

Somebodies Breaks Down TV Barriers

Source: By FRAZIER MOORE
Posted: 09/03/08 2:35PM
Filed Under: [Television](#)



NEW YORK (AP) - Many college students see the diploma that awaits them as their ticket to success.

For Scottie, a perennial undergrad who's having too much fun to be concerned with success, that diploma would be more like his eviction notice. Scottie is the happy-go-lucky hero of *Somebodies*, a new comedy series premiering on cable's BET at 10:30 p.m. ET Sept. 9.

Somebodies is notable in several ways.

It's billed as the first scripted series in BET's 28-year history.

With mostly black characters (notable enough for TV comedies and dramas), it has a funny, fresh angle on student life that should ring true for anyone who ever faced adulthood with let's-don't-be-too-hasty misgivings.

This is Scottie's brand of aversion. He's a party-going, churchgoing, easygoing guy whose unhurried journey of self-discovery is informed by kookie people with conflicting advice on the route he should take.

They include his saucy ex-girlfriend and his four razzing housemates ("I got sperm that's gonna finish college before you do!").

There's a fire-and-brimstone preacher, various eccentric family members, and new acquaintances such as Epitome, the outspoken founder of a campus black pride group whose acronym, B.O.N.C.E.R.S., is pronounced "bonkers" ("There ain't nothing more insane than a black man with a plan," Epitome cackles.)

When Scottie drops by his college counsellor's office hoping to change his major again, she rips into him for never finishing anything he starts. Her warning for where this could lead escalates into a rant that smacks of an updated "Ya Got Trouble" from *The Music Man*:

"Government assistance! Welfare! Rims that cost more than the car! Thirty-three-year-old grandparents! Sneaking chicken into the movie theatre! Red Kool-Aid stains around the baby's mouth!"

Scottie's reaction? A mix of bemusement and sheepish acknowledgment that, maybe, there's a nugget of truth in what she says.

One other thing sets *Somebodies* apart: Hadjii, the mono-monikered whiz who created it, wrote all 10 half-hours, directed several, serves as an executive producer, stars as Scottie - and did it all not in Hollywood or New York, but in cozy Athens, Ga., where he attended the University of Georgia, then, after graduation, made his home.

He also made Athens the home for *Somebodies*, which was filmed there this summer.

It's been a project long in the works for Hadjii, 32. It began years ago with a screenwriting class, where he showed his professor, Nate Kohn, a spec script he had written for *Seinfeld*. Impressed, Kohn encouraged him to write about his own experiences as a black man and native Southerner (he was born and raised in the coastal Georgia city of Brunswick).

A film industry veteran, Kohn became Hadjii's mentor, then his producer. Meanwhile, Hadjii was developing his characters and story, while refining a comedic voice that has the laser incisiveness of Chris Rock and the knowing graciousness of Garrison Keillor. (The clownish stereotypes of Tyler Perry? No comparison.)

"I want to be funny, but I don't want to be a joke," said Hadjii in a recent interview, then, enlarging on his theme, shifted into second person. "You want to talk about things that are relevant and have an impact. You want to deal with things that are important. You want to have heart."

His fellow executive producer Kohn points out: "There are no bad guys in what Hadjii writes. Scottie is trying to better himself, and a lot of people around him are trying to help them, even if they're crazier than he is."

Somebodies was first envisioned as a TV series. But, as an interim step, a feature-film version (and de facto TV pilot) was shot in 2004, with Hadjii starring and directing from his script.

In 2006, it premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. The series deal with BET resulted.

Things fell into place just as they imagined. But it took awhile to get there - so long that, during one delay, Hadjii wrote his first book.

"Don't Let My Mama Read This," subtitled "A Southern-Fried Memoir," was published earlier this year and, like "Somebodies," deals hilariously with issues that matter to him - childhood, family, women, race relations, as well as avoiding crack and gunshot wounds (and glorifying them).

"All I ever wanted to do was write," said Hadjii, explaining that filmmaking and acting "kind of happened like a natural progression."

Now he wonders if a natural progression will draw a white audience and other crossover viewers to sample his new series. Even luring older blacks could be a challenge, he said with a laugh. "They don't really fancy BET much. They just look at it as the boogie-woogie channel. "But I think it's a channel that *should* be discovered," he said, "and it would be nice to play a part in that. It's my own little way of trying."