

Written by Ernest Kanjo

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# EXCLUSIVE

with Ernest Kanjo

Meet Cameroon film makers in exclusive interview

“I’M A HUMBLE ACTOR



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- I want to transform society through cinema
- I’ve starred and featured in so many movies
- I don’t accept every scripts
- I belong to the Producers’ Guild of Cameroon
- Collywood will go places, give us only five years
- Collywood, Nollywood, we are one
- CRTV is now open to us
- Engwari goes to Africa Magic, then to AMAA
- I’m a devout Christian
- Nothing can separate me and my kati kati

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Chiatoh Collins wears many caps. He is always on the move. If he is not consulting at the

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Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JAICA), he is consulting at the Cameroon Chamber of Commerce. He hasn't really got time to spend at home and enjoy with his two lovely boys and their mum because he is either serving at his Limbe-based Pharmaceutical firm, where he is Human Resource Manager or facilitating a workshop. He would tirelessly dash to Yaounde, Bamenda, Kumba, Buea, etc to handle issues of the Collywood. But what caught my attention about Collins was an art he knows best – acting. One fine evening in December 2007, I happened on a copy of Illusion, a movie done in Bamenda. Less than an hour into the movie, I halted. “This guy is great, I think he’ll make it. I told the friend who had served me with Illusion. “Chiatoh Collins is one of the best actors we have so far,” he replied. It was at the mention of the name that I recalled we had profiled him in Among Youths earlier that year. I watched the rest of Illusion and was not disappointed. Rather, I was amazed and Collins had convinced me that Cameroon had talented actors.

### **Two Weeks Later..**

We are at the Cameroon Cultural Centre in Yaounde for a workshop that marked the festival leading the first edition of the ACE Awards. Some well-built fair-complexioned gentleman is given the floor. Just like a teacher, he lectures. He is not only fluent at speech, but he speaks decent English. His ideas are brilliant. “But I know him somewhere,” I told myself. “Aha, this is the guy who performed thrillingly in Illusion.” As soon as we are out of the hall, I move up to him. “I know you,” I invited Collins for the conversation that ended with him offering me a copy of one of his movies. The following months revealed that Collins was a heavy weight in the Industry We had planned this interview long ago, but his very busy schedule won't let us do it. When we met on location yesterday, I pulled him off set for a while. “If I do not interview you now, the next moment I'll hear you're in Limbe,” I said. “You're right bro,” he confirmed. He was a brilliant interviewee. {/xtypo\_rouned2} Excerpts

### **THE PERSON – CHIATOH COLLINS**

Ernest Kanjo (EK): Who is Chiatoh Collins?

Chiatoh Collins (CC): I'm a young Cameroonian, born in 1974 in Kom in the North West Region. I went to primary and secondary school in Kom, then moved over to Bamenda where I did high school. I studied in the University of Yaounde I from where I obtained a B.A in Philosophy. I have had a lot of informal training in several disciplines. I believe a lot in learning.

### **CHIATOH THE ACTOR**

E.K: For how long have you been acting?

C.C: Since 2003. Six years now.

E.K: What inspired you into acting?

C.C: I was inspired by my unending desire to transform society for the general good of the people who live in it. I realised that this could be done via movies.

E.K: Have you been able to do that?

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C.C: Not quite. I think there is a long way to go and I hope some day, I'll hit my chest and say I've been able to help society through movies.

E.K: Could you cite some movies you've either starred or featured in?

C.C: They are quite many. I'll cite a few – Switching Hearts and Criminal Love both in 2003, Mission to Damunza and Giant Broom in 2004, Brother Joshua, Grains of Honesty and Illusion in 2005.

E.K: Which has been your most challenging movie?

C.C: Mission to Damunza.

E.K: Why?

C.C: It is the wildest movie I ever did. The cast was exceptionally wonderful, so I had to work extremely hard to give the movie the strength is deserved.

E.K: What do you consider are your strength as an actor?

C.C: The ability to master my lines and interact with my co-actors. Also, I have respect for everybody, including directors who could be younger than me. I also communicate well and have a lot of consideration for humility. Finally, I have self-motivation.

E.K: Have you ever had any formal training as an actor?

C.C: No, but I'm very observant and learn a lot.

E.K: How has the public reacted to your performance?

C.C: Positively! Many have appreciated my performance and that to me is a big challenge. I'll definitely not lie on my laurels. Rather, I'll keep working hard to improve on my skills.

E.K: Would you accept every scripts?

C.C: I would only accept scripts that are helpful to society. Scripts that cannot educate or send across a vital message are not meant for me.

E.K: Have you ever been invited to shoot beyond Cameroon?

C.C: After watching my performance in Illusion, Nigerians got interested in me. I was invited twice to feature in some Nigerian movies. Unfortunately, my schedule did not permit me go.

E.K: How would you assess Cameroonian actors?

C.C: They're wonderful. This country is endorsed with a cream of talented actors and actresses. But, talents are lying fallow and our Universities have to develop this sector. There is urgent need for our faculties to create cinema clubs.

