

# Jazzy Bells, An Animated Short Directed and Written By Dara Frazier, To Debut At 33rd Annual Pan African Film Festival

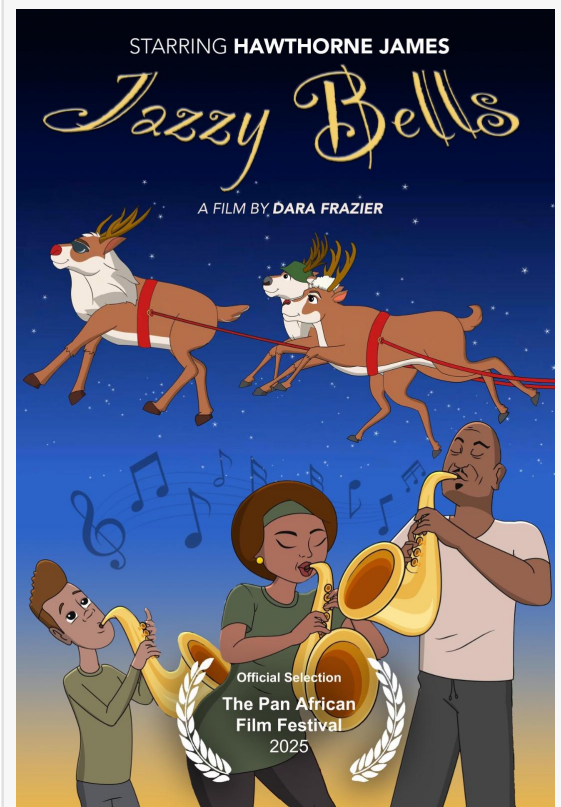
*Veteran Actor Hawthorne James Lends His Voice to the Animated Holiday Story to Premiere on Feb. 12 at 6:25 PM and Feb. 13 at 4:25 PM at the Culver Theater*

CULVER CITY, CA, UNITED STATES, February 8, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- "[Jazzy Bells](#)," an animated holiday special written and directed by [Dara Frazier](#), makes its world premiere at the 33rd Annual [Pan African Film Festival](#) with screenings on Wednesday, February 12 at 6:25 PM and Thursday, February 13 at 4:25 PM at the Culver Theater, 9500 Culver Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232. The family-friendly short film is 22 minutes long and stars Hawthorne James, a veteran actor known for his iconic roles in *The Five Heartbeats*, *Speed*, *Se7en*, and more. He lends his voice to the role of Otis Walker, the traveling jazz musician. The voice actors rounding out the cast are Tasha Michaud, Jean Cecile Nadine, Je'maya Jackson, Adriohn Richardson, Devin Laster, and Doris Anita Miller.

"I am honored that *Jazzy Bells* is debuting at the Pan African Film Festival. *Jazzy Bells* explores how the magic of Christmas reunites a traveling jazz musician with his grandchildren," said Frazier.

The 33rd Annual Pan African Film & Arts Festival takes place in Los Angeles from February 4-23, 2025 at The Culver Theater, Cinemark Baldwin Hills Crenshaw Plaza 15 and XD and the Westfield Culver City Shopping Center. PAFF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Black stories and images through the exhibition of film, visual art, and other creative expression.

Frazier's journey to realize *Jazzy Bells* began with her mother's unexpected passing from a brain aneurysm. "Saying goodbye to her was the most difficult thing I'd ever experienced, and the first



*Jazzy Bells*, an animated short written and directed by Dara Frazier, premieres at the Pan African Film Festival on Feb. 12 at 6:25 PM and Feb. 13 at 4:25 PM at the Culver Theater, 9500 Culver Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232.

Christmas without her was hard on the whole family, especially my son, who was six years old at the time," she said.

