

'Once Upon a River' most anticipated film of 2019 at the Gallup Film Festival

Written by Staff Reports

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Writer and Director Haroula Rose, of Lincolnwood, Ill. will be at the Gallup Film Festival September 12-14. Her film, *Once Upon a River*, based on Bonnie Jo Campbell's New York Times' 2011 best selling novel of the same name, will be screened at 6 pm September 14.

The film features actor Kenadi DelaCerna, who plays Margo, a young 15-year-old girl whose uncle, "Cal" lures her into a situation in which he takes advantage of her in a small river town along the Kalamazoo River near Lake Michigan. Margo's father Bernard Crane is played by Tatanka Means, who comes to his daughter's aid and defense as a fatal quarrel ensues with Uncle Cal.

"There was something about the character (Margo) - something visually cinematic," Haroula Rose said as she recounted the storyline. "It was tragedy along the way." *Once Upon a River* is Kenadi's first feature film.

The film starts out with Margo besting others as she fires a rifle and consistently hits the bullseye. Uncle Cal (Coburn Goss), who is impressed with her ability, zeroes in on her sharp talent in front of his sons. A fateful journey begins with young Margo, that takes place over a two year period in the novel. She finds her birth mother after journeying by boat along the river as she meets with unexpected situations.

“We had to decide, with so many characters in Campbell’s novel, what to keep and what to lose,” Rose said. “So many things can happen in a novel - our mind can picture whatever it wants.”

The production (filming) was done in freezing weather near Wisconsin. “The day we finished, it snowed,” Rose recalled the snowfall being more than a foot deep. “We were driving away while it was snowing. Oh my God, thank you for letting us finish.”

“We had challenging work with one of the scenes with Kenadi and John Ashton, who plays the character Smoke. Ashton, an actor with 40 years and 100 stage, film, and television credits, is best known for his role as Sgt. Taggart in *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984). “Kenadi couldn’t push him in the wheelchair. We went from crying to laughing. It was a collective memory. Everyone felt emotionally tied to what was going on,” she said about the production.

Tatanka Means, Navajo, Oglala Lakota, and Omaha, joined the cast through Santa Fe-based casting director Angelique Midthunder. “Tatanka Means is a breath of fresh air. He always handles himself in the most professional manner, while still bringing humor and a sense of levity with him,” Midthunder said. Means, known for AMC’s *The Son* and National Geographic’s *Saints & Strangers*, will be featured in HBO’s upcoming, *I Know This Much is True*.

Once Upon a River was shot by cinematographer Charlotte Hornsby, a Sundance award winner for *Hair Wolf* and *Lucia Before and After*.

Harola, a Fulbright Fellow, graduated from Chicago University with a B.A. and an M.A., studied

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at University of Southern California’s MFA program. She is currently working on a documentary feature on gun violence. “They have found a way to survive and build a community in their own way,” Harola says of the characters in her film.

Once Upon a River was dubbed “One of the most anticipated films of 2019” by *Filmmaker Magazine*. The run time of the film is one hour and 30 minutes making it feature length.

Haroula encourages everyone interested in filmmaking to be assertive. “If there’s a story you want to tell and you can’t stop thinking about, it’s not wise to wait around for someone to give you permission,” she said. “Try it out doing so in a short way. Each time you’ll get more confident.”

Following the screening of her film Sept. 14, Haroula and Kenadi DelaCerna will appear at a Q&A session at the El Morro Event Center on South Second and Coal Avenue.

The Gallup Film Festival starts September 12 and continues through Sept. 14.

For more information visit gallupfilmfestival.com or call (505) 722-8982.