

Bains Interview

Marshall Tyler

Slow Pulse

1. Where did this story of *Slow Pulse* originate?

The idea for *Slow Pulse* came during the shutdown when I would go on these long walks in the hills behind my house here in LA and I'd be listening to music on my EarPods, and these recurring images started to form in my mind where I saw this middle-aged man learning to dance in a class where he was the odd man out, and, though clearly dedicated to what he was doing, was failing miserably. So, that became the germ to the story. I knew I wanted to tell a fish-out-of-water story, sort of in the vein of *Billy Elliot* which I was really inspired by. So, I pitched it to Procter & Gamble when they reached out to me through Tribeca's Karen McMullen about a new initiative that they were launching called *8:46 Films* where they were commissioning four films, each with a running time of eight minutes and forty-six seconds, as a way of reclaiming the time of George Floyd's murder by disgraced Minneapolis ex-police officer, Derek Chauvin. The concept of reclaiming that horrendous event and what that 8:46 time represented in the culture, and replacing it with something powerful and uplifting was so intriguing to me. They were looking for stories of hope and resilience, so eventually, after several pitches and after submitted my script, *Slow Pulse* was selected as one of the four films that they we're going to get behind and move forward with. And the rest, as they say, is history...

2. How important was casting for this project, and what did the casting process look like?

I have an amazing casting director that I work with named Danny Cabeza. We came up at the same time working on films together like *Miami Vice* under Michael Mann. Danny has a really strong eye for talent, and thinks outside the box. He cast my HBO short *CAP* which was nominated for the Casting Society of America Artios Award for Excellence in Casting for his work on it. He worked so hard to get Jimmie Fails on board of *Slow Pulse* for us. It was nerve racking waiting to hear, but we finally got word from CAA that he was onboard. So, casting him was so important because the role doesn't involve a lot of dialogue, making the role a performance that's really about mannerism and behavior. A role like this requires the actor's eyes to be very sympathetic and be able to convey so much emotion because we have to root for him right off top. Jimmie's eyes pull you in instantly and helps create empathy and heartbreak for the audience. Also, casting Jacob was a big ordeal as well. We had to find a 9-year-old black boy

who could dance at a level that when you see him move, you believe he's been studying and knows his craft. Finding Zion Rupert to play the part of Jacob was a dream come true, because we were looking and auditioning kids from all over and weren't sure we were going to find him. We luckily ended up finding him through the Debbie Allen Dance Academy so we're very grateful to them and to Zion's father, Sylvester.

3. Jimmie Fails is awkward, and that seems intentional. What did the process look like trying to incorporate these ideas of awkwardness and comfortability?

Jimmie Fails is just that kind of guy. He's the absolute coolest, most different person you're going to meet. He's just very abstract and individualistic, but grounded in all the right ways. And, as a director, I just love it all about him. I love all his quirks and mannerisms. They make him such an interesting actor to watch. And he's very subtle and nuanced--another thing that really is exciting to me when thinking about an actor for a role. He's also such a team player. One early morning before the crack of dawn, we had to sneak into a park and carry all this gear and equipment up this giant hill through lots of winding trails and Jimmie jumped right in to help us carry the load. He was truly a delight to work with and I felt so deeply blessed to have him breathe life into the role of Bernard Brash. If you've seen his work in *The Last Black Man of San Francisco*, you'd know right off hand what I'm talking about in terms of how you instantly feel for him when you see him on screen. It's pretty spectacular.

4. Furthermore, dancing makes me uncomfortable (particularly because I never know how to react). Did you make a conscious decision to try and make viewers feel a certain way, or did you want each viewer to get something different from the performances?

Hmm, that's a great question. Now you've got me thinking about my intentions... I would say that I really wanted to create a mystery. I wanted people to ask 'why was he doing what he was doing?' more than anything else. In doing that, I guess by keeping it very vague, I was allowing the audience to feel and think whatever it is that they were going to when they first watch the film. I had people tell me that they've watched the film a few times, because they just didn't see all the little moments and bits of storytelling that were peppered along the way. And how moved they were seeing it each and every time. So ultimately, as a director, I'm trying to create an experience for the audience that is slightly uncomfortable, but equally intriguing and beautiful. I really want to make it feel honest and real.

**5. I feel that film, regardless of the role you play in it, can be educational.
What's something you learned while making *Slow Pulse*?**

I learned so much in making this film, especially about pacing and scheduling. We had such an ambitious for a three-day shooting schedule and in the long run, turned out not having enough time—*there's never enough time*. So, I learned about the importance of having a realistic shooting schedule and really having a stronger gage about how much time I'd actually need to cover each scene. It was very challenging.

6. What was the best part of making *Slow Pulse*?

The best part of making *Slow Pulse* was being able to have so much of the South Los Angeles/Crenshaw community represented in the film and most importantly, portrayed in such positive and beautiful ways. We had the Lulu Washington Dance Theatre play a big part of the production which allowed us to insert our actors inside a working dance theatre. And Tamika Washington ended up being the instructor in the film which added a whole other layer of authenticity to the project. We also had the local business owners help us when we needed it. So, I'm really super proud that we were able to make this a film for and by our community. That means a lot to me.

7. What was the most challenging aspect?

The most challenging was the shooting schedule. It was just way too ambitious and not enough time to do it all. But I'm very happy about how it all turned out. Also, editing the film was a huge challenge as well, in that we had to tell the story (not including end titles) in only 8 minutes and 46 seconds, no more or less. So, you can imagine how challenging that was, in trying to get a film's running time to exactly that specific amount of time.

8. What are you working on now?

I'm working on getting my first feature made titled *Fever Dream*. It's a very personal and intimate story that I'm so excited to tell that and that beautifully speaks to various issues of our time. We're also working on a feature length documentary about a designer that largely influenced the way we all dress and express ourselves through clothes.

9. Where can readers find you on social media, and where can they watch *Slow Pulse*?

I can be found on Instagram @mymanmars and also @newbumperandpaint.

10. This question is a little left-of-center, but I feel like it's an important question to ask filmmakers. What is/are your favorite film(s), and what role have they played in your filmmaking process?

Ha! That's a tough one because I love so many films. I'm a huge fan of all the Dardenne Brothers' films like *The Kid with a Bike*, *Le Fils (The Son)*, *Rosetta*, *L'Enfant (The Child)*, etc. and their latest film coming out that I happened to catch at this year's Cannes Film Festival, *Tori and Lokita*. I love all of Barry Jenkins' films from his early shorts, to *Medicine for Melancholy*, to *Moonlight*. I love *Tree of Life* from Terrence Malik. I'm a huge Michael Mann fan, especially, *Last of the Mohicans*, *Thief*, *The Insider*, *Heat*, etc. I love Chloe Zhao's *Songs My Brother Taught Me* and *The Rider*, Eliza Hittman's *Beach Rats*, *It Felt Like Love*, and *Never Rarely Sometimes Always*. I love Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale Station* and *Black Panther*. There are just too many filmmakers and films to name. But they all imprint themselves on me and I take bits and pieces of all of them when I'm writing or directing a film. They show me what greatness manifested looks like and gives us all something, as artists, to aspire to. But I'd have to say that *Midnight Express* was the film that most influenced me and made me want to become a filmmaker.