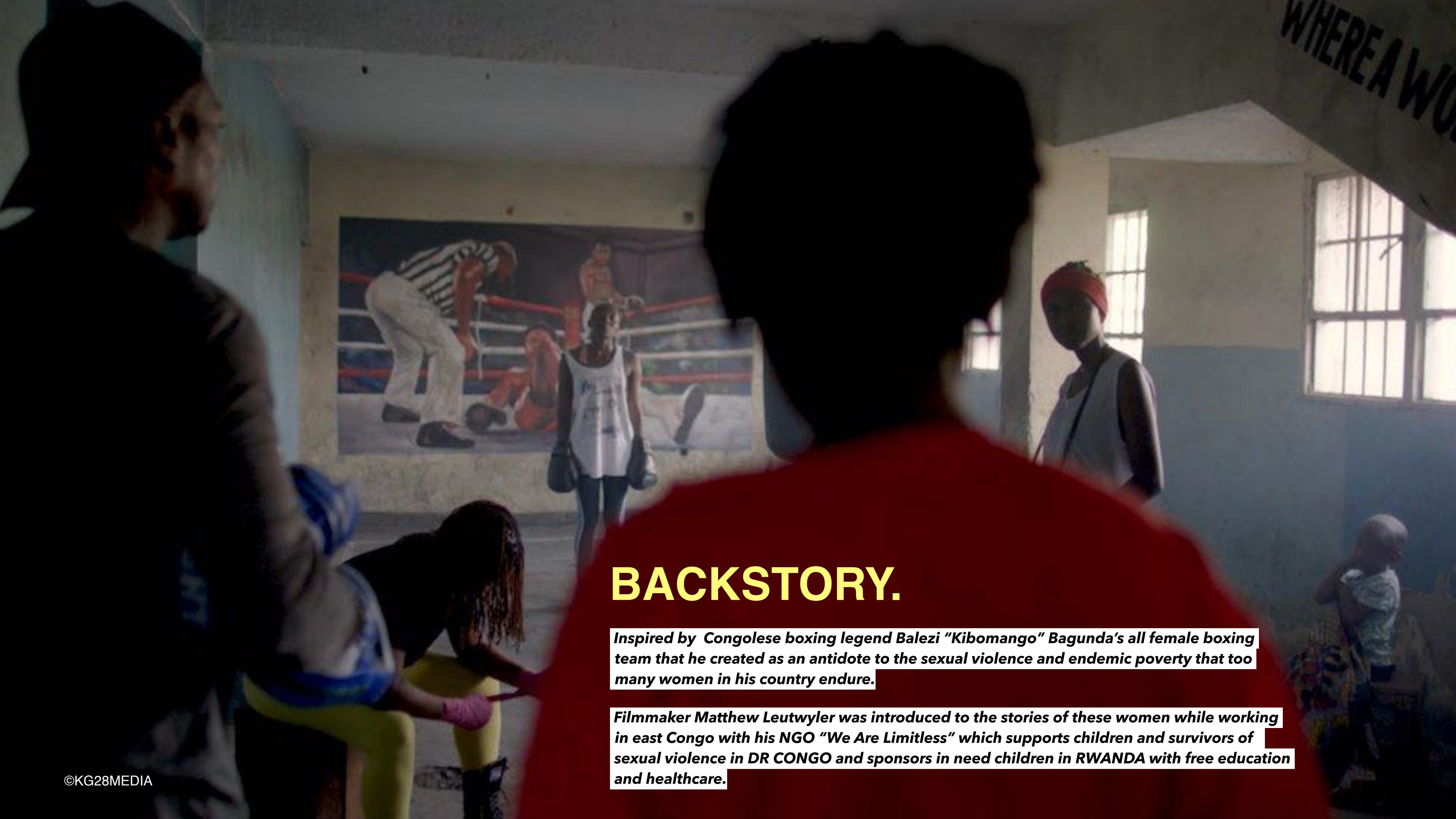




FIGHT LIKE A GIRL

A young Congolese woman forced to work in an illegal mineral mine, escapes her captors and finds a new life for herself after joining a renowned all-women boxing club in the border city of Goma.





