

QUEEN BESS : THE BESSIE COLEMAN STORY

WHEN JAZZ AND RACE RIOTS BURN ACROSS THE NATION IN THE ROARING 20'S,
A FABULOUS FLAPPER RISKS EVERYTHING TO HELP UNITE A COUNTRY DIVIDED BY RACE,
AS THE FIRST FEMALE AFRICAN AMERICAN PILOT

QUEEN BESS



A SOLAX FILM STUDIOS PRODUCTION

QUEEN BESS WRITTEN BY: DAVID G. ZANARDI EXECUTIVE PRODUCER APRIL CHANDLER PRODUCERS:
HARRY BELAFONTE JR. GK RED INDRANI PAL-CHAUDHURI DAVID G. ZANARDI DIRECTED BY: INDRANI PAL-CHAUDHURI

LOGLINE

In the Roaring 1920's, when jazz and race riots burn across America, a fabulous flapper risks all to become the first female African American pilot, helping unite a country divided by race.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Raised on the cotton-fields of segregated Texas, Bessie finds love and inspiration among giants of music, media, finance and activism in Jazz Age 1920's Chicago. When race riots erupt, she risks everything to become the first female African American and Native American pilot and barnstorming sensation, helping unite a country divided by race.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Challenged since childhood, working the cotton-fields and laundry press with her illiterate yet inspiring parents, young Bessie helps raise her siblings amidst the oppression of segregated Texas. Intelligent and defiant, she refuses to conform to society's demands, battling poverty, racism and sexism. She vows to rise above her circumstances and become "somebody."

Hope inspires her escape to Chicago, where African Americans are breaking boundaries, finding unprecedented success. Though admonished by sister-in-law Willie, she ascends to the heights of the passion and sensuality of the jazz clubs along Chicago's Southside. Among the flapper dresses and champagne glasses, Bessie finds friends among giants of music, media, finance and activism: black media titan Robert Abbott, Ida B. Wells anti-lynching advocate, feared banking king Jesse Binga, and exotic dancer Josephine Baker, the last two perhaps becoming her lovers.

Hate, however, catches up with Bessie. In the race riots of the Red Summer of 1919, her neighbors are dragged from their homes and beaten as the city burns. Bessie emerges from the ashes with a dream: to ascend to the sky as the first female black pilot and inspire equality.

Norms no longer stand in her way. Willie objects, but she tries every American flight school. Finding all refuse to teach both blacks and women, she gathers her resources, learns a new language, and moves to France, to learn from World War I ace pilots.

A national hero upon her return, "Queen Bess" performs air shows, and insists her audiences are desegregated – creating for hundreds of thousands, their first positive encounters with families of another race. As flight shows become all the rage, to keep her audiences growing, she learns to be a daredevil, barnstorming to stretch the boundaries of the impossible to show the world that a woman of color can do anything. She is determined to create a school to teach people of color to fly. But when she refuses a film role that perpetuates a disparaging image of African Americans, she loses her backers.

Crashing a plane and in despair, Bessie is ready to give up, but her friends and family help her find the will to walk again.

Rising again, Bessie meets Josephine Baker who inspires her to fly again. Josephine in turn is inspired by Bessie to move to France and become a pilot. Bessie rises to her greatest heights, educating thousands, she buys a troubled airplane to perform new stunts to further her dreams of equality, and returns for the first time to the South.

Fate catches up with her there, when her white mechanic / publicist / possible lover apparently makes a fatal mistake. Bessie is placed on a train and Ida presides over funerals for her across the country, as tens of thousands of mourners pay their respects.

PROPOSED CAST

ZENDAYA as Bessie Coleman

Known mononymously as an actor, female empowerment activist and “It” girl, Zendaya began on The Disney Channel, starring in *Shake It Up*, which premiered with 6.2 million viewers. Her recent films *Spider-Man: Homecoming* and *The Greatest Showman*, were major box office successes.



