



Documentary

A positive attitude

Tyler Rosen's feature-length documentary *Doin' My Drugs* records a trip made by musician Thomas Muchimba Buttenschøn to Zambia in 2015. The film documents Buttenschøn's campaign to change attitudes to HIV in his birth country through the positive power of music. Born to a Zambian mother and a Danish father who visited Zambia with a Danish NGO, Buttenschøn's family moved to Denmark before he was 1 year old. The documentary follows Buttenschøn, whose music contains elements of indie, blues, funk, and jazz, as he meets fellow Zambian activist musicians, such as Danny Kaya, John Chiti (an albino singer), B-Flow (a hip-hop artist), and the Zulu family whom he enlisted to participate in a test-for-ticket concert (free admission to those who get tested for HIV) and to record the documentary's soundtrack album. Although the film's message is sombre, it is interspersed with impromptu and engaging performances and collaborations with other musicians. Many of Buttenschøn's songs have thought-provoking lyrics, such as the song *Doin' My Drugs*, which features in the soundtrack. As well as his musical collaborators, ordinary Zambians and others also give their views to camera.

Writing and performing seem as natural to Buttenschøn as breathing; we see him doing both while walking down the street or sitting in a taxi. His most effective communication is through his songs. Buttenschøn is a talented musician with many hit songs, who is very popular in Denmark, partly because of his role as a judge in the reality programme *Denmark's Got Talent*. Archive clips from another Danish TV programme that documented his father's AIDS appear in the film; in those clips, his father expresses his ambition that his son will have a long and happy life. Buttenschøn had lost both parents by the time he was 9 years old.

With an impressive afro hairdo, Buttenschøn is a striking figure as he walks through impoverished parts of the Zambian capital Lusaka. We see him using his celebrity to publicise his project on radio stations. His efforts are motivated by the stark reality of AIDS in Africa, and Zambia in particular. In Zambia, according to the film, more than 14% of the population are infected with HIV/AIDS.

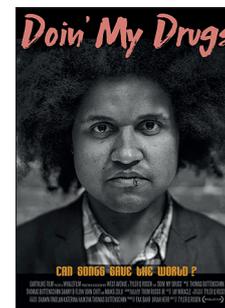
In 2015, Buttenschøn founded the Muchimba Music Foundation, dedicated to creating change and awareness through music. He is not the first pop musician to use his influence to this end. However, he has a particular reason for adopting HIV as his cause: he has been HIV-positive for his whole life. In a telling scene, we see him talking to some young people queueing to be tested. They are surprised to learn not only that he was born with HIV but that he stands before them, now more than 30 years old, in seemingly

good health and a father, with one of his young sons accompanying him. What further surprises them is that the antiretroviral drugs that keep him well (virally suppressed) and unable to transmit HIV have been available to all in Zambia for free since 2005. Yet, people continue to die owing to the stigma around HIV/AIDS; people would often rather live in ignorance than be seen attending a clinic to receive antiretrovirals for fear of being judged for their life choices. Buttenschøn sees normalising testing as a first step toward addressing the Zambian HIV/AIDS crisis. If you know your status, the disease is manageable. In an enlightening, painful to watch scene, we see a man learning of his positive test in a testing tent; the fear in his face at the realisation that he will have to tell his wife is obvious. In Zambia, we learn that men are commonly disowned by their wives when testing positive. The view of a local pastor appearing in the film, that a wife is to blame for a husband's promiscuity, indicates that the country has some way to go before more enlightened attitudes prevail. Buttenschøn advocates talking about HIV, because not talking allows the disease to spread. On a visit to his mother's family, he reveals that his mother's death was AIDS-related; his mother's sisters believed that she had died of malaria, which, of course, might be technically true. As is typical in Zambia, HIV/AIDS is rarely admitted to.

An outsider, albeit with Zambian roots, bereaved as a result of AIDS, who is unencumbered by the normal taboos, and owing to the circumstances of his birth, Buttenschøn is perhaps uniquely positioned to lead such a campaign. Indeed, it could well be that for these reasons, he has an inherent immunity to the scepticism that tends to accompany other wealthy Europeans involved in humanitarian actions in developing countries. Few would, I think, doubt his sincerity. As Buttenschøn says at one point, "there's never been a single day when I don't think about death". He contrasts the situation in Zambia with Denmark where no child is born HIV-positive. Partly as a result of the test-for-ticket concert, there are promising signs that younger Zambians are more likely to learn their status, and Zambia has considerably progressed in halting and beginning to reverse the effects of the epidemic.

Highlights of the 2015 concert are shown toward the end of the film; it proved very successful, and ambitious expansion plans are afoot. Rosen's *Doin' My Drugs* is an engaging spotlight on Buttenschøn's crusade "to end HIV" in Zambia, which effectively illustrates the issues around and encourages continued effort in the ongoing HIV/AIDS battle.

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