BACKSTORY.

Inspired by Congolese boxing legend Balezi "Kibomango" Bagunda's all female boxing team that he created as an antidote to the sexual violence and endemic poverty that too many women in his country endure.

Filmmaker Matthew Leutwyler was introduced to the stories of these women while working in east Congo with his NGO "We Are Limitless" which supports children and survivors of sexual violence in DR CONGO and sponsors in need children in RWANDA with free education and healthcare.



SYNOPSIS.

Safi, 19, has been kidnapped from her village by a rebel group and forced to work in an illegal mineral mine. But after two years, she makes a harrowing escape from her captors, and treks for six days through the east Congolese jungle, to the border city of Goma in search of a new life.



Safi finds herself living on the unfriendly streets of Goma selling sambaza for a local fisherman. One night after deftly fending off an attacker with a ferocious punch, she catches the eye of the legendary boxing champ who takes her under his wing and brings her into his club where he is teaching a ragtag group of female boxers.



Seeing fighting as a way to get out of the poverty and violence that grips her country, she signs up for the team... but soon discovers that there is more to boxing than being able to throw a powerful punch...

and maybe there is more to life than simply surviving.



THE STORY.

SAFI 19, is forced by a rebel group to work in an illegal mineral mine digging up cobalt in the jungles of East Congo. After suffering at the hands of her captors for two years, she decides to make her escape under the cover of night and trek for days through the dense bush, before finally reaching the "safety" of the border city of Goma. But living on the chaotic city streets has its own perils. She finds work selling sardines for a local fisherman but that only provides her with about 15 cents a day. One night, she's attacked by a man but deftly defends herself with a surprisingly ferocious punch that knocks the man out. The story of a street girl with a powerful punch spreads and catches the ear of legendary Congolese boxer BALEZI BAGUNDA ("KIBOMANGO"), who brings her to his makeshift gym where he is teaching boxing to a small group of women.

There, she meets the rest of the team who all have their own struggles they are working to overcome. 19 year-old LEILA, trying to make a life for her and her two year-old son who was born after she was raped by soldiers that raided her village. MARCELLA, 30, the oldest of the group, whose humble goal is simply to get a steady job as a security guard at a local bank - something unheard-of for a woman in Congo. AISHA, 20, the team's best fighter, she lives with her parents and is training with a hope of landing a spot to compete in the National Championships in Kinshasa with the winner going to Germany for a shot at becoming a World Champion.

The women of the team navigate their way through the patriarchal society of Congo that offers little respect for women engaging in "men's" sports. Leila balances motherhood with her boxing life. Marcella's steadfast determination pushes her to continually apply for the bank security job ... and continually get rejected. Safi struggles under the tutelage of Bagunda. Her distrusting stubbornness has her leaning heavily on her strong punch and resisting his precise technical training.

Competition brews between Safi and Aisha but in their inevitable sparring session, it's obvious that even with her powerful punch, she is no match for the technical mastery of Aisha. The National Championships near with Aisha set to represent the team. But a celebratory night out takes a turn when the ladies confront two teenage rebels that are trying to recruit Leila's young son. Aisha's wrist is fractured in the fight, ending her chance at participating in the Championships.

Three weeks from the Tournament, the women convince Kibomango to give the slot to Safi and Aisha becomes a reluctant coach who has to help her learn to combine her ferocious punch with Aisha's footwork and superior boxing IQ...

But will it be enough for an epic upset against Aisha's nemesis and current light weight champ, MIKI NDAYA, in the Congolese National Boxing Championships?

EXT. LAKE KIVU - SMALL PORT - SUNSET

Safi and Leila sit on the edge of the shore,
still sweaty from their run, taking in the quiet.

LEILA

So where you from?

SAFI

Nowhere.