WINSTON DUKE as Jesse Binga

Trinbagonian-American actor best known for his role as M'Baku in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, starting with *Black Panther*, his film debut, and *Avengers: Infinity War* (both 2018). He will reprise the role in *Avengers 4* (2019).



VIOLA DAVIS as Ida B. Wells

With brilliant performances across a broad variety of roles, Viola is the first black actress to be nominated for 3 Academy Awards, winning one, and the only black person to achieve the Triple Crown of Acting: an Oscar, an Emmy and a Tony.



DAVID OYELOWO as Robert Abbott

David describes himself as “Hellbent on period drama: we need the context so we can build, and then go on to grow.” He starred as Martin Luther King Jr. in *Selma*, winning a Golden Globe and NAACP best actor, starred in *Interstellar*, *The Butler*, *Lincoln*, *Queen of Katwe*, and *A Wrinkle in Time*.



JANELLE MONAE as Josephine Baker

Janelle expanded her musical talents to the world of film in 2016 with her feature debut in Oscar-winning *Moonlight*, then starred in Oscar-nominated *Hidden Figures*. Both films received rave reviews and were massive Box office hits.



Indrani and GK worked with her on *Digital Death* against AIDS in Africa, raised over a million dollars in a week for KCA and won two Gold Lions at Cannes Festival of Creativity.

KEVIN HART as John Coleman

Comedian, actor and TV host, and producer, Kevin is known for *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, *Captain Underpants: The First Epic Movie*, *Ride Along*, *Central Intelligence*, *The Secret Life of Pets*, and *Grudge Match*, and was nominated for a Grammy.



MARY J. BLIGE as Susan Coleman

Grammy award-winning musician Mary has proved her acting skills in *The Help* for which she received a Golden Globe nomination, and *Rock of Ages*. She starred in *Mudbound*, for which she received two Academy Award nominations.



Indrani and GK have worked repeatedly with Mary, creating some of her most successful album art, editorials and videos. Mary wrote the foreword to Indrani's book *ICONS*, about their working together.

KIERSEY CLEMONS as Elois Coleman

Kiersey has quickly become known for the diverse and captivating characters she has brought to life. She starred in *Hearts Beat Loud*, *Dope*, and *Transparent*.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Queen Bess is the epic story of the power of one woman's determination to rise above perceived limitations of race, gender, and poverty, to bring impossible dreams to life and change the world. Rebellious, glamorous and living by her own rules, Bessie Coleman lights her own fire. She risks everything to "amount to something." Her unstoppable spirit and short but unforgettable life as the first female African American pilot and daredevil, help unite a country divided by race.

Queen Bess' success will build on the recent ground-breaking stories of women of color. Amongst similar biopics on real women who changed the world, such as *Hidden Figures* and *Loving*, *Queen Bess* stands out for its characters' fearlessness, outspoken personalities, fabulousness and refusal to fit into society's expectations. Alongside the fictional heroines of *Wonder Woman* and *Black Panther*, *Queen Bess* characters' strength and fabulousness are even more inspiring, as they never lets men rule over them, and they refuse to conform to a male fantasies of womanhood. Biracial, perhaps bisexual, glamorous, free-spirited, complex and flawed, Bessie is a role model worthy of celebration today.

Bessie's story is a true hero's journey: the child of illiterate parents, forced to drop out of college, she finds inspiration and love among kindred spirits achieving unprecedented success in 1920's Chicago. Each character who influences her is one of a kind, extraordinary, with their own flaws, brilliance, and fascinating character arc. Though they may disagree, they come together in unexpected ways to help each other thrive. As Bessie chases her dreams across the world, then crashes and must learn to walk again, she draws strength from her unconventional loves and a same sex relationship with Josephine Baker, being inspired by and inspiring all around her.

