

BOXCUTTER



CANADA // 2024 // DRAMA // 88 MINS // ENGLISH

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LOGLINE

Rome has the talent to break out as a rapper, but his chance to impress a megastar producer is jeopardized when the only copy of his album is stolen.

SYNOPSIS

Aspiring rapper Rome has the talent and vision to break out in Toronto's hip-hop scene, but his crippling insecurity is holding him back. When he learns that megastar producer Richie Hill will be making an appearance at a local club, Rome seizes the chance to meet him and get his album into Richie's hands. However, disaster strikes when Rome's apartment is burglarized and the only copy of his album is stolen. Racing across the city with his friend Jenaya, Rome scrambles to track down his collaborators and his records before the show begins and he misses his one shot.

Set against Toronto's gentrifying streets and its vibrant music scene, "*Boxcutter* finds its strength in those within the community who believe in you when you might not always believe in yourself" (*Cinema Axis*).



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I spent over 10 years working in Toronto's music industry as a radio personality (OTA Live on FLOW 93.5 FM), studio engineer, producer, and artist manager. With *Boxcutter*, I'm bridging my "second life" as a filmmaker with my "first love," music. Toronto has had a thriving hip-hop scene since the 80s, but it's only in recent years that the world has started to truly take notice. The success of artists like Drake and The Weeknd, coupled with the rise of social media and the internet, has finally shone a spotlight on what's happening up north—recognition that's long overdue.

Despite the growing excitement around Toronto's hip-hop and R&B scene, we still don't have our *Juice*, *Dope*, or even *Gimme The Loot*. *Boxcutter* aims to be that film—a bold, energetic narrative, unfolding in a single day, that puts the Toronto hip-hop community on the big screen. But this isn't your cliché hip-hop film. There are no drugs, no guns, no struggling single mother, and no shady record deals. There's no scene where our hero spontaneously breaks into rhyme. Instead, the film tries to offer a grounded, realist approach to two young people grappling with their identity and struggling to recognize the place they call home.

Shooting-wise, we approached each scene with intention, letting the characters' emotions guide the camera's movement. We kept the film's pace dynamic by having the characters in constant motion and shooting in a new location every day. Whether it was walk-and-talks, energetic running sequences, lock-offs, or hand-held floating shots, our goal was to capture Toronto and its people with honesty and beauty.

Lastly, *Boxcutter* is a summer movie. I'm tired of the cold, northern Canada that we see in so many films. We shot in the heart of summer, in the heart of the city—Toronto for Toronto. The sights, sounds, and energy of the city are captured in every frame.

Hope you enjoy the ride,
Rez

KEY CHARACTERS



ROME, 20, is an aspiring rapper tired of working in a warehouse. There's only one problem though – the perfectionist in him is too insecure to actually release any music. Afraid of not being good enough, Rome naively believes that the only path to success is through the endorsement of a celebrity co-sign. So, when a music super-producer makes a surprise appearance in downtown Toronto, Rome sees an opportunity to get his foot in the industry door. But on the day of the big event his apartment is robbed of everything, including his music. On a quest to find his songs in time, Rome must confront his fears of failure and learn what it means to be a vulnerable artist in a time where popularity is valued more than originality.



JENAYA, 19, is an activist-artist fiercely committed to speaking truth to power. Accompanying Rome on his quest, she depicts the dangers of gentrification in her art using the whole city as her canvas. However, her ideas conflict with Rome's. Jenaya's steadfastness and determination is only wavered when gearing up for her first corporate job. Feelings of doubt crack through her armour as she battles with marketing executives and the age-old question of art vs. commerce. Tackling apathy and the erasure of a community, Jenaya must do what she can to save a city from itself.



SID, 20, is an aspiring music manager living on Rome's couch while managing his career. His practical approach to the music business often clashes with Rome's artistic vision. After leaving home due to a lack of family support, Sid is at a crossroads, unsure of his future if Rome's career doesn't take off soon.

ACTORS' BIOS



ASHTON JAMES as ROME

Ashton James is one of Canada's most promising young actors. A graduate of the prestigious CFC Actors Conservatory, his talent was recognized with a 2023 Canadian Screen Award nomination for his standout role in CBC's *Revenge of the Black Best Friend*.

James continues to build an impressive resume, with recent recurring roles in *Beyond Black Beauty* (Amazon/Family), Carlton Cuse's *Five Days at Memorial* (AppleTV+), and Season 2 of the hit series *Law & Order Toronto* (Citytv). Ashton is set to star in the lead role of *Youngblood*, a highly anticipated remake of the 1980s classic film.



