Written by TTS
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Neba Lawrence is a film director par excellence. His upbringing in film directing is comfortably solid. He learns fast and easily acquires the skills. From one movie to the other, the young director has displayed a mark improvement in his work. Little doubt, an actress swore if it wasn't Larry, as the film director is sometimes affectionately called, she was not going to come on set. Many film makers, including Nollywood's Emeka Ike have hailed Neba for his talent. But for all of that, the Yaounde-based film director remains a humble person and would hesitate to talk about his achievements. To him, he is yet to begin. His humility and soft-spoken approach is perhaps what charms the people around him. Recently, Neba directed a trans-national movie, starring Emeka Ike, Tonto Dike and Solange Yijika, to name these few. It was another big challenge, but the young Cameroonian came out successful. I caught up with him, soon after lamps and the camera on his set were switched off. Amongst other things, Neba said it was a memorable production in his life as a budding film director.

Excerpts:

Ernest Kanjo (EK): Hello, Larry!

Neba Lawrence (NL): Hi, Ernest!

EK: You've just rounded off with the Ayi Chatou Inoua production which was a huge project...

NL: Exactly!

EK: You should be worn out now!

NL: That's correct, I'm really tired, having been on set for 11 days.

EK: You found time to eat something and rest during the production, I guess.

NL: Hahaha, yeah, just a little sleep though!

EK: So, how would you evaluate the production?

NL: Generally, it was a good one. I loved the experience. But I must say it was quite challenging working as a full-time director of a trans-national movie project. Such projects you know, are not common. There are quite expensive and require enormous diligence. Also, I was directing some of Africa's most valuable actors and the bests we have here in Cameroon.

EK: Tell me, how did you feel, directing a mega star like Emeka Ike? Were you scared initially?

NL: Hahahahaha, you're not serious Ernest, why would I be scared? Well, I've been directing for some time now and so I was merely doing what I've been used to. Fortunate, Emeka is a nice person to work with. He respected his director, was humble and committed. He was cordial and ready to do whatever thing his director wanted him to. This was my source of inspiration and probably the reason for the success we recorded in the production.

EK: You also had to deal with yet another mega star, Tonto Dike...

NL: Yes, Tonto's performance was quite pleasing. I was elated. A few times she was a little bit impatient, but I made sure everything was ok. Tonto always consulted me if there was need. She obeyed my directives on set and gave me just what I need. She was a good artist to work with.

EK: Kalu Joyce..

NL: Eeemmmm, she's such a brilliant elderly actress. I had no difficulty directing her. She is wonderful and I'll like to work with her again and again.

EK: Solange Yijika seemed to have caught everyone's attention...

NL: Including the director...hahahahhah, Yeah, you know she has always been good. It was not different this time. I was happy with her performance, so too were our guest actors.

EK: We realised the atmosphere between you and the Nigerian cinematographer was cordial...

NL: Superb! NG1 is a wonderful person. Let me say that the success of the project will largely depend on his expertise. I pray for another opportunity to work with him. He's a big bro...hahahhahaa.

EK: How would you assess the performance of the Cameroonian actors?

NL: As usual, they were good on set. Each person did their home work and delivered when the time came. I was proud of them and would urge the actors to work harder and harder. They fitted in the game.

EK: Let me take you back, why did you accept this job?

NL: I had two other jobs before Ayi Chatou contacted me. I went through her story and found it interesting. Then, her sincerity and seriousness attracted me to the job which I accepted. I was certain it was going to be a hit movie.

EK: One would have thought you accepted the job because the movie was going to have Nollywood stars, starring...

NL: Not at all! I just said Ayi Chatou's story was a convincing one and she was quite serious about the project.

EK: So, how did the mention of Nollywood artists make you feel initially?

NL: Normal! This was not going to be my maiden experience with Nollywood actors. Recently, I worked as an assistant director in a movie starring Jim Iyke. That was in Bafut. So, I was just

going to continue in that light. However, directing actors who've not only been on the job for long, but who have worked with more experienced directors is a plus to my career, I believe.

EK: Talking about the producer, what do you make of her?

NL: Aicha is a wonderful person. She is a brave girl who will go places in the industry. Let me use this opportunity to thank her for bestowing confidence in me and handing over the project to me. In fact, I score Aicha 150% on 100, permit me say that, it comes from the bottom of my heart. I won't hesitate to do many more projects with her. She is simply great!

EK: So, what does Neba Lawrence aim at now?

NL: Do you want me to say bigger projects with big names? No, no..hahahha. Ernest, I began from somewhere and would not under look any project. Projects are big because of the people who execute them. I would accept any project and try to give in my best.

EK: Any project in the pipeline?

NL: When the time comes, you'll know.

EK: You may like to pay tribute to a few persons, especially after the brilliant job you just did.

NL: Certainly! Let me thank God for the breathe, skill and every other thing. My parents have been very supportive. I thank them immensely. I must express my sincere gratitude to the Minister of Culture Ama Tutu Muna who gave us her benediction a day before shooting commenced. I can't forget GONIKS PRODUCTIONS, the Nigeria marketer who has been very instrumental in moulding me and guiding my choices. I benefited from the moral support of Musing Derick, Fondo Fred and some other producer/directors who visited me on location. I'm quite grateful to them.

EK: Larry, it was nice talking with you.

NL: Thanks a lot Ernest.

EK: Hope you'll receive me for another interview when I do request for it.

NL: I'll always do that, be rest assured.

EK: Bye for now!

NL: Have a nice time!