Leila understands the answer. Doesn't press. THEN -

SAFI

Beni originally. My family was killed when
the FDLR came through one day. They took me. Not sure
where I've been living the past few years.

She points towards the lush mountains surrounding the
volcano that looms over the city.

SAFI

Up there somewhere. I... I don't know where.
I don't really want to know - where.

Leila nods. Two sisters bound by dark pasts.

LEILA

But now you are here. With us.



EXT. AIRPORT GRAVEYARD - DAY

Chickens peck at grass sprouting through cracked asphalt under an abandoned airplane fuselage. Nyiragongo looms over the old airplane graveyard.

CEDRIQUE

When I was a boy I used to come here a lot.
I'd pretend I was a pilot shooting down
French warplanes (Laughs).

They share a look then his gaze drifts to her butterfly bandage and swollen jaw.

CEDRIQUE

You like fighting?

She nods.

SAFI

But you don't think women should fight?

CEDRIQUE

I don't think *anyone* should fight.
This country, this continent, everyone here
has been fighting for too long.

She gives him a gentle smile. Understood.



AMA QAMATA

SAFI

23 year old Ama Qamata is one of Africa's fastest growing stars. In June she completed production as the lead in the third season of Netflix Africa's most watched series, "Blood & Water." She was also recently named South Africa brand ambassador for ADIDAS. The production team scoured much of Sub-Saharan Africa searching for the right actress to play Safi, and upon seeing Ama's audition and hearing her ideas for the character, instantly knew they had found the young woman to bring her to life. Ama's commitment to empowering the lives of girls in Africa and being a leader for change also fit perfectly into the themes of FIGHT LIKE A GIRL.

HAKEEM KAE-KAZIM

BALEZI BAGUNDA ("KIBOMANGO")

After working alongside Brian Cox and Ian McKellen for The Royal National Theatre, Kae-Kazim made a successful transition into British television, appearing in The Bill, Trial & Retribution and multiple episodes of popular BBC series Grange Hill. He then moved to South Africa, where he became well known for film and television roles.

He went on to appear in SLIPSTREAM alongside Sean Astin and THE FRONT LINE before starring in the hugely successful PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END as Captain Jocard. He followed it with a role in the blockbuster, X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE.

Kae-Kazim appeared in various hit television shows including Lost, Law & Order: Special Victims Unit and Criminal Minds.[4] He also starred as Colonel Iké Dubaku in season 7 of the Fox television series 24 and the television movie tie-in 24: Redemption. His longest running role has been in the Michael Bay produced Starz series, Black Sails. Kae-Kazim is currently starring in the BBC fantasy series Troy: Fall of a City as Zeus, king of the Olympians.

Kae-Kazim is an appointed global ambassador for Africa 2.0, a civil society organization providing a platform for emerging and established African leaders to drive forward the transformation of Africa.





MALAIKA UWAMAHORO

MARCELLA

Born in Rwanda, and a Theatre Studies BA graduate from Fordham University in NYC, The acting Track. Malaika was able to attend Fordham as a proud recipient of a Rwandan Presidential Scholarship.

She has performed her own poetry on stages around the world, including Forbes Women Africa in Durban South Africa, The United Nations Headquarters in New York, and African Union Summits in Addis Abbaba and Kigali.

In 2014, she made her Off-Broadway debut at Signature Theatre in the world premiere of Katori Hall's Our Lady of Kibeho. Other theatre in the US includes: Dance Africa (BAM), Miracle in Rwanda (Theatre Row, New York), and Africa's Hope (USC Bovard Theatre, CA). International theatre: Les Os que Craquent (Theatre de Poche, Belgium.)

Film: NOTRE DAME DU NIL, (Dir. Atiq Rahimi), LOVELESS GENERATION, (Dir. Thomas Petkovski), UN PLAIN PARFAIT (Dir. Pascal Chaumeil), SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL (Dir. Roger Spottiswoode). Best Actress Award at Vues D'afrique Festival International de Cinéma au Montréal, Nominee for Best Solo Performance Audelco VIV Awards 2019, Nominee for Best Actress Golden Orange International Film Awards. BFA 2017.



