

A SHORT  
FILM

# FREESTATE

PORTABLE SKY IN ASSOCIATION WITH DAVES GUZHA PRESENTS



## FREESTATE

DIRECTED BY MARTHA FERGUSON

STARRING

STEPHEN CHIGORIMBO MARTHA FERGUSON KEVIN HANSEN AND JOHN DENNISON

[WWW.FREESTATETHEFILM.COM](http://WWW.FREESTATETHEFILM.COM)

## PRESS KIT

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**Portable Sky Productions**

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[www.freestatethefilm.com](http://www.freestatethefilm.com)

Canada, Zimbabwe, France 2013

HD, Colour

English, 11 minutes

## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

DIRECTOR	Martha Ferguson
SCREENPLAY ADAPTATION	Melissa Webster, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Martha Ferguson
PRODUCER	Daves Guzha
PRODUCTION COMPANY	PortableSky Productions
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	Martha Ferguson
TECHNICAL INFORMATION	HD, Scope 2:35
SOUND	5.1 Mix
RUNNING TIME	11 minutes
COUNTRY OF PRODUCTION	Zimbabwe, Canada, France
DATE OF COMPLETION	April 2013
CONTACT	Portableskyprod@gmail.com

## LOGLINE

A woman and her driver, another man, a state of mind.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

**FREESTATE** is a forbidden-love story; a short film about the complicated relationships between the people in today's Southern Africa. The film captures two days in the life of a single, foreign woman, Michelle, and her driver, John. Michelle (30's) and John (50's), who is married, share a unique closeness, until she breaks their bond. When their car breaks down, a shocking encounter with a helpful family forces them to address the accepted rules of behavior on their property.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

**FREESTATE** is a contemporary love story set in Zimbabwe. The 11-minute film recounts a special relationship between a single woman and her married Driver, highlighting the cultural hurdles that surround them. Michelle, a successful TV producer, has been working as an expat in the country for seven years. Single and in her late 30's, she falls in love with her driver, John, an older, married man who loves the romance of the old Westerns, with cowboys saving the good people from the 'baddies.'

When Michelle crosses the line with John, she disrupts the unspoken arrangement of what is appropriate. When their car subsequently breaks down and a farmer offers his assistance and lodging, the situation is further complicated by a shattering encounter that Michelle has with the farmer's son, Jaap. An encounter that John cannot save her from; John cannot be the cowboy in the same way that Jaap can and Michelle is left with a difficult choice in order to keep the peace.

Together, John and Michelle have to move on navigating the social rules that ultimately unite them, giving them a clearer understanding of what the nature of their relationship has to be. **FREESTATE** presents resilient people caught in the changing times of today.

## DIRECTORS NOTES

### MARTHA FERGUSON

While I was at university, I was impacted by the release of the Canadian Film **A Winter Tan**, directed by the late Jackie Burroughs. She adapted a novel, **Given Sorrow Words** by Maryse Holder, and travelled to Mexico to shoot a film about a story that spoke to her. What she did was inspiring and stayed with me over the years.

While I was working in Harare, Zimbabwe 2010-2012, I was struck by the complex relationships among the people there and how different it was from my life in culturally pluralistic Toronto, Canada. Then I read Melissa's short story **Space To Fall** about a single, white, woman in 21st Century Africa and her unique relationship with her driver in Free State, South Africa. A quiet love story about a man and a woman set against the tension of the beautiful and unpredictable African landscape. I connected to the story for many reasons; how, as a foreigner, the female character processed this post-Apartheid South African world, and how she, as a single, white, modern, professional woman from the first world navigates the country's codes. As well, I was interested in how the story captured the transitioning times there and how this affects the peoples behaviour. In certain regions, Zimbabwe reminded me of 1950s America with its white bosses and poor black help. Even though the film takes place in the present, I wanted to capture this time warp visually with the look of a 1950s film. The film is the woman's story but, I envisioned an ensemble piece as every character is struggling to establish an identity in an uncertain environment.

As a filmmaker, I was at once fascinated by the feeling of lawlessness of Africa, the wild, the freedom it affords, and the drastic affects this has on its people. This environment influences the decisions and fantasies of the characters. This is, for example, expressed in the Driver's love of westerns and American cowboys. Even though he wants to be the cowboy, perhaps it evolves that Jaap, the farmers son who gets to be the real renegade.