Bessie's story resonates deeply with me on many levels. As a biracial, bisexual woman who has spent my life empowering women of color, the LGBTQ community and the disenfranchised, I was inspired by my early experiences. Raised accompanying my mother volunteering with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, and as a teen co-founding Shakti Empowerment Education Foundation (SEEschool.org) for women and girls, I learned to help survivors overcome adversity to uplift others. Thriving in the glamorous fashion and advertising industry, then studying anthropology at Princeton University, my understanding deepened, working with numerous NGOs and the United Nations. I was fortunate to be mentored by legendary artists, from David Bowie and Iman who discovered my work while I was a student and later launched my directing career, to Beyonce whose solo career I helped launch with my album cover and campaigns with L'Oreal and Pepsi, and Mary J. Blige whose career breakthrough I helped launch and who wrote the foreword to my book *ICONS*. Working intensely with diverse actors and musicians, I learned to bring out their best performances.

My approach is as a collaborator, inviting creative discussion and improvisation to add richness and authenticity. My vision is hyper-real, combining an avant-garde fashion-forward aesthetic with realism, real locations, real actions, and natural light where possible. I thrive on flexibility, contrasts, rigorous compositions, aesthetic overload, unconventional angles and approaches. I love bringing together stellar teams with whom I work regularly such as Oscar-nominated DP Garry Waller and visionary producer GK Reid, and to discover new talent, who bring the richness of their life experiences to the screen.

My vision is to mix the raw gritty realism of my short *Girl Epidemic* with the magical realism of my *Legend of Lady White Snake* for a quixotic, danger and hope-filled dream-scape that reflects the characters' inner life: an unforgettable world. To provoke viewers to laugh, cry and to hope, to join our protagonists in finding their own potential and inspire them to achieve their dreams.

DIRECTOR

INDRANI PAL-CHAUDHURI

“Rad feminist director” (*Jezebel*) Indrani is known by a single name “For her iconic imagery and visionary storytelling” (*Huffington Post*) with A-list artists across the film, TV, fashion and music industries. Her films have won 25 awards including two Gold Lions at Cannes Festival of Creativity, Best Picture and Best Director at the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival, and Best Film at the CNN Expose film awards, presented by Quincy Jones, and featured in HBO’s *Bowie The Last 5 Years*. According to *Forbes*, “Indrani’s direction is brilliant and provocative.”



Advocating for women’s empowerment, working with 25 NGOs, as Women’s Entrepreneurship Day Fellow & Speaker at the United Nations, and Co-Host of the Global People’s Summit during the General Assembly at the UN, “Wielding her visionary work like a weapon, Indrani is using her art and resources for social justice and change” (*Soma Magazine*). A teen model-actress, Indrani co-founded and became executive director of a female empowerment school in her hometown in India before graduating from Princeton University. While a student, David Bowie became a mentor, commissioned her first album cover, later launching her directing career with her first music video. Indrani’s work was presented with a major exhibition at the Lincoln Center NY to accompany her book, *ICONS*. Collaborating with artists from Beyonce to Kate Winslet, Keanu Reeves to Mary J. Blige, and brands from L’Oreal to Pepsi, Indrani has been published in the *New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vogue* and *VICE*, and interviewed for *CNN*, *Larry King Live*, *E! News*, *Showbiz Tonight*, *the BBC* and *HBO*.

View her work at: www.indrani.com

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

VAN HAYDEN

Mentored by Spike Lee, Van Hayden began as an intern on Spike’s *Mo’ Better Blues*, becoming an assistant at his 40 Acres & A Mule Filmworks. Mr. Hayden has worked in film and television production for 27 years, primarily as a 1st Assistant Director, on shows including *Dear White People*, *Hustle and Flow*, *Kids*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Whitney*, and *The Assassination of Richard Nixon* starring Sean Penn.

Van Hayden was elected to serve as a Co-Chair of the Directors Guild of America’s African American Prior to his 16 years in production, he was an award-winning journalist and editor at The Associated Press and other professional news outlets. His most recent film has him working in Chicago currently.