CLARCK NTAMBWE

AISHA

*Making her acting debut in **FIGHT LIKE A GIRL**, Clarck plays a role not so far from her own life. Aisha is the no-nonsense lightweight champion of North Kivu District in DR Congo. In real life, Clarck is part of the team that the film is based on and has been coached by legendary Congolese boxer Kibomango since she was 14 years old. Since then she has become the lightweight champion of North Kivu. Recently she fought in the African Zone 3 Championship and won a silver medal.*

She has had to endure numerous challenges in her native country with regards to women competing in what many in her country consider a "man's sport"... but this has not deterred her on her journey to show the world what she is made of.



ARTHUR NKUSI

CEDRIQUE

Arthur Nkusi is probably the most well known comedian in Rwanda. He was the morning radio host on KISS FM for six years before moving his focus in 2021 to his live comedy shows, stand-up, and his hugely successful SEKA LIVE and ARTHUR NATION brands.

Arthur is also an accomplished dancer, choreographer and actor having starred in SHOOTING DOGS, OPERATION TURQUOISE, MISSING PILLARS, and SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL.





BAHALI RUTH

LEILA

Bahali Ruth is a Rwandan actress, dancer, poet and contestant in the 2022 Miss Rwanda Pageant. She has performed in numerous stage plays with renowned Rwandan theater group Mashirika on the popular radio drama series Sakwe, and in the feature film LEFT TO TELL. She has also worked for three years with the Internationally celebrated Ubumuntu Arts Festival.

As a poet she has performed regularly for eight years on the Rwanda poetry and spoken word circuit including stages at Cafe Litteraire, Kwibohora 25, and Tarama Nige.

KENNEDY MAZIMPAKA

ABDUL (FISHERMAN)

Mazimpaka Jones Kennedy is a Rwandan film Actor and theatre performer and film Director who appears in both International and Local films. Kennedy made his debut in (1998) with a supporting role in the first International genocide film about Rwanda 100 DAYS a film Directed by Nick Hughes. He had his breakthrough role in another International film SHOOTING DOGS (2005) directed by Michael Caton Jones.

In 2007 Kennedy featured in SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL directed by Roger Spottiswoode. In the same year Kennedy starred in the Sierra Leon drama "EZRA" directed by Newton Aduaka. Ezra is the first film to give an African perspective on the abduction of child soldiers into the continent's recent civil wars.

In 2008 Kennedy starred as a school teacher in a yet another story of the Hutu militias Interahamwe who invaded a secondary school at night in 1997's WE ARE ALL RWANDANS , the true story of the Nyange school students in Rwanda attacked by rebels in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. Since then he has appeared in numerous local and international films including AFRICA UNITED, OPERATION TURQUOISE, and KINYARWANDA.





BLANDINE FLORENCE

BRANDINE

Making her acting debut in FIGHT LIKE A GIRL, 20 yr old Blandine is currently homeless with her 2 yr old child. She is the volatile but protective, self-appointed leader of the girls who live on the streets of Goma.

In the film she portrays a fictionalized version of herself who quietly admires Safi from a distance.





CHARLINE KABUO

MIKI NDAYA

Charline is a former prostitute and member of the all women's boxing team who left both behind to get married and have two children. After an argument with her husband became physical, she fought back and nearly knocked him out. The following morning he was gone.

She recently rejoined the team only to have her husband reappear and tell her if she wants him back she will have to quit boxing again. She chose to remain with her team.

Charline makes her acting debut as Leila's nemesis and Congolese lightweight champion, Miki Ndaya.



SUPPORTING CAST

In order to build a more authentic backdrop for the story, the production team hired non-actors in most of the supporting roles. These locals included street kids, former child soldiers, and real members of the all-girls boxing team.



