

# Top 10 South African films of 2016

 By [daniel dercksen](#)

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Local has indeed been lekker in 2016, with more than 30 films released in South Africa. Here are the films that had a visceral and emotional impact, allowing us to see the world through home-grown eyes.

## 1. My Father's War

A touching and inspired exploration of the flawed relationship between a father and his rebellious teenage son with outstanding performances by Edwin van der Walt as a conflicted young man who is constantly at war with his father, a veteran of the Angola border war, with an equally powerhouse performance by Stian Bam as a man torn between a past that shattered his life, and a future that holds little promise. Erica Wessels is also superb as the wife who is caught in the middle of their epic battle. The men don't see eye to eye on anything, and there seems to be no hope for reconciliation between them. A wonderful experience from writer-director Craig Gardner.

## 2. Modder en Bloed

In this emotional journey into the heart and soul of a war that divided a nation, reconciled revenge forces underdogs to triumph in the spirit of togetherness. It's a poignant story of man versus himself when incarcerated with other Boer prisoners-of-war on the island of St. Helena in the Atlantic Ocean, but also the story of Afrikaner men tortured emotionally and physically by a monstrous British tyrant during the Anglo Boer War of 1899-1902, as well as the story of a British woman who redeems herself through the horrors she witnesses. Under the thoughtful direction of writer-director Sean Else, the ensemble cast shines, particularly Sian Bam as a Boer warrior and family man, whose wife and only child were killed by British soldiers; Grant Swanby as a hot-headed Imperialist who is in charge of the English concentration camp and rages with a consuming hatred for the Afrikaner. It's difficult to single out individual performances in such a strong cast, but it's hard to ignore Marno van der Merwe as the cocky Boer, Altus Theart as a heroic stalwart, and Charlotte Salt as the British Imperialist.

### 3. Free State

This heartbreaking romance is set in 1979 and tells the story of a forbidden love affair between Jeanette – a white Afrikaans girl – and Ravi – an Indian man. The film is written and directed by multi-award winning filmmaker Sallas de Jager. “The film explores the predicament of a parent and child relationship within three families when they are confronted by the ripple effect of the forbidden love affair between Ravi and Jeanette. The parents are confronted by the need of a parent for your child to find true happiness versus the need for your child to uphold the way of life taught to him/her from childhood in order to fit into a community as an adult.

### 4. ‘n Pawpaw Vir My Darling

Family. You want to live without them, but can’t survive without them. That’s the essence of Koos Roets’ quirky satire ‘n Paw Paw Vir My Darling, which takes us on a humorous and heartfelt journey into the hearts and souls of a needy Afrikaner family living in the fictional Damnvil in 2003. This is based on an idea which Roets skilfully adapted from Jeanne Goosen’s bestseller that offered her intelligent and sharp observation and understanding of the psyche of characters and their reactions to the social, cultural and political milieu in which they find themselves. The film adaptation aptly celebrates the core of Goosen’s work, although at heart it’s a brilliant social satire in the tradition of Siener in die Suburbs and Triomf. It’s equally a women’s film that acutely addresses issues of women finding their worth in work and home, but also a human drama about a family that tries to unite dramatically and comically, and also addresses serious issues like cancer with dark overtones.

## 5. Die Ontwaking

A grisly, mesmerising thriller that investigates the mind and motivations of an acutely intelligent serial killer, marking the impressive directorial debut of acclaimed production designer Johnny Breedt (Paljas, Hotel Rwanda, A Long Walk to Freedom). Hailed as a game-changer for South African film, Die Ontwaking is based on the first book of the 'Abel' trilogy, Abel se Ontwaking (translated into English as The Skin Collector), by well known crime writer Chris Karsten. Says Breedt: "I really wanted to be challenged as a filmmaker and wanted to do the same with my audience, take them to a place where they do not necessarily want to go."

## 6. Noem My Skollie

If you are looking for a gritty and hardcore prison drama, Noem My Skollie features Dann Jaques Mouton (last seen in Abraham) delivering a touching performance as a man who grows up on the impoverished ganglands of Cape Flats in the 1960s. It tells the tragic story of four teenagers, AB (Austin Rose) and his three best friends Gimba (Ethan Patton), Gif (Joshua Vraagom) and Shorty (Valentino de Klerk), and their vicious journey into adulthood. It's the autobiographical story of screenwriter John W. Fredericks who takes us into the hardship of prison life, but also the story of a man who find life in a hellish existence.

## **7. Sy Klink Soos Lente**

A refreshing revival of the Afrikaans Romantic Comedy genre, with Corné van Rooyen's sensitive directing style and Stiaan Smith's fresh script create a wonderful background for Amalia Uys and Smith's gripping performances which pull out all the emotional stops. It's a delightful tale of a mechanic (Smith) who falls in love with a beautiful and brainy redhead (Uys) who is the daughter of his boss at a car dealership in Johannesburg. The chemistry between Smith and Uys is pure magic and when the sparks begin to fly, the mechanic spins a white lie and tells her he's the lead singer in a band.

## **8. Wonder Boy for President**

Writer-director John Barker turned politics inside out and upside down with his biting independent mockumentary. Funnyman Kagiso Lediga steps into the shoes of Wonder Boy, a charismatic and authoritative young man from the Eastern Cape, who is coerced into running for president by two dubious and corrupt characters played by Ntosh Madlingozi and Tony Miyambo. Their aim is to mould him into a great politician and manufacture his downfall at the right time, for the right price. It is a political satire that delves into political dynamics and challenges that arise.

## **9. Dis Koue Kos, Skat**

A charming local film that features Anna-Mart van der Merwe in top form as a renowned food writer Clara, who discovers that her husband is cheating on her with one of her best friends and moves to Cape Town with her two kids where she rediscovers her true nature, and gloriously uncovers the allure of food in romance! Clara undergoes this journey not only of healing, but of rediscovering her passions in life, all the while plotting her revenge on her ex husband and his new, much younger wife. Deon Lotz is equally brilliant as the cheating husband with Frank Opperman ideally cast as a restaurant owner and chef who has a peculiar food fetish. Elzabe Zietsman is also fantastic as the best friend and matchmaker who adds to the humour in the story of love lost, and ultimately found in the strangest of places.

## **10. Noma**

Challenging conventional filmmaking, Pablo Pinedo is very much an auteur when it comes to his well-researched and structured Noma, using his skills as producer, writer, director and cinematographer to create an impressionistic documentary that is different from traditional filmmaking. Noma tells the story of Nomaliphathwe Gwele, a 25 year old single mother of two, who lives in a backyard in a rented shack, and wants to improve her life. To do that she decides to join a land occupation action to build her own shack in the new settlement but risking violent evictions.

[NOMA\\_Trailer](#) from [EveryWhere Films](#) on [Vimeo](#).

*For more information on other local releases that made an impact in 2016, visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)*

## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)

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