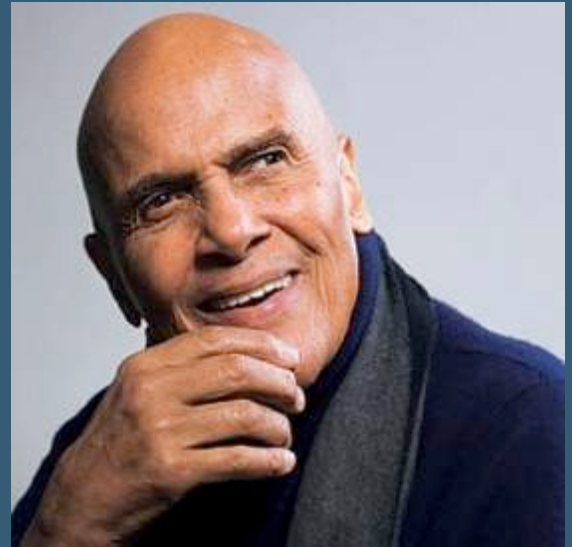


Van Hayden presenting at the DGA Awards

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

HARRY BELAFONTE

Harry Belafonte is an icon of film, music, and social activism. With nearly seven decades of inspiring audiences with his extraordinary work, he has won numerous awards, including three Grammys, an Emmy award, a Tony award, and the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award at the Academy Awards' 6th Annual Governor's Awards. Among his broad-reaching talents, most relevant to this film was his work in the Jazz Age drama *Kansas City* for which he won New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Supporting Actor. His work as a producer includes the musical film *Beat Street* and *Odds Against Tomorrow*, which was nominated for a Golden Globe.



Harry's achievements as a social activist are inspiring, having been one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s confidants. He is currently ambassador for the American Civil Liberties Union and UNICEF.

PRODUCER

GK REID

An award-winning producer, known as a "Renaissance man" (*Soma Magazine*) for his multi-faceted collaborative approach across film, fashion, design, music, media, and women's empowerment, GK produces works that move millions to action. His films have won 25 awards including 2 Gold Lions at Cannes Festival of Creativity, Best Picture at the Los Angeles Independent Film Festival, and Best Film at the CNN Expose 2018 film awards 2018. His work was featured at the Lincoln Center, Center Pompidou Pompidou Paris, The V&A Museum, The Brooklyn Museum, The Rubin Museum of Art, SHOW studio London, The Museum of Contemporary San Diego and The Australian Museum of the Moving Image; and published in *The New York Times*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, *V* and *VICE*. GK is trusted by A-list artists for their most important projects, including Jennifer Lopez, Rihanna, Beyonce, Kanye West, Kim Kardashian, Mary J. Blige, Willow Smith, Channing Tatum, Lady Gaga and David Bowie; artists KAWS, Richard Phillips, Yoshitaka Amano, writer Neil Gaiman; directors Michael Haussman, James Mangold, Floria Sigismondi, David LaChapelle and Indrani.



GK Reid with Jennifer Lopez

Raised between New Mexico and Amritsar India, with a Native American healer mother, GK has worked with 20 nonprofits for social justice and equality. Among these, his *Digital Death* against AIDS in Africa, starring Kim Kardashian, Janelle Monae, Usher, Jaden and Willow Smith, raised over a million dollars in under a week for KCA. He is currently producing "Be the Subject Not the Object" a film for women's empowerment, and he is Co-Founder and Executive Producer of SDG ICONS, a global campaign at the United Nations around the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, including gender equality, to solve the global grand challenges by 2030.

MUSIC COMPOSER & MUSIC PRODUCER

BABYFACE AND CHLOE FLOWER

Babyface is an 11 Grammy Award-winning producer, songwriter, and vocalist known for the breadth of his work in R&B and pop music.

Chloe is a classically trained pianist and cellist who fuses wide ranging influences and sounds into contemporary beats, working with artists such as Beyonce, NAS, Celine Dion, Deepak Chopra, Russell Simmons and Susan Sarandon.

Together this creative duo is adept at crossing genres and styles, with a particular love for 1920's influences.

