

"Yard"

A feature film by Joshua Bee Alafia

The camera pulls out from a steering wheel grip in the hands of a Street Hawker who wears all kinds of items on his body, car related, cleaning supplies, etc. The sidewalks are active with folks walking, Taxi Vans filling up with passengers. Ras Solomon walks wearing an Ethiopian robe and carrying a staff. He boards the Van sitting in the front seat. The van goes through several settings until it's in the country.

"Does planet Earth have an axis? I don't mean one that it turns on, but a physical point that sparks the collective subconscious. Maybe it does, and it changes with the times. Ur, Cairo, Auxum, Timbuktu, Athens, Paris, New York... Kingston."

Ras Solomon exits the van and walks through a field towards a Nyabinghi drumming ceremony: Twelve Rastas of various ages play drums and chant. Ras Solomon SINGS. Cut to another African ceremony, very far away. Raph, a Jamaican with dreadlocks, a practitioner of the African Martial Art Capoeira, and employee at the Jamaican Embassy plays capoeira in a circle in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

"Coming to Ethiopia had confirmed my belief that Jamaica is the planet's axis. I'm not saying that because I'm Jamaican. Growing up in Jamaica, I thought for sure it was New York until I got there. Rolling Thunder, the Cherokee Medicine man, said that the Caribbean Islands are the mountains of Atlantis. Maybe that has something to do with it. Big up a Yard!"

And so begins the film **Yard**, a Jamaican word for homeland. While the word yard connotes home in general, the film **Yard** looks at the transcendental nature of culture and ideology through five character's quest to find their place on Earth. **Yard** is the thread that weaves Japan, New York, Africa, China, Europe, and the Caribbean together.

Raph works in the Jamaican Embassy in Addis Ababa by day and at night spins dancehall and culture Reggae, his family tradition. When Raph rubs Lionel, the local celebrity Trinidadian deejay, the wrong way and defeating him in a Sound Clash (musical battle between sound systems) Lionel poisons Raph with a ganja cigarette that makes him blind. Unable to regain his sight through conventional medicine, an Ethiopian Holy man tells Raph he must return to his homeland to be healed.

Mikkel, Raph's brother, has been hustling in New York for five years. He sells tee shirts, batteries, bootleg DVDs, anything to subsidize his music.

When the pawn shop sells his music equipment on pawn, and he loses his cool and find himself deported for his selling his bootleg goods without a licence. As he moves through the judicial system he is befriended by Barrington, a shady Jamaican who has plans to make money by selling bullets in Jamaica.

Raph returns to his home in Kingston, Jamaica to find that his family has rented his room to Hiro, a Japanese deejay from Tokyo in Jamaica to study patios and expand his knowledge of deejaying with tutelage of Basil, Raph's father and founder of the legendary sound system, Black Ark Sound. Basil sends Raph to see the roots healer Ras Solomon, who heals him completely in one day, miraculously. With his strength returned, Raph teaches capoeira to youth at the Ujamaa cultural center in Dunkirk; a neighborhood infamous for being a battleground for warring gangs.

Mikkel suddenly appears at his family's doorstep. Mikkel however never tells anyone the reason for his sudden appearance. With no money, Mikkel ends up selling bullets with Barrington to raise funds for studio time to record his music. Basil sends Mikkel out with Hiro to facilitate recording dub plates (special remixed versions of songs) with some of Reggae music's great singers; Sizzla, Richie Spice, Capelton, Warrior King, Natural Black, I-Wayne, Luciano, Chinna Smith, Kiddus I, and Lee Scratch Perry. In the process of discovering why Jamaica is the center of the universe, Mikkel gets a variety of interesting theories from the recording artists as well as Ras Solomon, a one-time reggae hit maker who left his career for the natural life in the mountains, who shows him ancient ruins from Atlantis. Mikkel starts to see a reason for his coming back to J.A.. He realizes that he must tell his family about what happened in New York.

Raph's capoeira class engages and inspires the children of the warring factions. Raph falls in love with his best student Kasan's mother, Kenisha. Kenisha turns out to be the daughter of Don Derwa, one of the local Dons of the neighborhood. Don Derwa finds out that Raph is Mikkel's brother and asks for a deal in bullets, bringing the truth to light of Mikkel's activities. When one of Raph's students is killed in crossfire, Mikkel leaves the bullet game and acts as a diplomat for peace between the warring factions.

The film ends in a capoeira roda with the warring factions watching their children play capoeira together to Nyabinghi drums. Guns are exchanged for instruments and a giant Sankofa sculpture is made from the retired weapons. Hiro marries Neffertitti and takes her and the children to Japan. Yard is Earth's cultural axis.