"WHERE A WOMAN RULES, STREAMS RUN UPHILL"

"In Congo, people think female boxers are wasting their time, that girls are only good for cooking, going to bed with and making children." - Marcella Sakobi, mother, fighter



PRODUCTION NOTES

KG28MEDIA is a new Rwanda based production company with the mission of collaborating with filmmakers across the planet to bring groundbreaking content to a global audience.

Fight Like A Girl was shot in August and September of 2022 in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo and the surrounding areas of North Kivu.

The film marks the first time a western narrative feature film was shot in East Congo. The team combined documentary filming techniques utilizing non-actors in uncontrolled environments with the structured, scripted narrative to capture the vibrant reality of life in the region.

The filmmakers cast local street kids, militia members, and boxers from the real club in supporting roles to add authenticity to the story. Instead of locking off streets and populating with professional actors, "live" locations were used to capture the real-life vitality of the city and the people who live there - often times using hidden cameras. At the end of a take that Leutwyler was happy with, the production team would track down anyone who was captured in the scene and have them sign a waiver if they agreed to be in the film.

In one particularly noteworthy situation, where Safi chases after a street kid who stole her fish, a real life good-samaritan tried to intervene and tackle the young boy before producer Innocent Munyeshuri ran in to inform him that this was not real and part of a film shoot.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Complicating an already ambitious shoot was the war in East Congo between Congolese forces and M23 rebels reaching its highest point in over a decade with UN offices next to the production hotel being attacked and burned just two weeks before the start of principal photography.

The nearby fighting threatened to shut down production daily, often forcing the team to switch locations at a moments notice. Armed soldiers were used to keep the cast and crew safe while filming in red zone areas in the region.

In the end, despite prevailing anti-Rwandan sentiment at the time, the mixed crew of Congolese and Rwandese worked together under unprecedented filming conditions to accomplish the shared goal of telling the story of these inspiring women.

The film was edited in Zanzibar, Tanzania with post production sound being performed in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Fight Like A Girl recently received 8 nominations at the Africa Movie Academy Awards including Best Screenplay, Best Lead Actress, Best Supporting Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Best Cinematography, Best Editing, Best Production Design and took home the trophy for Best Original Music.

The film was an Official Selection at the International Film Festival of India and played to a sold out crowd in Goa November 23, 2023. On the same night in Johannesburg the film screened at the South African Independent Film Festival where it won Best Feature Film.



SOUNDTRACK

Music is an essential part of East African life and African music in general has influenced the Blues, Jazz and Gospel in the west for decades. Today, artists from all over the continent are working with some of the biggest acts in America and Europe.

The songs on the Fight Like A Girl soundtrack are exclusively from African artists from the region (including: Muthoni Drummer Queen, Nadia Nakai, Rosa Ree, Bombshell Grenade, Nasty C, Aşa, Zap Mama, Fireboy DML, and Dee Koala). The closing credit track, Tere Mbi (My Body), from Congolese artist Celine Banza is a particularly poignant assertion of her value as a woman beyond the male gaze. It is performed in Ngbandi, her native language spoken in the north of the Democratic Republic of Congo.