They fuse the power of music to bring awareness to female empowerment, with extensive work in support of foundations such as Somaly Mam fighting sex trafficking of women and girls. Chloe received the Creative Impact Award for her work against Human Trafficking and music education by Cast LA.



LOCATION MANAGER

BASS HAMPTON

A location manager since 1996, Bass Hampton's work includes *X-Men: First Class*, *Get Out*, and *The Notebook*, and many others since 1996.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

APRIL CHANDLER

An Executive Producer based in Malibu, working with independent filmmakers and established studios on film projects from \$5M to \$100M, April Chandler's business knowledge and communication is unrivaled. April is currently in post-production on *Fountain of Youth*, and in pre-production on *The Mango Girl* and *Fountain of Youth II: The Social Experiment*. April spent a year traveling the world filming *Wonder Hunters* and the *Explorers Grand Slam*, interviewing people like Eve Branson's Foundation in the Atlas Mountains in Morocco to show the best in humanity against the backdrop of amazing natural wonders.



EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

JEREMY BANSTER

French executive producer, writer, and actor who will bring his expertise in filming in France to *Queen Bess*. Most recently he executive produced *The Sleeper by The River* and *The Hand of Fadma* which won Best Director at Tanger Film Festival, and *X Company* (CBS), which won 2 Canadian Screen Awards.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

MELANIE CAPACIA JOHNSON

An award-winning documentary filmmaker with her work on *The USS Indiannapolis: The Legacy*, Melanie is also a co-founder and managing partner at Tiny Horse, a marketing and production company that grows ecosystems of loyal fans. In 2017, Tiny Horse attracted and entertained more than 100 million fans through disruptive storylines.

Prior to building Tiny Horse, Melanie produced several indie films, unscripted, scripted episodic and live-stream broadcasts for MTV, Nickelodeon, VHI, NBC, HBO, FOX, NBC, BBC etc. She has the ability to develop and quickly scale and manage productions of all types of film, TV or digital.



Mel has partnered with Justice for their Live Justice initiatives, which celebrates the unstoppable power of girls. Melanie executive produced the inaugural Live Justice Awards ceremony that honors remarkable young girls and influencers making a difference.

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND VFX

GARRY WALLER

Oscar Nominated cinematographer and visual effects artist with an impressive body of work in Hollywood for nearly twenty-five years. While a student at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, he had a career breakthrough to work at Lucas Films, on *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*. Garry won both an Emmy Award and an MTV Music Video award for Best Cinematography for his work with the Rolling Stones. He has filmed all over the world on theatrical releases. He also has created complex visual effects for many extraordinary films. Directors he has worked with include David Fincher, Olivier Megaton, Joseph Kosinski, Antoine Fuqua, Dustin Nguyen, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Tim Burton. Indrani and GK have enjoyed working harmoniously with Garry on several projects.

VFX SUPERVISOR

BERNICE HOWES

With one Emmy win and two Emmy nominations for best visual effects, Bernice is a proven producer with experience in Production, Post, Visual Effects and VR. An excellent problem solver with big picture overview skills, Bernice has twenty-five years experience of helping global companies meet the demands of large budgets, complicated technology workflows and tight schedules. Bernice has a start-to-finish working knowledge of Production, Post Production and Visual Effects including MPAA and Guild regulations, International deliveries and US filming state incentives. Having led crews ranging from 10-100 persons, Bernice enjoys managing technical projects from the initial contract negotiations to personnel hires, production shoots, post and VFX workflows to the final color grading and delivery. Bernice is experienced in audio post production including Atmos mixing.

WRITER

DAVID ZANARDI

David Zanardi has over fifteen years' experience as a writer, producer and actor. He began his writing career as a journalist, winning multiple Associated Press awards for feature writing, photography and deadline reporting. He has worked with some of the most creative minds at home in their craft, such as *Bernie* director Richard Linklater, Matthew McConaughey and Jack Black. Zanardi has produced films from documentary series *Breaking Barriers: The Lost Legends* which profiles segregation in the 20th century in America, to directing and writing films like *Next to You*, a story about PTSD and returning war veterans. His feature film writing credits include *The Trade*, *The Vessel*, *Heartbreak House*, and *The Valley*. He has also produced numerous commercials and television projects. Throughout, Mr. Zanardi has continually sought stories that reflect who we are as a society, and where we are headed.