This a world where everyone is tempted to break the rules and where a 'date rape' can take place uninterrupted. Here, the African Code is neither North American or European: Why doesn't John save Michelle from Jaap? He might have in a Western, but here in Africa, their love silences them.

If there are politics in the film, they are in the silences, when words are avoided because everything has already been said. I have always been drawn to stories that explore what is not said aloud, themes that surround the struggles and strangeness of being human. The work of British playwright Harold Pinter has been an influence. Tsitsi, Melissa and I worked to fill the screenplay with the loudness of these unsaid moments that fill up the day to day. **FREESTATE** combines these two components, forcing the question of what it means to be "free" in Africa.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### MARTHA FERGUSON

Director, Producer,  
Screenplay Adaptation,  
Actor: *Michelle*



Martha is a Canadian director, writer, producer and actor. She began her career at the age of eight, appearing in commercials as well as many Canadian TV classics. Over the years she has worked extensively in Film and TV appearing as an actor with Canadian talents such as Jeremy Podeswa (*Touch*, *Queer As Folk*), Ingrid Veninger (*Uriah*), Jim Allodi (*The Uncles*), Nick de Pencier (*It's not you, its me*), Peter Wellington (*Shakespeareville*), and Don McKellar (*Last Night*).

In 2000 Martha began making independent films with Thirdthing productions. Short films she has written and directed include **The Wet Season**, starring Ellen Page, Maury Chaykin and Jackie Burroughs, official selection of The Vancouver Film Festival, LA Short Film Festival, and the Montreal World Film Festival; **The Crying Booth**, which screens regularly on the Bravo! Network; **Elbow Shots** for the Splice This! Festival, Toronto; and, **Love School**.

In 2009, Martha started dividing her time between Europe and Canada and formed Portable Sky Productions focusing on Canadian international co-productions. In 2010, she worked in Harare, Zimbabwe for two years. While there, she co-produced the performance part of the film **HIFA: The Harare International Festival of the Arts**, for the British Council in Zimbabwe. She produced and performed in the play **The Fever**, by Wallace Shawn; served on the Jury for the **International Images Film Festival of Zimbabwe (IIFF)**; and, wrote the feature film **The Platform**. Her two years in Harare culminated in the making of **FREESTATE**, which Martha directed, adapted, acts in, and executive produced.

Upcoming feature film projects include **The Platform** and **The Love School Project** which are in development. Martha currently splits her time between Toronto and Paris.

### DAVES GUZHA

Producer

Daves Guzha is a prominent Zimbabwean arts practitioner with a distinguished 27 year long career on both stage and screen as a Producer, Director and Actor. He is responsible for Creating Zimbabwe's first post independent commercial and professional theatre space, Theatre in the Park, and implementing the first co-production deal between the countries only TV station ZTV and his independent film production house, Creative Native. This resulted in the countries first sitcom, "Waiters." In the face of constant censorship and unwelcome attention from the state, Daves continues to generate work that promotes an open exchange of ideas and free flow of information vital to the nation. He is currently developing Smith's and Mugabe's definitive film, as he questions the influence of these two leaders on generations which span 5 centuries. He is currently setting up an expansive film, video and music distribution chain in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi.

## BIOGRAPHIES cont.

### ALEX DISENHOF

Cinematographer

Alex recently shot the Academy Award-winning Director Michel Gondry's film, **The We and the I**, which premiered at Cannes 2012 and Played at the Toronto International Film Festival, it was the New York Times Pick of The Week. He recently finished shooting **Fishing Without Nets**, A Somali Pirate Feature film shot on location in Kenya, directed by Cutter Hodierne. Based on the 2012 Sundance winning short film of the same name. Alex was the cinematographer for the award winning short film **Funeral Kings**, directed by the McManus brothers 2012.

### MELISSA WEBSTER

Writer

Melissa Webster was born in Krugersdorp, South Africa and raised in the Eastern Cape. She studied English and Psychology at the University of Cape Town, and holds a Master of Arts in writing from Johns Hopkins University.

She has lived in Africa, Asia and North America, and has been a chicken farmer, book-seller, clerk, editor, bar-maid and factory worker, among other things.

She currently lives with her husband and three children in Harare, Zimbabwe, and is a mother and freelance writer.

