

MOVIES

Review: ‘Akilla’s Escape’ mines socio-political context of Toronto’s Jamaican community



Saul Williams in the movie "Akilla's Escape." (Vertical Entertainment)

BY MICHAEL RECHTSHAFFEN | CALIFORNIA TIMES
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The Times is committed to reviewing theatrical film releases during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because moviegoing carries risks during this time, we remind readers to follow health and safety guidelines as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local health officials.

A meditative mood piece, Charles Officer’s neo-noir crime thriller “Akilla’s Escape” dispenses with the usual cops-and-robbers tropes in its depiction of a young male teen enveloped in a seemingly unavoidable cycle of violence.

Set against the backdrop of Toronto’s Jamaican community, which forms a significant part of the city’s vibrant cultural mosaic, the story is seen through the haunted eyes of its 40-year-old title character, affectingly played by actor-poet [Saul Williams](#).

Looking to cash out of his clandestine cannabis-growing operation now that the industry has become legalized, Akilla makes one of his last deliveries to a Greek-run dispensary only to witness a violent robbery perpetrated by the Area Six Generals, a street gang affiliated with the notorious Garrison Army (based on the real-life [Shower Posse](#)).

The gang escapes with the exception of Sheppard, a mute, epileptic 15-year-old (Thamela Mpumlwana), in whom Akilla sees his teenaged self (also played by Mpumlwana) when he was living in Brooklyn, where he was initiated into the Garrison Army by his abusive father (Ronnie Rowe Jr.).

Although the constant shifts between contemporary Toronto and ‘90s New York can at times cause confusion, the film remains firmly rooted in Williams’ quietly powerful, laser-focused performance. He and [Massive Attack’s 3D](#) (a.k.a. Robert Del Naja) contribute the atmospheric score and the film boasts a unifying visual schematic captured by Maya Bankovic’s poetic cinematography.

Those who would have preferred Akilla’s “escape” to be executed with more [Guy Ritchie-style bombast](#) might shrug indifferently, but the incendiary social-political context provided by Officer and co-writer Motion (a.k.a. Wendy Motion Brathwaite) ultimately proves more potent than one more explosive firefight or tightly-cut car chase.

‘Akilla’s Escape’

Not rated

Running Time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

Playing: Starts June 11, Laemmle Royal, West L.A.

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