"It was therapeutic for me to write the story about Otis Walker, who travels the world as a saxman in a famous jazz band," said Frazier, a native Detroiter with a lifelong passion for storytelling. "As the holidays near, his family misses him more than ever, especially his grandchildren. After Otis decides not to come home for Christmas, a beautiful brown-skinned angel, a witty polar bear, and some spunky reindeer use their magic to help him understand the true reason for the season."

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I am honored that Jazzy Bells is debuting at the Pan African Film Festival. My family-friendly story is about how the magic of Christmas reunites a traveling jazz musician with his grandchildren."

*Dara Frazier, an award-winning filmmaker and playwright.*

The aha moment for Frazier to pay tribute to her mom's memory occurred after watching a family favorite movie. "When the classic "A Charlie Brown Christmas" aired on TV, it brought back fond memories of watching it with my mom. At the same time, I wished that there was a story

that reminded me more of the community where I was born and raised on Detroit's west side," Frazier reminisced. "Beyond the Motown sound, the city also has an amazing jazz scene mixed with the blue-collar lifeblood that keeps it going. For example, my carpenter was a poet, the roofer was a drummer, and the locksmith was a doo-wop singer."

Frazier set out to capture that energy with a story about processing grief, family, love, and the magic of what music does for the soul. "I picked up my pencil and paper and went to work, sketching rough characters and writing the script. Fortunately, I found a talented team of artists and animators who helped breathe life into my vision," she said. "The voice actors truly embodied the heart of Jazzy Bells, especially the multi-talented Hawthorne James. When people see Jazzy Bells, I hope they experience what it feels like to come home for the holidays and treasure our loved ones who have joined their ancestors."

Additional credits:

Music by: Joyce Spencer and Derick Bell

Animation by: Dara Frazier, Marcelo Gorenman, Suneer Kasim, and Laura Grijalva

#### ABOUT DARA FRAZIER – WRITER/DIRECTOR

Dara Frazier was born in Detroit and developed a passion for storytelling at an early age. She is a novelist, Off-Broadway playwright, journalist, artist, and award-winning filmmaker. She has worked on projects for MTV and Nickelodeon. She attended the Detroit High School for Fine and Performing Arts and graduated with a degree in Interactive Media from the International Academy of Design and Technology in Chicago. Dara won the Best African American Filmmaker

Award at the Brooklyn Film Festival for her animated short film, La Revolution.

While residing in New York City, she was accepted into the Harlem Writer's Guild, past members of which include Maya Angelou and Terry McMillan. Her feature film, *Sweeter Without Sugar*, was an official selection at the African American Women in Cinema Film Festival. Her debut play, *Passing*, had a sold-out run Off-Broadway and was nominated for an Audience Development Committee, Inc. Award. She is the author of several novels and the children's book *No Glasses For Me*. She directed and wrote the CG-animated feature film *The Sky Princess*, an official selection of the African Diaspora International Film Festival in New York City.