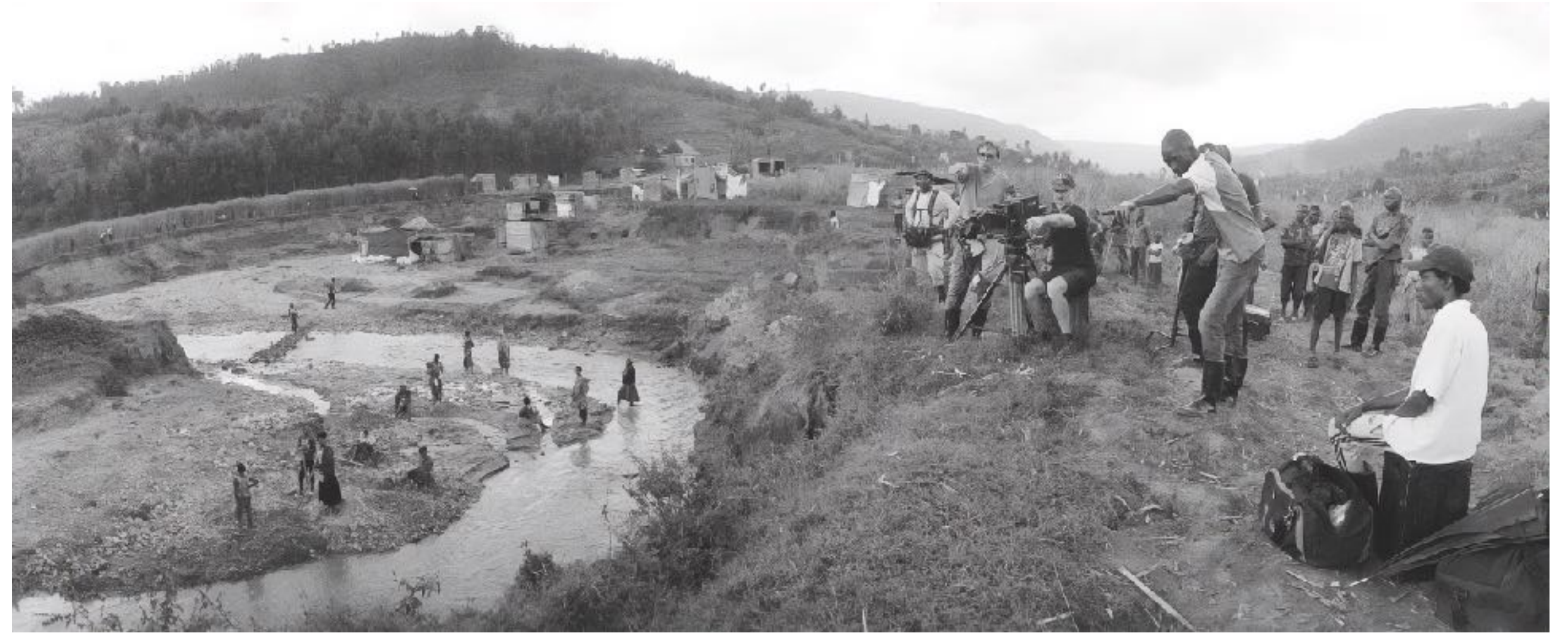
ORIGINAL SCORE

While writer, director Matthew Leutwyler was editing the film in Zanzibar he met SINAUBI ZAWOSE & PAMOJA ZANZIBAR, a musical act that fuses western contemporary rap into traditional East African gogo music. The band plays handmade instruments from the 19th century including zeze, chizeze, mbira, ngoni as well as a modern bass to create their distinct music. Leutwyler connected them with Fight Like A Girl composer Coby Brown in the United States who had them lay elements of these unique sounds over the top of his compositions to produce the film's moving and at times unsettling score.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was first introduced to the stories of these women and their legendary coach six years ago while working in East Congo with my NGO "We Are Limitless" and immediately Anton (producing partner) and I knew we needed to find a way to bring their stories to a broader audience. We decided to cast many of the real women of the boxing team as well as other non-actors in key roles to add to the authenticity of the story as well as offer work opportunities to the people of the area. This combining of documentary filming techniques utilizing non-actors in uncontrolled environments with our more structured, scripted narrative helped to capture the vibrant reality of life in the region.



Shooting in East Congo brings its own unique challenges but when the on-going conflict between the military and M23 rebels began to boil over only days before the beginning of principal photography, a big decision needed to be made about whether we could actually shoot the movie at all. The producers and I discussed moving the filming to neighboring Uganda but in the end we felt like Goma, and Congo in general, was such an important "character" in the story and we could not do it justice shooting it in any other country. Production Manager Clarisse Umutoniwase doubled our hired armed security for the production and we agreed to work our shooting schedule around military hot zones as they popped up.

We made the creative decision to keep most of the locations "live" and have the professional actors interact with whatever street kids, ex-child soldiers, shop owners, street vendors, and real boxers from the area that were there on the day... giving the scenes an unpredictable vitality and energy.

