 2013's L'Etalon D'Or at FESPACO. Saul was the first African-American to win Best Actor at the festival. *TEY* was also awarded The Prize of the City at Venice. In 2014, Saul made his Broadway debut as the lead in *Holler If Ya Hear Me*, based on the lyrics of Tupac Shakur. Saul has published five books of poetry which have been translated into several languages. As a musician, Saul has released six albums and toured and collaborated with artists including: Kanye West, Nas, Janelle Monae, Nine Inch Nails, Rage Against The Machine, The Roots, Mos Def, Allen Ginsburg, Amiri Baraka, Gil Scott-Heron, TV On The Radio, Blackalicious, and Erykah Badu.

ABOUT ANISIA UZEYMAN (CO-DIRECTOR)

Anisia Uzeyman is an actress, playwright and director. Born in Rwanda, she studied drama at the Superior School of Theater in France. Her directorial debut *Dreamstates* was shot entirely on iPhones and starred Saul Williams, William Nadylam and Beau Sia. The film premiered at the LAFF in 2016. She has also directed numerous music videos. As an actress Anisia has starred in, among others, the award winning film *Aujourd'hui-TEY* where she met Saul Williams, and the feature film *Ayiti Mon Amour* by Guetty Felin which premiered at TIFF 2017. Her first book, a poetic treatment of her original screenplay *Saolomea*, *Saolomea* will be published by Not a Cult this Fall.

ABOUT ELVIS NGABO (NEPTUNE)

Elvis Ngabo is an up and coming Rwandan dancer who recently participated in East Africa's Got Talent

CHERYL ISHEJA (NEPTUNE)

Cheryl Isheja is a singer and performer currently working on her first album.

ABOUT KAYA FREE (ACTOR - MATALUSA):

Kaya Free is a rapper, actor, songwriter, composer. He lives in Canada and works for a positive change in mentality. Agatikers is his brand.

ABOUT ERIC 1KEY (ACTOR - POTOLO THE AVATAR):

Eric Ngangare, known primarily by his stage name, Eric 1Key, is a multilingual hip-hop poet, spoken word artist, blogger, and actor in Kigali, Rwanda. He is also an advocate for increasing access to venues that encourage artistic expression, particularly theaters. In February 2015, Ngangare created his debut album, *Entre 2*, to critical acclaim. 1Key's work emphasizes questions of identity and forgotten history. Born in Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo, he came to Rwanda in 1997; he has also lived in the Republic of Congo and Uganda.

ABOUT CECILE KAYIREBWA (ACTOR - NUN):

The musical traditions of Rwanda provide the foundation for soulful vocalist and composer Cecile

Kayirebwa. A founding member of the Rwanda Song and Dance Circle since 1961, Kayirebwa has continued her musical heritage as a member of Belgium-based African bands Bula Sangome and Arcadia and as a soloist. Kayirebwa's early interests in traditional music were strengthened when she traveled, as a welfare officer, to all regions of Rwanda. Leaving her native country, after her mother went to live with a Frenchman in the remote Belgian village of Lozere, Kayirebwa quickly adapted to her new home. Learning to speak French, she began performing French versions of tunes by Stevie Wonder and Jimmy Cliff in local discotheques. In 1983, she studied traditional music at the Royal Museum of Central Africa in Tervuren, Belgium. The following year, she joined Bula Sangoma. After recording a single, "Amour Sucre," with Arcadia, a bilingual group that she formed with a friend, Kayirebwa recorded her first album, *Music From Rwanda*, with accompaniment by Nzongo Soul. In addition to original songs, the album included Rwandan pop tunes and songs by Jean-Christophe Mutata. Kayirebwa has continued to use her music as a vehicle for attracting attention and raising funds for Hope, the Children of a Thousand Hills, a charity organization that she formed with Christine Coppel.

ABOUT CEDRIC MIZERO (COSTUME DESIGNER):

Cedric Mizero was born and raised in a small village called Gishoma in the Western Province of Rwanda. A self-taught artist, Cedric enjoys observing and exchanging with other artists and artisans to learn from their techniques and hard work to stay inspired and motivated with his own development. He chooses to mix disciplines in his work, experimenting with paint, textures, fabrics and still objects, allowing himself to navigate freely through feelings and emotions to bring to his art a voice for love. His Fashion for All long-term project is part of an artistic commitment to draw people's attention to the often-invisible humans of the rural and poor areas of Rwanda. Fashion for All puts at the center of Cedric's fashion collections the women and men of the village, inviting people to reflect about the value of each individual and their right to access and enjoy fashion regardless of their age, size, social or economic status. Under the Fashion for All umbrella project, fashion collections presented in art installation settings include *Strong Women* (2017) and *Beauty in the Heart* (2018). In 2018 Cedric Mizero was selected to participate in the International Fashion Showcase 2019 as one of the 16 finalists out of 200+ applications from young fashion designers around the world.

CREDITS

NEPTUNE FROST (1h45')

Language : Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Swahili, French, English

NEPTUNE : Cheryl Isheja & Elvis Ngabo "Bobo"

MATALUSA : Bertrand Ninteretse "Kaya Free"

MEMORY: Eliane Umuhire

ELOHEL : Rebecca Muciyo

PSYCHOLOGY : Trésor

Niyongabo INNOCENT : Dorcy

Rugamba

POTOLO the AVATAR : Eric Ngangare "1Key"

Produced by

SWAN FILMS

SOPHERIM

KNITTING FACTORY ENTERTAINMENT

SPKN/WRD

JMK FILMS

QUIET

In Association With

REDWIRE PICTURES

CARTE BLANCHE

Executive Producers

STEPHEN AND

RUTH HENDEL

EKATERINA BAKER

JULIETTE AND WALTER PRYOR

KYLE STROUD

LUKE DANIELS

Additional Executive

Producers

LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA

CHE KOTHARI

LIZLAND FILMS

A TRIBE CALLED RED

MICHAEL ORANGE / MATATU

Associate

Producers

KARA WALKER

LOU RABON

SCROOBIUS PIP

COREY SMYTH

JOHN LEDERER

Co-Producers

SOL GUY

DAVE GUENETTE / PIRATES BLEND

CARTE BLANCHE

REDWIRE PICTURES

MARIA JUDICE

Music by

SAUL WILLIAMS

Director of Photography

ANISIA UZEYMAN

Edited by

ANISHA ACHARYA

Editorial Consultant

DODY DORN ACE

Costume Designer

CEDRIC MIZERO

Hair & Makeup Creative Director

TANYA MELENDEZ

Supervising Sound Editor/Sound Designer

BLAKE LEYH

Re-recording Mixer

SKIP LIEVSAY

NEPTUNE FROST CAST

(In Order Of Appearance)

NEPTUNE — Cheryl Isheja

NEPTUNE — Elvis Ngabo “Bobo”

PRIEST — Diogene Ntarindwa “Atome”

MATALUSA — Bertrand Ninteretse “Kaya Free”

DORO — King Kivumbi

TEKNO — Robert Ninteretse

POTOLO — Eric Ngangare “1Key”

BINYA — Natacha Muziramakenga

DEO — Deogratias Munyakazi

MEMORY — Eliane Umuhire

ELOHEL — Rebecca Uwamahoro

INNOCENT — Dorcy Rugamba

NUN — Cécile Kayirebwa

PSYCHOLOGY — Trésor Niyongabo

XAM — Michael Makembe

NEWS ANCHOR — Ekaterina Baker