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SEEN UP NORTH - Hush 2 making noise in NY

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Consul General Lennox Price (centre) with cast members of Hush 2. (CJ)

BY TONY BEST | SUN, JULY 17, 2011 - 12:00 AM

There was a time when incest, drug dealing, youth gang activity and sexual abuse by fathers were not the subjects people discussed in polite company.

Not so anymore.

With the internet and the proliferation of cable television, nothing is off-limits any more.

"We see and hear these things about New York and other parts of North America, but not about Barbados and the Caribbean and that's why the movie was so interesting; riveting is a better way of putting it," said Renee Harper, a Bajan who is a director in the New York City Department of Education's Human Resources Division.

Harper, mother of a 26-year-old son, had just watched a screening of Hush 2, the movie made in Barbados two years ago by Step By Step Productions in association with Praise Academy of Dance.

Hush 2, as its title indicates, is the second in a trilogy of productions aimed at confronting social issues that plagued the youth but that are often swept under the carpet.

The screening took place at Barbados' Government offices in Manhattan

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with Lennox Price, the Consul-General, as host. Like others in the audience, Harper and Price liked what they saw.

"The quality of the production was good and it showed off the talent we have in Barbados," she added.

Price describe the film's content as "entertaining and informative".

"It's part of our mission to expose Barbadians in the Diaspora to our cultural endeavours back home and this was certainly among the best and it was well received," he added.

Helen Walker, who works in corporate administration at a large Canadian bank in Manhattan, agreed.

"The movie has some distinct message, especially for young people and their parents, who are often in denial about fathers abusing children," said Walker, a Barbadian.

The film, which features Bajan talent in front of and behind the camera, was shown to packed audiences in cinemas, churches and community facilities in Barbados, Jamaica, Antigua and Trinidad and Tobago.

It also attracted rave reviews, especially from teachers, social work professionals and film critics who hailed it for its technical quality and social messages about teenage pregnancy, drug dealing and sexuality.

Interestingly, it tells the story without the use of obscenities. That may explain why Hush 2 has won a UNICEF award and has been hailed by NICFA.

With Hush 3 already completed and having had its premiere showing in Barbados and other Caribbean locations while scoring thousands of hits on Facebook, the Weekes team, Step By Step Productions and Praise Academy of Dance are reaching for a global audience.

"Everything we do has a religious component. That's because we are Christians," insisted Dave Weekes.

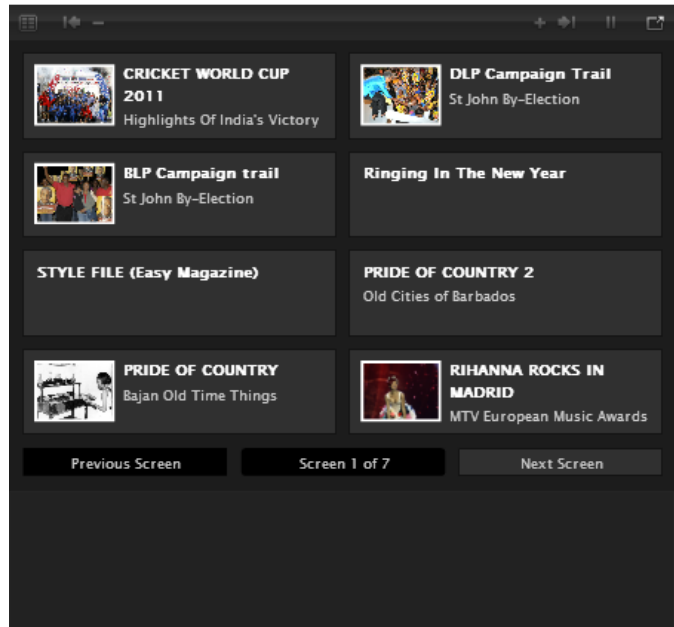
As part of the promotional and marketing effort, they are in the United States having screenings in New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts.

"The response in the US has been enthusiastic, not simply from Barbadians but from Americans and other people who believe the movie is a valuable teaching tool," said Marcia Weekes, artistic director of Praise Academy.

"The comments we have received from church groups, professional social workers, educators and young people on our current tour have been very encouraging."

A person who shares that sentiment is Diarah N'Daw-Spech, general manager of ArtMatarrri Productions, a film distribution company that also organizes the African Diaspora Film Festival in New York.

"The quality of Hush 2 is excellent actually," she said after a screening. "The images, sound, acting and set design are quite good and the reaction of the audience was impressive.



“It is a culturally viable tool and the viewing experience was very good. Although it had some violence, the story of Hush 2 wasn’t adversely affected by it. Indeed, the violence drove the story. The film is quite remarkable when you think that the screenplay, acting and the members of the production crew were all amateurs.”

Produced on a shoe-string budget, the series of films, said Dave Weekes, executive producer, focused on the youth and “has received full support of Barbadian and Caribbean audience” and from the Barbados Investment & Development Corporation.

As for the dance academy, his wife said it was giving its young men an opportunity to channel their energies into productive activity and the reaction of audience had propelled the youths to work even harder.

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