PRODUCTION ATTORNEY

ROBERT ABRAMOFF

One of the most well-established producers and film attorneys in Hollywood, responsible for hundreds of films. Starting out in Business Affairs at Warner Bros. TV, he was instrumental in development for prominent filmmakers and productions including *Lone Survivor* starring Mark Wahlberg, *Escape Plan* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, *2 Guns* starring Denzel Washington and Mark Wahlberg, *Broken City* starring Mark Wahlberg and Russell Crowe, *The Voices* starring Ryan Reynolds, *Freelancers* starring Robert De Niro, *Get Low* starring Robert Duvall & Bill Murray, and *Everything Must Go* starring Will Ferrell. Bob executive produced numerous films including the \$20 million *Dino Time*, *Dear Eleanor* starring Jessica Alba and Luke Wilson. He produced *Spy School*, *Good Luck* starring Gregory Hines and Vincent D'Onofrio, *Crossroads* starring Alan Arkin, *High Voltage* starring Antonio Sabato Jr, *Midnight Clear* starring Stephen Baldwin. Under Robert's legal and business guidance, Sunwoo produced animation for Walt Disney & Nickelodeon, including three *Rugrats* feature films and *The Wild Thornberrys*. Bob attended Boston University and USC Law, is licensed by the State Bar of California and is a partner in the law firm Burgee & Abramoff.

FILM FINANCE AND DISTRIBUTION

JOHN CURTIS

Financing and distributing independent film for 30 years, John has financed and produced more than seventy feature films and distributed internationally more than eighty five million dollars worth of film properties since 1984. He has numerous tax credit GAP finance relationships and is ready to get GAP Tax Credit Financing in place. Along with John Eyres he operates BritCan Media Limited, a UK based production, finance and distribution company with offices in London, UK, Toronto and Vancouver, Canada. On the front lines of worldwide distribution, John attends most sales markets consistently since 30 years. Previously he led the Prophecy Entertainment Group, taking it from concept to fully-integrated production and distribution company publicly traded on the VSE, with over \$150 million in production. John then joined Industry Works Picture Studios as its COO. His "hands-on" approach to every aspect of the business ensures the creation of the highest quality product with films. He is currently engaged in a 7 picture film slate in BritCan Media scheduled to be released through Sony Pictures, US and Universal in Canada.