ZOE LEWIS as JENAYA

Zoe Lewis is a rising talent, making her acting debut while captivating audiences as an R&B singer-songwriter. Known for her soulful voice and magnetic stage presence, Zoe brings a raw authenticity to her performance that translates effortlessly to the screen. Though new to acting, her natural charisma and emotional depth make her a standout in her first major role. Zoe is a hidden gem ready to shine.



VIPHUSAN VANI as SID

Viphusan Vani is a Tamil-Canadian actor born and raised in Toronto, Ontario. He left an indelible impression on the production team after his first audition – which he did between classes from his college library! From that moment on, we knew he was something special. As an emerging artist, he is dedicated to growing his craft and continuing to tell stories that resonate on a personal and emotional level.

CAMEOS

In *Boxcutter* we're excited to feature real and respected figures from Toronto's hip-hop and creative arts scene



Rich Kidd as "Richie Hill"

- Two-time Juno winning artist and producer
- Produced songs with Drake, Busta Rhymes, and Kendrick Lamar



RUSSELL! as "Shorts"

- R&B Singer & Producer
- 600K+ followers on socials
- 25 million + streams
- 5.3M YouTube channel views



Clairmont the Second as "Eric"

- Juno, Polaris & Prism nominated artist
- SOCAN Songwriting Prize shortlist



Junia-T as "Del"

- Official DJ for Global Superstar Jessie Reyez
- Juno and Polaris Nominated
- Over 10 million + streams



Neema Naz as "Carrier"

- Tik Tok famous Comedian / Actor
- 400K+ IG followers
- 600K+ TikTok followers



Parveen Kaur as "Condo Guard"

- 450K followers on IG
- Saanvi on Manifest (NBC / WB / Netflix)
- Netflix #1 in the U.S. for 19 days Broke
- Netflix streaming record



Marlon Palmer as "Streetcar Guy"

- Actor and stand-up comedian
- 28 million + views
- FLOW 98.7 FM morning show host
- Extragravy Podcast Host



THE MAKING OF

Throughout the process of making the film, we prioritized POC crew members, artists with longstanding histories in the hip-hop scene, and Toronto's underserved communities.

For casting, we took a non-traditional approach and collaborated with many non-professional actors from the communities we filmed in. At our core, we are invested in uplifting new talent and value the ideas that lived experiences can bring to the screen.

And we had a blast doing it.



32 LOCATIONS 26 UNIT MOVES

Our small but mighty crew made magic happen over our 21 days of shooting. We shot across the GTA changing locations literally every day. Toronto is a main character in the film and gave us so much colour, texture and style.

Made in Toronto with love.



KEY CREATIVES

REZA DAHYA - DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

Reza Dahya is known for his work as a host and producer of OTA Live on FLOW 93.5 FM in Toronto. He transitioned into filmmaking with his short films, ESHA and the crowd-funded FIVE DOLLARS, which premiered at the TIFF Kids International Film Festival, screened internationally and aired on CBC's "Canadian Reflections". A 2015 alumnus of the Canadian Film Centre's Cineplex Entertainment Film Program Directors' Lab, Dahya completed his CFC Short Film, CHAMELEON, the independent THE WORST PART and is currently releasing his feature film debut, BOXCUTTER.

CHRIS CROMIE - WRITER

Chris Cromie is a screenplay writer and music & sports journalist. His work has appeared across a multitude of formats including Soccer 360 magazine, FLOW 93.5 FM and The Score television network. His first three produced short films, ESHA, FIVE DOLLARS and CHAMELEON have all screened internationally with FIVE DOLLARS premiering at the TIFF Kids International Film Festival and both FIVE DOLLARS and CHAMELEON airing nationally on CBC's "Canadian Reflections" television show. Born and raised in Belfast, Northern Ireland, he emigrated at age 18 to Toronto, Canada where he currently resides.

JAMES KLOPKO - CINEMATOGRAPHER

Award-winning cinematographer James Klopko csc has built a solid portfolio of dramatic work including the internationally acclaimed Canadian independent drama SLEEPING GIANT, winner of 11 international awards and nominee for the Critics Week Grand Prize and the Golden Camera at the Cannes Film Festival. His other works include I PUT A HIT ON YOU starring Aaron Ashmore and Sarah Canning, Vimeo Staff Pick short film FLANKERS, and winner of the Canadian Society of Cinematography (CSC) award for Best Documentary Cinematography KAHA:WI : THE CYCLE OF LIFE.

SOKO NEGASH - PRODUCER

Soko Negash is a Toronto-based producer dabbling in doc, scripted, podcasts, and lots in between. Some things she's proud of: working on all four seasons of Netflix's Emmy-winning HIP-HOP EVOLUTION (Banger Films) and producing WITNESS, a doc series about viral videos for CBC Gem (Scarborough Pictures) that premiered at Hot Docs festival 2023. She recently co-produced Amar Wala's debut feature, SHOOK (TIFF '24). Soko is also an alumni of the Netflix/Hot Docs' Doc Accelerator program, Black Screen Office Producer's Program, Black Women Film! Canada, and RealScreen's Pathways Mentorship program.

