

VAYA WINS 11 nominations

Eight years in the making, Omotoso's new offering is SA's latest runaway movie success

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I was really shocked. I got the news late at night and I've been smiling ever since," said film maker Akin Omotoso this week when City Press asked how he was feeling about his latest film, *Vaya*, scooping 11 nominations in all the top categories of the 2017 Africa Movie Academy Awards (Amaas) - the most of any film on the continent. It was followed by a period film '76 (Nigeria); the Lupita Nyong'o gem *Queen of Katwe* (Uganda); and Ebola crisis film *93 Days* (Nigeria).

Just last week, *Vaya* made the news for opening the New York African Film Festival.

"Since its premiere in Toronto last year, it's been building up speed and now it's becoming a runaway success on the film circuit," said Omotoso, best known for his romcom, *Tell Me Sweet Something*, and his anti-xenophobia classic, *Man On Ground*.

Of the other South African nominations, another recent classic, Noem My Skollie: *Call Me Thief*, picked up six nominations, including for best film and best director; Dora's *Peace* starring Khabonina Qubeka as a sex worker attracted five nods, including a best actress nomination for Qubeka; Zola Maseko's *The Whale Caller* received two; while *Happiness Is a Four-letter Word* and *Funny Enough* each received one.

Traditionally dominated by Nigerian films, the 13-year-old Amaas have increasingly recognised South African projects. As in literature and pop music, South Africa and

Nigeria are constantly vying for top spot in competitions, a sweet irony as Omotoso was born in Nigeria but lives and works in South Africa.

Asked which country he considers home, he quipped, "Home is where I pay my taxes, so South Africa."

Omotoso was brimming over with praise for his cast and crew. *Vaya* was written by professional screenwriters working with four homeless men and it tells three stories of migration to the city, which intersect dramatically.

"*Vaya* has been allowed to grow organically. This is an acknowledgement of eight years of working on something."

The film, which is heading to the Sydney Film Festival in Australia next, has been touching hearts around the world as audiences share their experience of migration and immigrant life.

"It's the humanity of it," explains Omotoso.

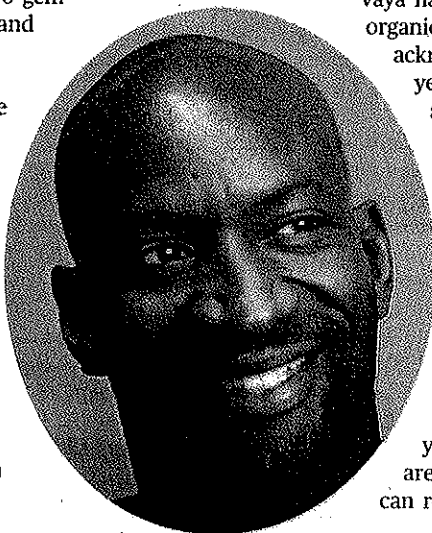
"The actors, the script; you really feel that these are human beings that you can relate to. People say that it stays with them for days after seeing it ... When

we show it here in South Africa, everyone recognises a cousin or an aunt or a sister who's come to the big city to try to find work."

One of his biggest joys is the best newcomer nod at the Amaas for Azwile Chamane-Madiba who plays *Zodwa*. "She's, like, 10 or 11," says Omotoso, "and this is her first film. It has been incredible to watch her grow."

South African audiences are going to have to be patient because *Vaya* is only scheduled for a cinema release on October 27.

The Amaas will be held in Lagos on June 18.



Akin Omotoso