

# Shai shies away from stardom

The "brewed in South Africa" movie *Fools* is already on the cinema circuit, but that does not mask my fascination with securing an interview with its lead actor, Patrick Shai, a premier actor by any definition.

Shai, whose scope of works in film, television and theatre, includes the South African-made big screen movies *Taxi to Soweto*, *Place of weeping and Cry the Beloved Country*, as well as TV productions *Bophelo ke sempheko* and *African skies* is by no means a flyweight in the local showbusiness and the rough 'n tumble arts sphere.

Cynics, sceptics and fans would agree that it has become difficult to talk about acting, in particular television and big screen in South African terms, without mentioning his name.

I was surprised upon meeting Shai that he did not project the image of the big showbiz star. Rather, he seemed to be a cool and composed fella who, were it not for his famous face, could easily have passed as just another arty type hanging around Time Square.

Right now, only one thing holds his fascination; the movie *Fools*.

Shai plays the lead - Zamani - a once-celebrated teacher in Charteston township who had given all he had family and community respect - to booze and had then raped a schoolgirl.

"Playing that role was close to my heart, because teacher Zamani is not merely an abstract character. Rather,



**ACTOR ALONE...** Patrick Shai, who plays the lead in the movie *Fools*, prefers not to be thought of as a celebrity.

Zamani represents thousands of great men: teachers, lawyers and professional types, of all hues, who have surrendered their responsibilities to a bottle of whisky or two cans of beer."

Shai said he was attracted by its story line.

"I never looked at *Fools* as a job but a journey.

"It thrilled me to work with buzzing young talent like Hlomla Dandala and Thembi Seete of Boom Shaka. One

learns a lot from working with inexperienced but eager-to-know youth," he explained.

Shai said the movie appealed to him because of a combination of the storyline (coming from the sharp mind of Professor Njabulo Ndebele), the direction by the Paris-based Natal-born Ramadan Suleman and its marketing by an energetic fledgling company IQ Formulae.

"Is it so exciting to film our own stories with no Hollywood guidance.

"The movie was a therapeutic experience because it is always a relief to engage in South African stories which have no "Amandla!" as the rallying cry."

Shai is concerned that many actors derive pleasure from basking in glory rather than performing to their full potential.

"It is important to have a sense of direction in popular culture," he says, adding that he had been a lucky one

throughout his career.

"Many youngsters," he says, "have succumbed to the 'celebrity' label - which is nothing but egos out of control, in pursuit for a flavour of the month stardom..."

Shai, who chooses his work carefully before he engages himself in it, feels the term celebrity is misused in South Africa. "I don't consider myself one. I am, Patrick Shai the actor and nothing else".