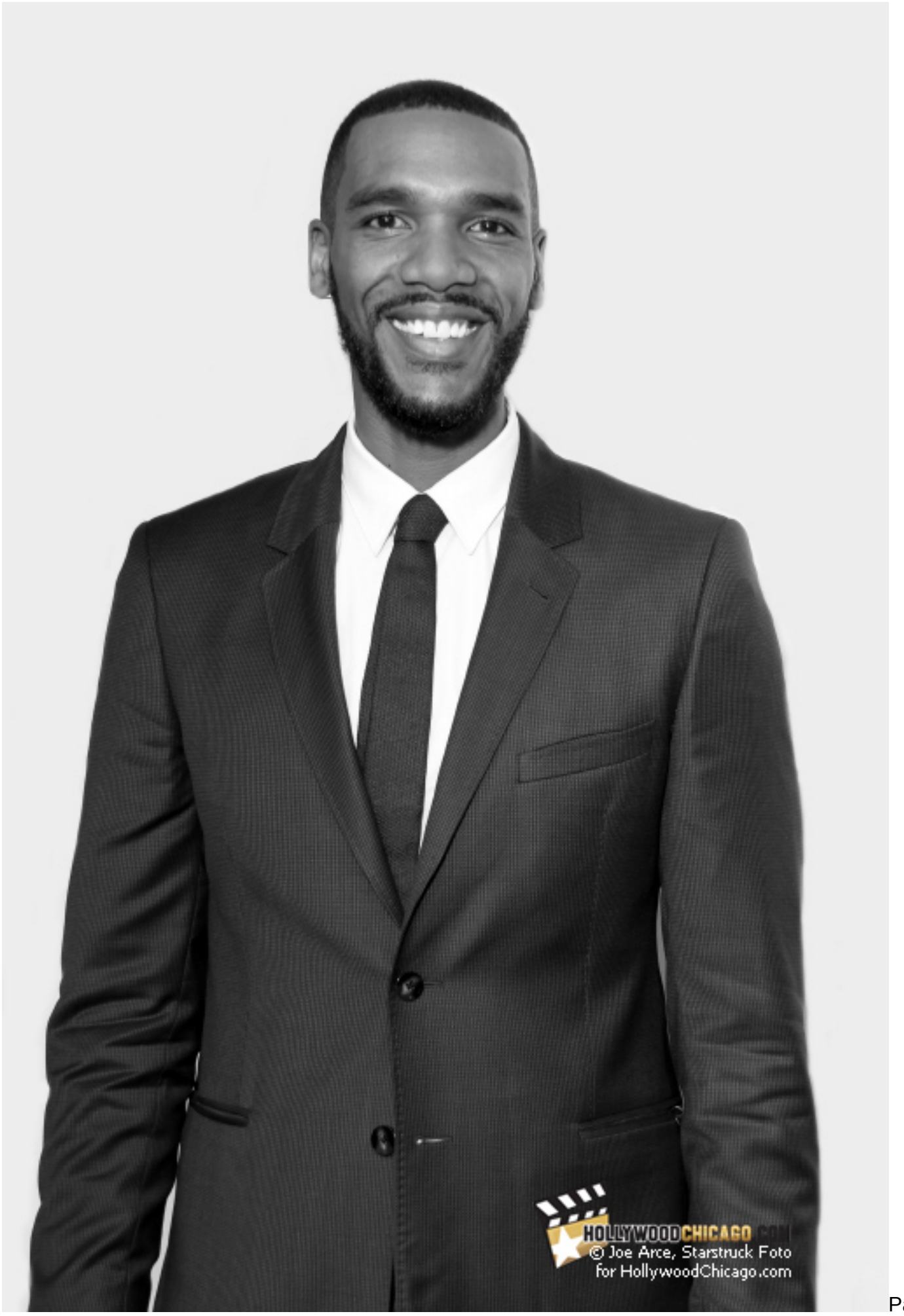
Slideshow: ‘Southside With You’ Red Carpet, Press Conference featuring John Legend

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on August 30, 2016 - 9:51am

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Parker Sawyers portrays young Barack Obama in ‘Southside with You.’

CHICAGO – There are previous examples of films that were made with a president as a character while he was in office, including “P.T. 109” (John F. Kennedy, war story), “W.” (George W. Bush, Oliver Stone biography) and “Yankee Doodle Dandy” (Franklin D. Roosevelt, cameo). President Barack Obama has joined their ranks, but the subject matter of “Southside With You” is decidedly different. The film chronicles his first date with Michelle Robinson, now the First Lady.