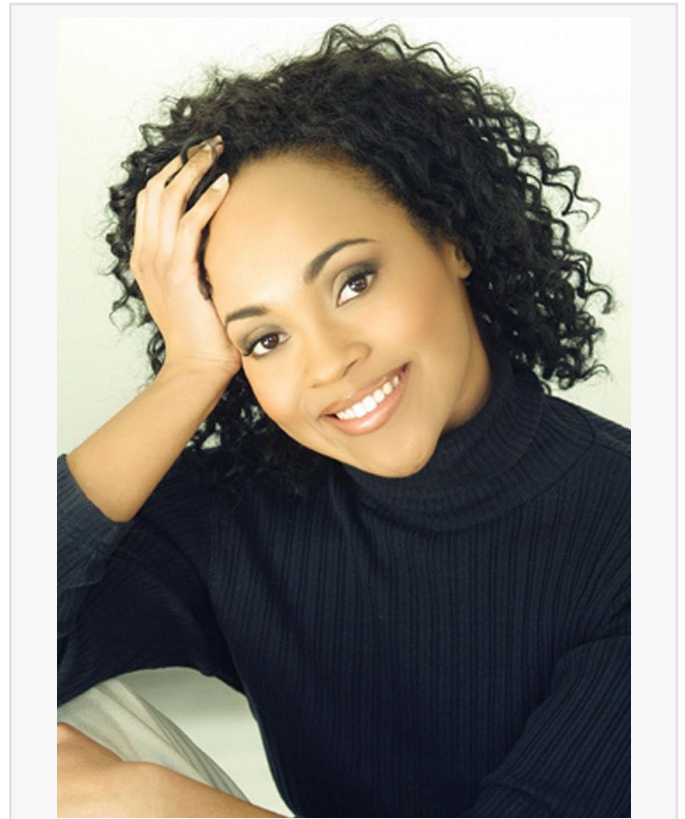
One of her scripts was recently selected as a top 30 semi-finalist from over 700 entries in BET's Project CRE8 TV competition. She has been commissioned to write seven scripts and had five specs optioned. Her plays, *Half Truth*, *Full Plate*, and *Shades of War*, were recently produced at Hollywood's Stella Adler Theatre, in residence with the Towne Street Theatre. Dara was a semi-finalist in the Page Turner Writing Contest and a finalist in the Women of Color Filmmakers Writing Competition. She lives in Los Angeles and has worked on Disney, HBO Max, and Netflix projects. Her holiday romantic comedy, *Catfish Christmas*, is available on Amazon Prime, Tubi, Bounce TV, Brown Sugar, FreeVee, YouTube, Apple TV, Vudu, and more.

#### ABOUT HAWTHORNE JAMES – STARRING AS OTIS WALKER

Hawthorne James is an actor, director, and producer whose powerful performances have left an indelible mark on Hollywood. He is best known for his role as Big Red Davis in Robert Townsend's *The Five Heartbeats*, as well as memorable performances in *Speed*, *Se7en*, *Boss'n Up*, *Heaven's Prisoners*, and *The Color Purple* (2023). With an extensive career spanning decades, he has appeared in numerous television shows, films, and theater productions. His work continues to be celebrated for its depth, intensity, and commitment to storytelling. In addition to acting, James has worked as a director and producer, bringing compelling stories to life on and off the screen.

#### ABOUT THE PAN AFRICAN FILM FESTIVAL

The Pan African Film Festival (PAFF), established in 1992, is the largest Black film festival in the



Detroiters Dara Frazier is a novelist, Off-Broadway playwright, journalist, artist, and award-winning filmmaker. She won the Best African American Filmmaker Award at the Brooklyn Film Festival for her animated short film, *La Revolution*.

United States. Recognized globally for its commitment to showcasing narratives of the African diaspora, PAFF screens over 150 films worldwide each year, highlighting stories that explore Black culture, history, and experiences. Held annually in Los Angeles, PAFF serves as a significant platform for emerging and established filmmakers, fostering opportunities for networking, industry exposure, and cultural dialogue. Learn more at [www.paff.org](http://www.paff.org).

To interview Ms. Frazier, contact Dr. Marie Y. Lemelle, MBA, PhD for Platinum Star Public Relations at [MarieLemelle@PlatinumStarPR.com](mailto:MarieLemelle@PlatinumStarPR.com) 213-276-7827

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Veteran Actor Hawthorne James is best known for his role as Big Red Davis in the 1991 film "The Five Heartbeats" and Sam, the bus driver, in "Speed." In Jazzy Bells, he lends his voice to the role of Otis Walker, the traveling jazz musician.



Jazzy Bells voice actors, director, and crew (from left) Connor Ahlstrom, Je'maya Jackson, Hawthorne James, Doris Anita Miller, Tasha Michaud, Devin Laster, Adrioehn Richardson, Dara Frazier, Derick Bell, and Jean Cecile Nadine.



A musical scene featuring Otis Walker from Jazzy Bells, an animated short written and directed by Dara Frazier. Photo courtesy of 1642 Productions, LLC.

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