### WRITER NOTES

on the short story,  
**Space To Fall**

"It was written upon my return to Southern Africa—after many years abroad in response to some of the emotions stirred up by coming home. Or one could describe it as a muted moment in a post-Apartheid South Africa, in which questions raised by the problematic overlap of love and power, almost shift into view."

### TSITSI DANGAREMBGA

Screenplay Adaptation  
Story Editor

Born in Mutoko, Zimbabwe. Tsitsi is an internationally acclaimed award winning novelist and filmmaker. Dangarembga wrote her first novel **Nervous Conditions** at the age of twenty-five. It immediately became a seminal piece of literature and was hailed by Doris Lessing as one of the most important novels of the twentieth century. She published her second novel **The Book of Not** in 2006 and its successor **Chronicle of an Indomitable Daughter** is to be published in 2013. She studied medicine at Cambridge and obtained her Masters in Filmmaking from the German Film and Television Academy Berlin. She lives in Harare where she founded the production house Nyerai Films and the film festival, The International Images Film Festival for Women (IIFF). She also founded the Institute of Creative Arts for Progress in Africa where she works as director.

## BIOGRAPHIES cont.

### RICHARD FEREN

Composer  
Toronto

Richard has been creating soundscapes and music for Canadian theatre, dance and film since 1992. He has won seven Dora Mavor Moore Awards, the 1999 Pauline McGibbon Award and short listed for the 2012 Siminovitch Prize in Canada. Over the years he has worked with several prominent theatre figures including Daniel MacIvor, Daniel Brooks, Ann-Marie Macdonald, Albert Schultz, to name a few; and companies across Canada, Canadian Stage, Souleppper, Neptune Theatre and the Shaw Festival. His work has been heard around the world, in cities like Budapest, Sydney Australia, Tel Aviv, Dublin, New York, Manchester, Amsterdam, Tehran, and Prague. He has also composed music scores for Films by Robert Lepage, Daniel MacIvor, and others.

### VERONIQUE BRUQUE

Editor  
Paris

Véronique Bruque is a well known editor in Paris, France. She trained at the INSAS, in Brussels, Belgium. She edits features, documentaries, televised films and shorts, Véronique edited **Another Silence, Clara et Moi, and Saigon**. For more information about her work: <http://www.veroniquebruque.com/>.

### TOM MCMURTRY

Editor  
Toronto

Tom McMurtry has a long history in both editing and sound. He has worked on such shorts as **Helpline, Altarcations and Mothers, Fathers and Other Strangers** in his capacity as a sound editor. His editing experience includes features and shorts, such as **The Air Up There, Mustard Bath, Four Sisters, and 7 Diamonds**. Tom is based in Toronto, Canada.

## KEY ACTORS

### STEPHEN CHIGORIMBO

John, the Driver

Stephen is a well known Zimbabwean actor and filmmaker. He became a household name playing as John Huni, in the soap opera Studio 263. He began acting in high school outside of Harare, Zimbabwe. He later played Othello and Macbeth in Shakespeares plays of the same name. He has been working in the film industry for over thirty years. He was the co-first assistant director and the African acting coach on Richard Attenborough's, **Cry Freedom**, as well as, on the TV movie, Mandela. He produced his first feature film, **Pfuma Yedu** in Zimbabwe. Projects he has worked on in Africa as a producer and/or actor include; **King Solomon's Mines, Month of The Doctors, Tuzedo Warrior** and **Jake Speed**. He is a founding member of the South African film festival and continues to work in film across Africa, Europe and the United States.

### KEVIN HANSSSEN

Jaap

Kevin is well known Zimbabwe Actor. He is also a director, writer and teacher. For over 25 years he has been acting in film/TV, and directing and creating theatre in Zimbabwe. He is a founding member of Zimbabwe's most successful touring theatre Company: Over the Edge, winning multiple 'Spirit of the Fringe' awards at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Their award winning play **Born African** has been performed some 200 times on three continents. His recently published book, Jump Theatre, is taught in Universities in Southern Africa. As well as acting, he runs Jump Productions, which produces shows relevant to the performing arts industry in Southern Africa and beyond. He recently starred in **Dicken's, The Master Story Teller**, as Charles Dickens, at the Rep's theatre in Harare, Zimbabwe.





