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Interview with Natasha Ofili

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Abstract

Natasha Ofili, the star and screenwriter of *The Multi*, was interviewed by Monica Blizek about the process that led to the creation of the film.

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Author Notes

Monica Blizek is a retired mental health professional.



An Interview with Natasha Ofili

Natasha Ofili, the star and screenwriter of The Multi, was interviewed by Monica Blizek about the process that led to the creation of the film.

Monica: How did you select this topic for your film?

Natasha: This topic is dear to me and hits home. In 2009, I was diagnosed with clinical depression. I remember before 2009, I had several encounters of self-destructive thoughts, feeling numb and controlled. There was a moment when I said, “I need help.” I sought therapy and went for many years. The path of enlightenment became brighter. It made me who I am today. It is now effortless to express my thoughts and feelings. I take pride in talking about my depression. Soon, I realized that people do not talk about their trauma, depression, or mental health issues in society. Society puts such stigma around talking about depression. It was naive for me to not see that. I wanted to incorporate trauma and mental health into a story. It is important to raise awareness about mental

health, especially where the world is heading now. Let's have conversations with openness to begin the healing process to accept and embrace one another.

Monica: Did you experience unique funding difficulties?

Natasha: This film started spontaneously; it began with a grant opportunity to write a play. Unfortunately, I couldn't proceed due to COVID. Faced with the challenge of writing a new story, I wrote *The Multi* in 3 days, and I couldn't believe it! The grant expanded my creativity and inspired me to convey vulnerability in storytelling. The film became more significant than expected, which led me to fund the entire production out of my pocket. I was fortunate to have savings from my acting work and other projects to invest in my production.

Monica: What was it like to create and work with Deaf and Hard of Hearing crew members?

Natasha: Being a Deaf person, it was amazing to work with a talented professional Deaf & Hard of Hearing crew. Especially since most of them work in the industry, and they hardly receive recognition for their work. One of my Deaf crew members, Michael Epstein, is the lead graphic artist for *The Mandalorian*. He was the art director for *The Multi*. We were able to communicate with each other seamlessly. Working with our hearing crew was also seamless. The entire production was accessible for deaf and hearing crew using American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters on Zoom. The Cast/Crew successfully communicated with each other by being innovative, patient, and open-minded.

(A side note: we prefer to be called “deaf & hard of hearing,” not hearing impaired. Hearing impaired is a negative medical term that focuses on the deficit, the ability not to hear. Deaf & Hard of Hearing (DHH) is a term that recognizes the person is deaf or hard of hearing and navigates their life with that identity. Each DHH person is unique.)

Monica: You indicated a desire to make this a feature length film. On what elements of the film would you like to expand?

Natasha: The elements I would expand on are Amara's daily life, how she copes, and navigating her office and home life. I would love to expand on the relationship with her sister, Anu. Lastly, expand on the trauma Amara endured, how Sade came to life, and who Sade is.

Monica: Do you have plans for another film?

Natasha: Yes, I’m currently adapting a play to a screenplay. It is on a different topic, a complex love story; I am very excited to get this film into production. I believe people will love this story.