CASTING DIRECTOR

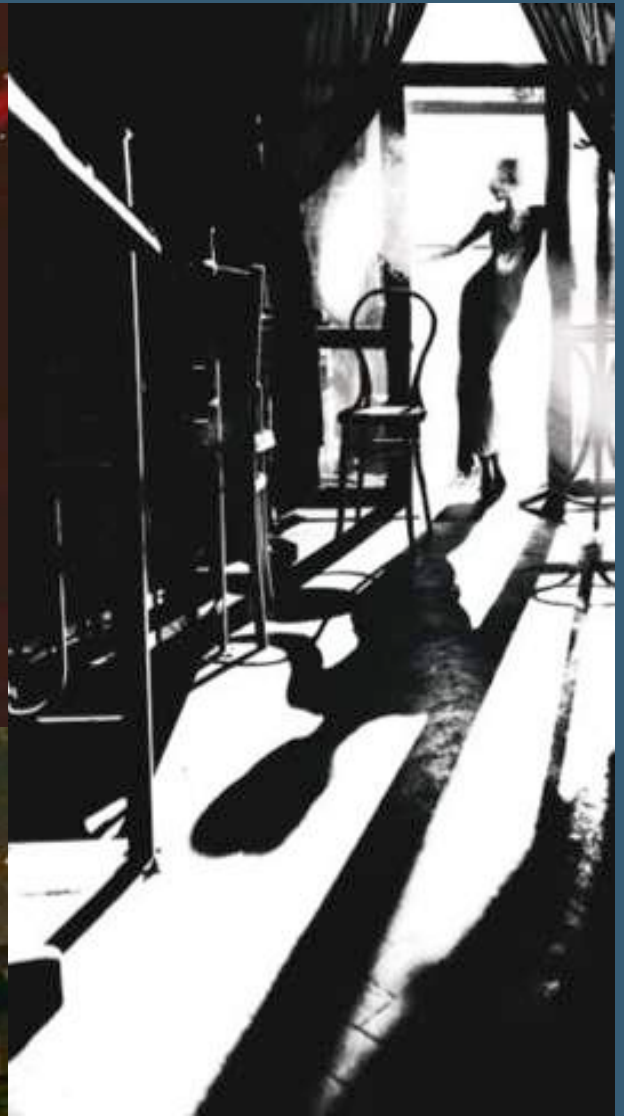
EMILY SCHWEBER

With an established a reputation as one of the top independent casting directors in Los Angeles, Emily's credits include *Second Hand Lions*, Billy Bob Thornton's *Daddy and Them*, and Gregory Nava's award winning series *American Family*. With Emmy Award-winning casting director Mali Finn for over a decade, Emily worked with directors James Cameron, Curtis Hanson, Joel Schumacher, Frank Darabont, Steven Shainberg, Larry and Andy Wachowski, and Brian DePalma, on films such as *L.A. Confidential*, *The Green Mile*, *Mission Impossible* and *Titanic*.

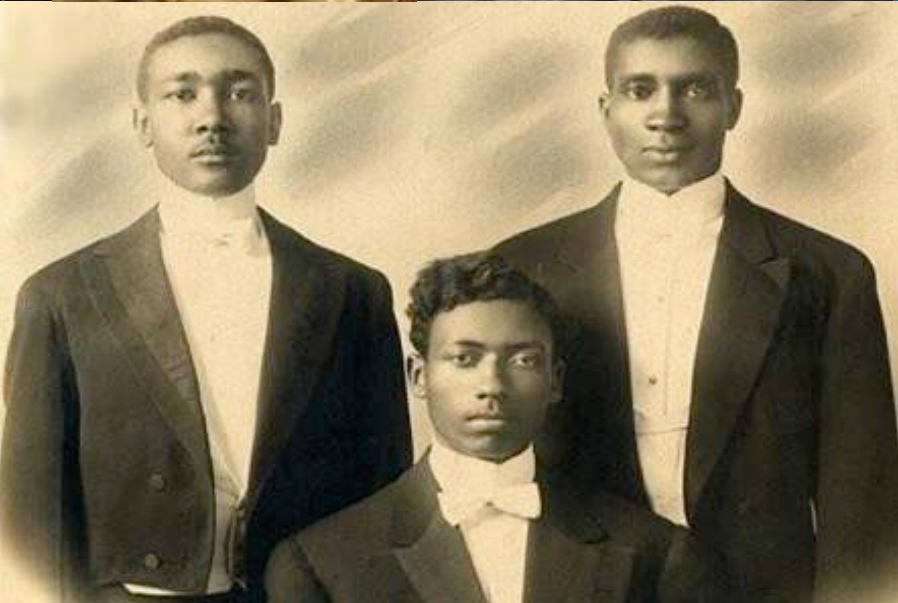
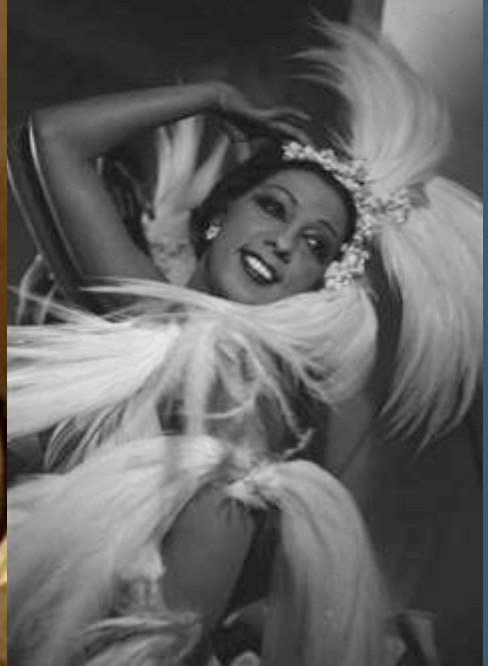
QUEEN BESS MOOD BOARD