Conceived, written and directed by Richard Tanne, “Southside With You” is a charming day-in-the-life first date that pairs the young Barack Obama (Parker Sawyers) – ex-Chicago community organizer and freshly minted Harvard Law School grad – with Michelle Robinson (Tika Sumpter). There are glimpses of Michelle’s home life, with her mother Marian (Vanessa Bell Calloway) and father Fraser (Phillip Edward Van Lear). Filmed on location in Chicago, the film also highlights the vibrancy of the city’s much-maligned Southside neighborhoods. It was also Executive Produced by singer John Legend, and opened nationwide on August 26th, 2016.

HollywoodChicago.com attended the Red Carpet (see link below), and the press conference for the principal cast (Sawyers, Sumpter and Calloway), writer/director Richard Tanne and Executive Producer John Legend. Here are the highlights…

HollywoodChicago.com: John, I’m impressed with your background in education, and your core study of African American culture and issues. By producing and promoting this film, and writing the song ‘Glory’ for the film ‘Selma,’ what do you want to represent about the African American legacy in American culture, and American history?

John Legend: As a creator, producer and someone who is responsible about putting out art, I always want to put light out into the world, with products that are provocative. And particularly when we talked about #OscarSoWhite this year, I want to see a diverse range of characters and

interests on the screen as well. So the film company wants to highlight those stories not being told, along with vital communities and subcultures. We need different faces and voices on screen.

That does come from my passion and study in college. When I first went to the library as a kid, I was reading about Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr., those big important lives that made such a difference with their courage, and willingness to stand up for what was right. When I look at these projects, some of them are political and some are not, but it is my job to put this beauty and light into the world.

QUESTION: Why was this film important to you?

Vanessa Bell Calloway: It was important to me after I read the script. I loved the love story, but mostly I love the Obamas so much. To me, this was going to be a piece of movie history, especially coming out of their last year in office. It was a no-brainer for me, I even flew myself here because it was low budget. I told Richard, don’t worry, I’ll get there. I wasn’t going to let anyone else get the part. [laughs]

Tika Sumpter: For me, the script was just so rich and full, and as black actors you don’t get scripts like this. You also often don’t see two black people falling in love in the movies, and the complexities of it all. I wanted to be part of it, and it was special. It was literally two people walking and talking, knowing each other and unfolding, it was a beautiful journey. I heard a story about an eight year old girl who asked her parents, after seeing the film, ‘did you fall in love like that?’ There are kids who are going to see this, and be inspired by it.

Richard Tanne: I wanted to tell a story about a love that felt real, and show some of the moments that a mainstream film romance would leave on the cutting room floor. The awkward glances, the silences and the probing back-and-forth that happens when you really get to know somebody. And what happens when that person really holds a mirror up to you, and show you who you can be, and elevate each other. It also became an experience of stepping outside of myself, in my own life as a white guy. It opened the doors of empathy, seeing things through another perspective. That is a theme in the film as well, so it was no accident. It was a privilege to expand personally like that.

Parker Sawyers: I just needed the job. [laughs] The script was refreshing, because I grew up with 1980s and ‘90s movies, and I hadn’t seen a script like that in a long time. The pacing, the heavy dialogue, the walking/talking, two characters getting to know each other and expressing themselves fully, all of what has made them to that point. I jumped at the opportunity to be part of something like that.

Legend: Like everyone on the panel, I’m a big fan of Obama, and have supported him politically since the beginning of his presidency. So yes, it’s natural that I’d get involved in an Obama movie, but this particular film to me had to do with scope. We could always do the big biography film, but I think it’s more interesting just to focus on a single moment.

That approach was exciting to me, rather than try to take on their entire lives. By focusing on the intimacy and small conversations – despite these characters going onto greatness – their first date was pretty simple. It was sweet, romantic and uneasy…all the things first dates are. I think there will be more films about the Obamas, but this is a great first film about them.

Photographer Joe Arce of HollywoodChicago.com was on the Red Carpet, during the Chicago premiere of “Southside With You” at Chicago’s Music Box Theatre on August 18th, and took these Exclusive Portraits of the cast and John Legend, Executive Producer of the film. Click “Next” and “Previous” to scan through the slideshow or jump directly to individual photos with the captioned links below. All photos © Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com.

1. SOUTHSIDE1 [23]: John Legend, Executive Producer of ‘Southside With You.’
2. SOUTHSIDE2 [24]: Parker Sawyers portrays young Barack Obama in ‘Southside With You.’
3. SOUTHSIDE3 [22]: Tika Sumpter portrays future First Lady Michelle Robinson in the film.
4. SOUTHSIDE4 [25]: Vanessa Bell Calloway as Marian Robinson in the film.
5. SOUTHSIDE5 [26]: Writer and director Richard Tanne of ‘Southside With You.’

CLICK HERE **[27] for the HollywoodChicago.com Red-Carpet video coverage of the Chicago premiere of “Southside With You.”**

”Southside With You” is in theaters now. Featuring Parker Sawyers, Tika Sumpter, Vanessa Bell Calloway and Phillip Edward Van Lear. Written and directed by Richard Tanne. Rated “PG-13”

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