EPS

RODRIGO BASCUÑÁN - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Rodrigo Bascuñán is an award-winning writer, producer, and director. Rodrigo has worked as a writer and producer on shows such as MuchMusic's The NewMusic, CTV's 4Real, and the CBC's George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight. Before launching Scenario, he wrote and produced the Emmy and Peabody winning docuseries Hip-Hop Evolution (Netflix Original). He is also known for founding Canada's largest hip-hop magazine (Pound) and co-authoring Enter the Babylon System, a look at gun violence through the eyes of the hip-hop generation—which became a bestseller and was nominated for the Governor General's Award.

DARBY WHEELER - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Darby Wheeler is an award-winning television director, producer, and writer, with over 20 years of experience. Some highlights include: developing Canada's only late-night talk show for the CBC, George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight; and producing for MuchMusic's The NewMusic, and Canada's only urban music TV shows MuchVibe and RapCity. Recently, Darby directed the award-winning, Dead Set on Life, for Vice, and directed and produced the Netflix Original, Hip-Hop Evolution, which won a Canadian Screen Award, a Peabody, and an International Emmy.

ANUPA MISTRY - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Anupa Mistry is a writer and producer. For a decade she worked as a music critic, editor, and occasional talking head with The FADER, Pitchfork, and Red Bull Music Academy. As a filmmaker she specializes in the creative development and production of stories at the intersection of radical history, culture, and human ingenuity. She wrote and produced for THIS IS POP (Banger Films) and BLACK LIFE: UNTOLD STORIES (Northwood Entertainment), and is producing two forthcoming music documentaries by Scenario Media: TURTLE ISLAND RAP and DILLA TIME. As a development consultant she has worked with Canadian and international filmmakers commissioned and supported by Onyx Collective/Disney+, Independent Production Fund, bildundtonfabrik (Germany), and the Regent Park Film Festival.

TANIA SARRA - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Tania is a seasoned film executive with 14 years of experience, starting in PR and advancing to senior roles in international rights sales, acquisitions, and content strategy. She has led sales teams for UK-based independent studios and executive produced original films. Most recently, she headed buying and distribution for MGM Studios across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Named a Future Leader by Screen International and an Upcoming Executive by The Business of Film, she also serves on the London Film Academy's Advisory Board. In 2020, Tania founded Hot Sauce, a boutique consulting firm specializing in producing and creative direction for major film and TV projects, while mentoring and developing programs to support emerging talent in the industry.

MUSIC



HARRISON, COMPOSER

Harrison Robinson, mononymously known as Harrison, is a Canadian electronic musician from Toronto. He is most noted as a two-time Juno Award nominee for Electronic Album of the Year, receiving nods at the 2017 Junos for Checkpoint Titanium and the 2024 Junos for Birds, Bees, the Clouds and the Trees.

STREAMING

10MIL+ ON 2023 ALBUM. 20MIL+ ON CATALOGUE.

"HARRISON CREATES A CRATE-DIGGER'S PARADISE WITH DREAMY SOUL, BEAT-SCENE JAZZ AND PRISMATIC POP-R&B." – FADER

SOUNDTRACK

A Toronto hip-hop movie wouldn't be complete without Toronto hip-hop. We're proud to feature a 100% Canadian soundtrack featuring some of Toronto's most acclaimed talent.

**LOU PHELPS
FEAT. JAZZ CARTIER
(PROD. KAYTRANADA)**

DIJAHSB

ADRIA KAIN

**JUNIA-T
FEAT. SEAN LEON &
RIVER TIBER**

LEILA DAY

LUNA ELLE

JAYDINK & LEX JR.

JIMMY PRIME

**CLAIRMONT THE
SECOND**

KEY CREDITS

Director: Reza Dahya

Producers: Soko Negash & Reza Dahya

Screenwriter: Chris Cromie

Editor: Reza Dahya

Executive Producers: Rodrigo Bascuñán, Darby Wheeler, Anupa Mistry, Tania Sarra

Associate Producers: Kirthiga Rajanayagam, Alison Almeida

Starring: Ashton James, Zoe Lewis, Viphusan Vani

Director of Photography: James Klopko

Composer: Harrison

Casting Director: Tannaz Keshavarz

Production Designer: Meryl Alyssa Romo

Costume Designer: Chantel Bedward

Key Hair & Makeup: Keisha Kerr



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