



## Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema

Jonathan Burger/Anchor Bay Films Rapulana Seiphemo in "Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema."

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"Jerusalema," in the awkward title "Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema," has two meanings, neither of which involves the Middle East. It refers to a figurative city on a hill, the promise of dignity and economic equality held out to black South Africans at the end of apartheid; and a literal one, the Johannesburg neighborhood Hillbrow, where that promise dissolved into poverty and rampant crime.

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Jonathan Burger/Anchor Bay Films  
Jafta Mamabolo and Motlatsi Mahloko.

The writer and director, Ralph Ziman, chose to tell the story of post-apartheid South Africa as a gangster tale, loosely based on actual events. Making just his third feature in a long career devoted mostly to music videos, he gorges on the stock elements of the genre: the studious child entranced by the neighborhood thug (in this case a former Marxist revolutionary), the sick mother, the trusting siblings, the new girlfriend from the upper class, the loved ones caught in the crossfire, the climactic rooftop encounter. The nearly two-hour running time allows for lots of plot. The hero, Lucky Kunene (Rapulana Seiphemo), goes straight not once, but twice in the course of the movie.



Between Mr. Ziman's music-video skills and his close approximation of the kinetic style of Michael Mann (a scene from Mr. Mann's "Heat" has a key role in the plot), it's easy to overlook the formulas and just enjoy the ride. It helps too that the urban setting, with the distinctively eerie Hillbrow telecommunications tower always looming in the background, is new (to American viewers) and interesting, and that Mr. Seiphemo and Jeffrey Sekele, as Lucky's mentor in crime, are convincing.

-- Mike Hale

Source: NEW YORK TIMES

<http://movies.nytimes.com/2010/06/11/movies/11gangster.html>