

New candid camera film

PICTURE this! A skinny taxi driver, armed with an attitude and a scale, telling overweight aunties that the “new taxi law” requires that passengers be weighed before they catch a ride and the fee varies according to their body mass. And before you know it, one offended passenger swings her hand to *klap* the unsuspecting driver.

This scene plays itself out in the latest slapstick comedy movie *Rainbow Skellums*, which premieres at cinemas across the country on December 23. The movie stars the three *skellums* Louw Venter (from *The Most Amazing Show*), Alexa Strachan and Kevin Ehrenreich, who travel to Johannesburg, Pretoria, Heidelberg, Ventersdorp, Strand and Cape Town pulling pranks on unsuspecting victims and trying to catch them on camera – a format best attributed to Leon Schuster who is still regarded as the highest-grossing filmmaker in the country. The laugh-a-minute movie also includes current South African dilemmas like bribery, corruption and security.

Rainbow Skellums comes after a long dry spell for local candid camera shot movies, a fact that some movie critics attribute to its tried and tested formula that is normally geared to a predominantly Afrikaans audience. And the fact that South Africa has caught the world's attention with successful flicks like *Tsotsi* and *District 9*, raising the expectations of local audiences while creating a measure of uncertainty for slapstick movie producers.

Rainbow Skellums producer Andre Scholtz is, however, positive that the movie will produce the goods come December 23.

“I’m very confident because the pre-screenings we had show that the people are laughing when they are supposed to laugh. I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t believe that it deserves a chance. The great thing about it is that we are not trying to be *District 9* and it’s just pure coincidence that both movies were made in South Africa. *District 9* cost \$30 million (R225m) to produce and my movie cost R3 million (R22.5m), which could only pay for coffee throughout the production of *District 9*,” jokes Scholtz. There are already talks of a sequel.

Shooting for *Rainbow Skellums* began a year ago and Scholtz, besides running on a shoestring budget, says the biggest challenge they faced was not knowing how their victims would react to the pranks. And actors had to think on their feet when the scenes didn’t play out according to the script.

Strachan, a theatre and television actress, was thrown into the deep end when she was cast in her first motion picture and, even worse, a candid camera flick. In one hilarious scene she plays a heavily pregnant woman whose drunk husband (Louw) storms out of a pizza shop after an argument.

Her waters break and the pizza delivery man has to calm her down as her contractions begin. “I gave birth to three children and believe me, it is no easy task to pretend that you are giving birth. It was easier when Louw was in the room, because all the attention was not focused on me,” she explains.

“My gags were so extreme and it is not a matter of how far you can push it but a matter of how you can keep it realistic because people are not stupid, even though they can be gullible. My victims were experienced fathers who had loads of children and had been in the ward when their wives were giving birth and so they started timing contractions. I don’t like that gap because

Watch out for laugh-a-minute *Rainbow Skellums*, writes **Lindile Sifile**



PLEASED TO MEET YOU: Actor Kevin Ehrenreich climbs out of a spaceship in a scene from *Rainbow Skellums*.

Pictures: SUPPLIED

it made me feel like an a*****e because I played on people’s empathy and I felt like crap.”

The phrase “rolling with the punches” would certainly mean something more tangible for Ehrenreich who, in a few scenes, was physically abused by his victims. On one occasion he received a smack from a vehicle owner when – while pretending to be a petrol attendant – he filled the car with diesel instead of unleaded petrol. In another scene he plays an alien whose spaceship lands in the middle of an open field where he faces being beaten up by angry people who’ve gathered to watch this unusual spectacle.

“The police captain gave me a bulletproof vest to wear and I said that is too heavy, and how can I get off the spaceship wearing this thing? It weighed twice my weight and the big challenge was that the spaceship cost us R500 000 to build, and if I fell coming out of it (because of the heavy bulletproof vest), the scene would have been a waste. I ... put away the vest and said a little prayer because I could have been attacked on the spot, and one lady in the crowd nearly stabbed me,” Ehrenreich says.

Although he may sound like an action hero straight out of a dangerous scene from a Hollywood blockbuster, Ehrenreich says South Africans can learn a thing or two from the movie.

“We are a funny people that take themselves too seriously. This movie is like a mirror that shows us how funny, and sometimes prejudiced, we can be.”

VELD ACTION: Actor Kevin Ehrenreich and producer Andre Scholtz during the spaceship scene.



ALIEN LANDING: The R500 000 alien spaceship in the middle of an open field.