MISE EN SCENE



CHARACTER



LIGHTING



VISUALS



VISUALS



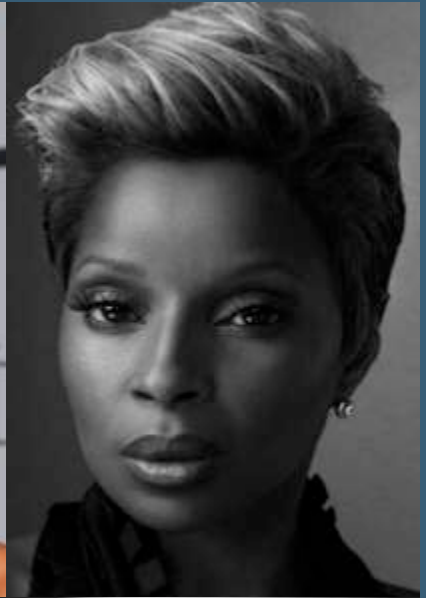
COSTUMES



COSTUMES



CASTING



FILM COMPARABLES



MOONLIGHT (2016)

A young black gay man's journey to manhood and love in 1980's Miami.

Budget: 4 M

Worldwide Gross: 65.5 M

Nominated for 5 Academy Awards,
Won 3 Academy Awards



LOVING (2016)

An interracial couple's legal battles 1950's-60's to the Supreme Court.

Budget: 9 M

Worldwide Gross: 13 M

Nominated for 1 Academy Award



HIDDEN FIGURES (2016)

3 black women scientists in the 1940's at NASA help win the Space Race.

Budget: 25 M

Worldwide Gross: 236 M

Nominated for 2 Academy Awards



GIRLS TRIP (2017)

4 black women lifelong friends push boundaries at Essence New Orleans.

Budget: 19 M

Worldwide Gross: 140 M

Nominated for 2 NAACP Awards



DEAR WHITE PEOPLE (2015)

Black students navigate racial politics at a mostly white college in the 2000's.

Budget: 1 M

Worldwide Gross: 4.4 M

Nominated 2 Sundance Awards,
Won 1 Sundance Award



BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD (2012)

A black girl navigates life in a sinking Bayou on the brink of orphanhood.

Budget: 1.8M

Worldwide Gross: 21.1M

Nominated for 4 Academy Awards



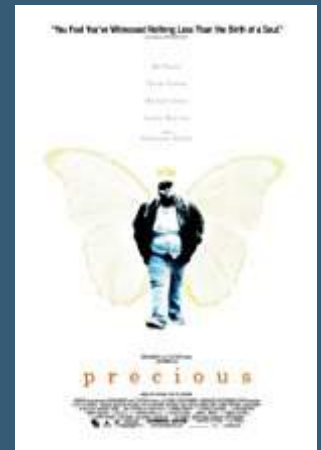
BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM (2002)

An Indian teen, against her parents wishes, joins football team and finds love.

Budget: 6 M

Worldwide Gross: 76.6M

Nominated for 1 Golden Globe and 1 BAFTA Award



PRECIOUS (2009)

An abused black illiterate overweight pregnant teen in 1980's finds a new start.

Budget: 10 M

Worldwide Gross: 63.6M

Nominated for 6 Academy Awards,
Won 2 Academy Awards

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST!

For more information on how to get involved, please contact:

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