## THE MAKING OF FREESTATE IN ZIMBABWE

**FREESTATE** began towards the end of my two year stay in Zimbabwe. As a foreigner, the authenticity of Africa shook me: the mysterious balancing rocks of Domboshava, the devastating beauty of the unpredictable landscape, and the mixture of joy and the deprivation that sits in the people. I knew that film was the only medium that could capture this intense sensual experience of Zim. and its impact on human behaviour. I joined a writing group led by South African writer Melissa Webster. There I began work on a screenplay, **The Platform**, I was writing at the time with Tsitsi Dangarembga. It was there that I first read Melissa's short story, **Space To Fall**. The nuanced predicament of the woman in the story spoke to me, I instantly saw it as a movie. That night I serendipitously met a Zimbabwean film/theatre producer, Daves Guzha. When I told him about the short story, he agreed to help me produce it and we set the shoot date. Melissa, Tsitsi and I began the work of adapting the short story and Tsitsi agreed to be my outside eye on set while I was acting. I found Alex Disenhof, our Cinematographer, through my friend Ingrid Veninger in Toronto. We flew him down from Cannes where they were screening Michel Gondry's film, **The We and I**, which he had shot. We put together a brilliant cast and everything fell into place.

While, shooting a film in Zimbabwe can be difficult, the Zimbabwean theatre, film and TV industry remains productive and filled with incredible talent both in front of and behind the camera. However, the political climate can be distrusting of creative endeavors involving cameras, especially a film that tells a racially oriented story involving farmers. As well, during the hyper-inflation years, many people and experts in the film industry left for South Africa taking much of the existing camera equipment and gear with them. Cameras are hard to find, the dolly we used was 23 years old; our lighting gels were ten years old; and communication (phones, internet, texting) and transportation in the country is still problematic. Nevertheless, we brought it together with a skilled crew and the shoot was a huge success and I look forward to making more films there.

I consider it an a privilege to have been able to make this film in Zimbabwe and get to work with the great talent there. I could not have made the film without their support.



# FREESTATE

## CREDITS

### KEY CREW

DIRECTOR Martha Ferguson  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Martha Ferguson  
PRODUCER Daves Guzha  
CINEMATOGRAPHER Alex Disenhof  
EDITOR Veronique Bruque, Tom McMurtry  
SCREENPLAY ADAPTATION Melissa Webster, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Martha Ferguson  
STORY EDITOR Tsitsi Dangarembga  
MUSIC COMPOSED BY Richard Feren  
SOUND Matthieu Choux  
PRODUCTION DESIGNERS Melissa Webster, Kate Rudder, Treena Maguire, Jamie McLaren

### CAST

JOHN Stephen Chigorimbo  
MICHELLE Martha Ferguson  
JAAP Kevin Hanssen  
ROY John Dennison  
BETTY Sue McLaren  
COWBOY Goodson Sarata  
MAID Constance Mataongwana  
FARM WORKERS Thomas Chilbada  
Solomon Bandura

## CREDITS

### CREW

PRODUCTION MANAGER	Jamie McLaren
CASTING	Blessing Hungwe, Jamie McLaren
ACTING CONSULTANT	Tsitsi Dangarembga
1st AD	Blessing Hungwe
CAMERA ASSISTANT	O'Brian Mudiwenyama
CONTINUITY	Yeukai Ndarimani
LIGHTING	Farai Chimombe
GRIP	Gregory Shambare
SOUND RECORDIST	Austin Phiri
KEY MAKE-UP, HAIR, COSTUMES	Kelli Barker
CATERING	Leopard Rock Hotel
TRANSPORT	Melissa Webster, Kate Rudder
STILL PHOTOGRAPHY	Kate Rudder, Martha Ferguson
CAMERA EQUIPMENT / GEAR	Decent Arthouse, Bits and Pieces
POST PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR	Martha Ferguson
POST PRODUCTION (NOE)	Noe @ Abel Factory
FINAL SOUND MIX	Steve Ghouti @ Yellow Cab Studios
SOUND CONSULTANT	Rob Bertola
COLOUR CORRECTION	Jean Ousmane
CREDIT DESIGN	Ronald Facht
POSTER DESIGN	Mark Veldhoven @ Pixel Ink Retouching