For me, cinema is at its most exciting when it takes viewers to places they have never seen and introduces them to people they will never have the chance to meet. Stories that provoke conversation and create positive change in the world -- and that is exactly what we hope to do with this feature and the accompanying docu-series that we are currently shooting.

MATTHEW LEUTWYLER

WRITER, DIRECTOR

Leutwyler directed the adaptation of the acclaimed novel THE RIVER WHY starring Academy Award winner William Hurt, Zach Gilford, and Amber Heard. He also exec produced SUPER starring Rainn Wilson and Ellen Page; and the comedy-drama THE GIRL MOST LIKELY, starring Kristen Wiig and Annette Benning.

Leutwyler stepped into the distribution side of the industry when he co-founded the theatrical distributor The Film Arcade in 2012. For two years, he collaborated on the marketing of films including Sundance winner and Independent Spirit Award nominee AFTERNOON DELIGHT starring Kathryn Hahn and Jane Lynch, as well as other Sundance entries THE OTHER DREAM TEAM, and A.C.O.D. with Amy Poehler, Adam Scott, and Jessica Alba. Matthew departed the company in 2014 to concentrate his efforts back on production and later that year produced the award winning food doc SPINNING PLATES.

In 2015 Leutwyler directed the sci-fi drama UNCANNY, with Mark Webber and Rainn Wilson. The multi-award winning film has been critically praised with Sight & Sound Magazine calling the film “confident, meticulously crafted, and performed with perfect nuance.” And Ain’t-It-Cool-News “A rare breed of thoughtful, independent science fiction.”

The following year with Anton Laines he executive produced and created the reality-TV pilot THE BANK for The Africa Channel. Best described as SHARK TANK for micro-loans, it was directed by Rebecca Henning (creator of BRAVO’s hit series BELOW DECK).

Matthew spent the final six months of 2019 in Mumbai directing and co-showrunning the 8 episode action-drama series STATE OF SIEGE: 26/11, based on the true life events surrounding the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. The series was one of the most watched mini-series in India and was nominated for six 2020 FilmFare Awards.

For the past 26 months Leutwyler and partner Anton Laines have been shooting a docu-series about the legendary Congolese boxing champion Kibomango and the all women boxing team he developed as an antidote to sexual violence and endemic poverty in his country. Matthew and Anton are also developing ORPHANS VS. ALIENS, a sci-fi graphic novel about extraterrestrial invaders attacking East Africa and the group of orphans that band together to save the world. The artwork is being done by a group of Rwandan teenagers with the completed novel being separated into a series of 6 comic books in 5 languages that will be distributed for free to numerous orphanages in Sub-Saharan Africa so children in this part of the world can see themselves represented as the heroes of an epic story.

Matthew has also directed and produced spots for Chevy Volt and Coke Zero and a music video for Egyptian (Imagine Dragons singer Dan Reynolds’s side project).

Outside of his career as a filmmaker, Matthew founded and oversees the non-profit WE ARE LIMITLESS. Since 2012 the NGO has been providing Rwandan and Congolese orphans and underprivileged youth with quality boarding school educations and healthcare. He also owns a popular restaurant in Rwanda’s capital city Kigali named after his mother, Lavana.

YVETTE GAYLE

PRODUCER

Yvette Gayle, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Africa Creative Agency, leads the Film & Television Division. Having spent more than two decades in the music entertainment industry in the United States, CNBC recently named Gayle one of 31 Women Rising in Africa. Her transition and move to the continent has been fruitful in expanding the careers of some of Africa’s most precious talents including actresses Pearl Thusi (Queen Sono, Wu Assassins, Catching Feelings) Ama Qamata (Blood & Water, Gomora, Fight Like A Girl) and Rosemary Zimu (Savage Beauty, Nine, Aye Aye) to name a few.