#### CHIATOH THE PRODUCER

E.K: I understand you're also a producer...

C.C: Yes! I'm the Executive Secretary of Cable Movies and Blossom Pictures, two film houses that work in collaboration.

E.K: What have you done as a producer?

C.C: I've produced Engwari and co-produced several other movies.

E.K: You would certainly have difficulties...

C.C: Yes, of course, that of mobilizing the necessary resources. It's not easy.

E.K: How do you tackle this?

C.C: We manage the little we get judiciously. We are disciplined and always work as a team, reason why we are able to overcome such difficulties.

E.K: Are you a member of the Producers' Guild?

C.C: Yes! I'm one of the founding fathers of the guild.

#### CHIATOH AND COLLYWOOD

E.K: Chiatoh and Collywood...

C.C: Ah, I'm also a founding father of Collywood.

E.K: How does that make you feel?

C.C: Great! I feel honoured that we are not only writing history, but breaking grounds with the Collywood initiative.

E.K: What necessitated the creation of Collywood?

C.C: We thought it was time we told our story to the world via cinema. It was time our industry rose and face challenges like is the case elsewhere.

E.K: Over seven months on, what has Collywood achieved?

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C.C: We've had a data base of stakeholders in the Cameroonian film industry. We know where who is, when and how we can meet and talk with whoever, what problems we have and how and where we can seek solutions. We've had four conventions, Buea, Bamenda, Yaounde and Kumba. I think we've come a long way.

E.K: Why do you think many have subscribed to Collywood?

C.C: It's a people's thing. It is the unique platform where film makers can meet and deliberate.

E.K: What does Collywood have in the pipeline?

C.C: We are working towards legalising the structure.

E.K: Collywood and the Ministry of Culture...

C.C: Both institutions co-habit convivially. It is a superb relationship, encouraged by Ama Tutu Muna, Minister of Culture. She has asked us not to relent our efforts, but should keep showing the world how great we are as film makers. She has pledged her total support for Collywood.

E.K: Could you assess Collywood's presence at the just-ended National Festival of Arts and Culture, FENAC?

C.C: It was fantastic. Everybody got attracted to Collywood. We made several fruitful contacts.

E.K: Collywood and CRTV...

C.C: It's a new dawn between us and CRTV. GM Amadou Vamoulke visited our stand in Maroua and was fascinated with what he saw. He personally gave us his contact and told us they were working on a new policy which will open up to Cameroonian movies.

E.K: There seems to be a growing partnership between Collywood and Nollywood. How healthy is it?

C.C: Very healthy! We are one. We intend to develop this relationship further in the areas of quality production and marketing.

E.K: There is an imbroglio surrounding the branding of the industry. Many people seem to be disturbed about the appellation Collywood. They say it is a manifestation of the lack of creativity. What is this Woods thing all about?

C.C: (Laughs): Woods is the identity of the film industry in the world, not necessarily America, India or Nigeria. It is no imitation, but a common jargon in cinema.

E.K: What future do you envisage for collywood?

C.C: The story will be different in the next five years. We are working. It's definitely going to bloom.

#### CHIATOH AND AWARDS

E.K: Chiatoh and awards...

C.C: I was the first Cameroonian Africa Movie Academy Awards, AMAA in 2006 with Gentle Solution. I was nominated in the best cinematography category. I'll be there this year with two movies.

#### CHIATOH'S PROJECTS

E.K: What are your up-coming projects?

CC: I'm currently working on a 200-episode serial which will be shot in July this year in Bamenda, Limbe and Yaounde. It will be projected on CRTV.

#### CHIATOH AND AFRICA MAGIC

E.K: What is your relationship with Africa Magic?

CC: I came into contact with Africa Magic, thanks to Agbor Gilbert who has been doing a great job as far as linking us to the pan-African entertainment channel is concerned. One of Africa Magic's producers, Wale Akinlabe is a very good friend of mine. Some of my movies have been projected on the channel. Many other Cameroonians have been benefiting from the partnership with Africa Magic which we intend to formalise.

#### THE OTHER SIDE OF CHIATOH

E.K: What is your height?

C.C: 1.85 metres

E.K: Your Weight...

C.C: 85kg

E.K: Your hobbies

C.C: Watching Cameroonian movies.

E.K: Your best African dish...

C.C: Kati Kati, hahahahahahahahahah

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E.K: Your best colour

C.C: Blue

E.K: Your best town in Cameroon...

C.C: Yaounde

E.K: Your best Cameroonian actors...

C.C: Vugar Samsam alias Grand Pa, Muma Pascal, Yimbu Emmanuel and Solange Yijika. I'm looking forward to working with Solange.

E.K: Your best foreign actor...

C.C: Denzel Washington

E.K: Your best sports...

C.C: Volleyball and swimming.

E.K: Who do you like?

C.C: People who are nice.

E.K: Who do you hate?

C.C: I hate atheists.

E.K: Thanks very much Collins for your time. It was wonderful talking with you.

C.C: The pleasure has been mine.

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