

5 reasons *Kanarie* is a gem, even if you're not Afrikaans

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- Starring Schalk Bezuidenhout in a breakout, jersey-less, SAFTA-nominated lead performance
- Winner of 15 international awards
- 100% critics rating on Rotten Tomatoes
- "A winning combination of thoughtfulness and exuberance." *The Hollywood Reporter*
- "Rich, poignant and finely observed." *The Los Angeles Times*



Kanarie, Schalk Bezuidenhout's breakout movie, is now streaming first on Showmax in South Africa.

Schalk stars as Johan Niemand, a fashion-loving gay teen in small-town South Africa in 1985, a time of apartheid, religious conservatism and war, an era when not even his idol Boy George had dared to come out publicly as gay yet.

When Johan is called up to serve his compulsory two-year military training, he escapes the border war by joining The South African Defence Force Church Choir and Concert Group, known as *Die Kanaries* (The Canaries), where he discovers his true self through hardship, camaraderie, first love and the liberating freedom of music.

If you missed *Kanarie* at the cinema - and it was only the 10th most popular South African movie at the box office last year, so clearly most of us did - here are five reasons not to sleep on one of the most fun but moving South African films yet:



#1. Schalk Bezuidenhout is one of our favourite comedians, but might be an even better actor

Schalk is one of South Africa's top comedians: the winner of two Comics' Choice Awards, described by Skhumba recently as "the one white comedian loved by black people."

But in *Trippin With Skhumba* earlier this year, Schalk confessed that he wanted to be an actor before he thought of being a comedian.

On the basis of his performance in *Kanarie*, acting might still be his true calling, as much as we hope we still get to laugh with him often on stage. *The Los Angeles Times* compared him to the legendary Buster Keaton while praising his "clear talent for drama" and the way he "superbly juggles Johan's many moods and modes," while *FilmThreat* raved about his "confident, raw performance."

Schalk earned a 2019 South African Film and Television Award nomination for this role and won Best Supporting Actor last year as Danny in *Hotel*, but we're pretty sure he's just getting started.

Just be warned: he's missing his trademark knitted jerseys, moustache and wild hair in *Kanarie*, so you might not recognise him immediately in the movie, but just look out for the guy in the wedding dress in the opening scene...

#2. Germandt Geldenhuys is hilarious, and can seriously sing

Schalk is ably supported by the rest of the cast, particularly Hannes Otto as his love interest, Wolfgang, and Germandt Geldenhuys as the irrepressible Ludolf, in a hilarious performance that won Best Supporting Actor at Silwerskerm and earned a SAFTA nomination.

As *FilmThreat* put it, "Ludolf's happy to see anyone and loves to chat with them about whatever. While it sounds like it may be annoying, Geldenhuys finds the right balance of pluck and genuine sympathy to make the character work."

Germandt won the 2017 Huisgenoot Tempo For Actor of the Year: Soap Operas for his role as Louis Koster in *Binnelanders*; earned a Fleur Du Cap nomination for *Sweeney Todd*; and won the Grand Champion Award for singing at The World Performing Championships, which will surprise no one who hears him sing in *Kanarie*.

#3. Christiaan Olwagen is a director to watch

After being named Standard Bank Young Artist Of The Year for Theatre in 2015, Christiaan Olwagen switched his focus to cinema, writing and directing three acclaimed Afrikaans films in three years: 2016's *Johnny Is Nie Dood Nie*, 2018's Chekhov adaptation *Die Seemeeu*, and *Kanarie*, with a fourth, *Poppie Nongena*, premiering at kykNET's Silwerskermfees this month.

Kanarie is an impressive mix of genres - a coming-of-age, coming out, musical love story war film - that is sometimes funny, sometimes heart-warming, and occasionally tragic, and that moves from raw reality to music-video-style flights of fancy and back again seamlessly. It's an incredible balancing act but one that Christiaan makes look easy. While he may not be famous outside the Afrikaans community yet, he's still in his early 30s and we'd put money on that changing soon... As *BusinessDay* put it, he's "streets ahead of other directors."

#4. *Kanarie* is inspired by a true story

In *Kanarie*, Schalk and the rest of the cast are helped by what *The Los Angeles Times* described as "a first-rate script," which director Christiaan Olwagen co-wrote with musical director Charl-Johan Lingenfelder, based on Charl's own experiences in the army choir.

As Charl told BizCommunity, "I believe one of the strengths of the film is the fact that it is a very personal story and that it is true. People are very surprised when they find out that approximately 95% of it is factual. It's not often you get to watch a film of this nature where the narrative is so close to what really happened. We didn't have to invent a whole lot – it was all just ready to be told."

#5. *Kanarie* is a funny, moving tale about standing out, even when you just want to fit in

Sometimes we sell things short when we pitch them as good South African films. *Kanarie* is a good film. Period.

It has a 100% critics rating on Rotten Tomatoes; a 7.9 rating on IMDB; and has won 15 awards around the world. As *The Los Angeles Times* put it, "*Kanarie* ably hits the high notes... rich, poignant and finely observed..." Or as *The Hollywood Reporter* said, while predicting an international theatrical run, *Kanarie* is "a winning combination of thoughtfulness and exuberance." Similarly, *Indiewire* picked it as one of seven films to watch at Outfest, North America's premier LGBTI festival, calling it a "surprisingly fun" musical about "the effects of nationalism on a tender soul, and the bond of brotherhood among misfits."

So whether or not you're gay, or Afrikaans, or want to support proudly South African products, *Kanarie* is the film for you, next time you're in the mood for an uplifting musical love story about finding individuality in a world of oppression and uniformity. Watch it first on Showmax [here](#).

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