ANTON LAINES

PRODUCER

Twenty years ago, Anton jumped head first into the film industry working with NFL Hall of Fame coach John Madden’s Production Company, Goal Line Studios. In 2003 he was the Unit Production Manager on the feature film, DEAD AND BREAKFAST, where he met Matthew Leutwyler. In the following decade Anton focused his career specifically on commercial production, working with clients such as Clorox, Electronic Arts, and Bud Light, as well as some of the world’s top leading ad - agencies. In 2013 Anton founded TWENTY NINE BLACK PRODUCTIONS, a full-service production company, in which he’s helmed multiple national and global campaigns for major brands. Anton began to focus his career toward directing in 2016. Over the years he’s also worked on several projects with Matthew, including VOLUNTEERS: A RWANDAN COMEDY, THE BANK, STATE OF SIEGE: 26/11.

After successfully co-creating an experimental web series during the pandemic (Disconnected) that was shot remotely with actors worldwide, Laines and Leutwyler formed KG28 Media to continue telling compelling stories from around the globe. Their first project under the new company was the "Fight Like a Girl" feature Film and an accompanying Docu-series following the real lives of the women who inspired the movie. Serving as a co-creator of the series and a Producer on the film, Laines now oversees the production of the KG28 slate of projects in development.

Anton is an active board member and fundraiser for the non-profit WE ARE LIMITLESS and travels to East Africa four times a year to assist with the needs of the NGO’s programs. He lives in San Francisco with his wife Katie and his one year old son Lennox.

SERGE IBAKA

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Serge Ibaka was born in Brazzaville, The Republic of Congo, 30 years ago (9/18/1989). He followed his parent's love for basketball in the war-torn country. His passion for the game made him overcome many personal challenges and he was able to reach the NBA at 19. After 11 seasons in the league and after winning an NBA championship in 2019 with the Toronto Raptors, Ibaka has added many skills sets to his off the court persona. He is the creator of the hit Youtube shows “How hungry are you?” and "AvecClasse" and the co-producer of the documentary "Anything is Possible", that chronicles his return back to the Congo with the NBA championship as a symbol of his success and more importantly as an object of inspiration to his people.

COLIN GAYLE

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

As founder and CEO of Africa Creative Agency (ACA), Colin Gayle’s beliefs are rooted in visionary branding that breaks down borders and elevates the continent’s cultural profile through strategy and global best practices, utilizing everything from content and content platforms to live events and social engineering. Drawing on decades of experience across music, media, television and film, Gayle continues to shape the perception of Africa through storytelling and music. He ex-produced Zulu Man In Japan (Netflix) and was music supervisor for Netflix’s Queen Sono, Blood & Water, Jiva, Savage Beauty and Glamour Girls to name a few.

A KG28 MEDIA production

In association with
Africa Creative Agency
and
Ouenze Entertainment

Fight Like A Girl

Ama Qamata

Hakeem Kae-Kazim

Malaika Uwamahoro
Arthur Nkusi

Bahali Ruth
Kennedy Mazimpaka

Introducing
Clarck Ntambwe

Composer
Coby Brown

Costume Designer
Sissi Ngamije

Editor
Matthew Leutwyler

Co-Producers
Ama Qamata • Clarisse Umutoniwase

Production Designers
Omar Mouktar Sibomana • Antoine Nshimiyamana

Director of Photography
Richard Henkels

Executive Producers
Serge Ibaka • Jordi Vilà Sánchez • Colin Gayle • David Quinney

Executive Producers
Adrian Colbert • Kent Spence • Rebecca White

Producers
Innocent Munyeshuri • Yvette Gayle

Produced by
Anton Laines

Written & Directed by
Matthew Leutwyler

A man in a blue shirt and light-colored pants sits on a dark ledge, looking towards a woman in a pink top and black leggings who is boxing. The scene is set against a sunset sky with soft, colorful clouds. The man is on the left, and the woman is on the right, captured in a dynamic pose. The overall mood is serene and active.

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Hollywood Reporter Press Release Link [Here](#)