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FILM

In the mix

New film, *MixedUp*, contributes to conversations on mixed-race identity

AN EARLY SCENE IN *MIXEDUP* SHOWS HOWARD

J. Davis, also known as Haui, being covered from face to neck in clay, which starts malleable and dark and dries hard and light. The scene lasts around three minutes, as Davis simultaneously grapples with his racial identity on screen. “I do get frozen in whiteness constantly because I’m perceived that way by the world,” he says.

Davis is a multidisciplinary artist and actor who grew up between England and Canada. During an audition about two years ago, a casting director told him that he wasn’t “English enough.” This frustrated him, as it echoed a statement he’d heard many times before. “It started this moment of me reflecting on what has been said to me in audition rooms of not [being] English enough, not North American enough, not Black enough, not white enough.”

These offhand comments propelled Davis, who’s now based in Niagara-on-the-Lake, to write his first documentary. *MixedUp* tackles confusion over his racial identity and his experience of

being mixed race. Pairing up with Vancouver-based co-producer Jack Fox, the duo have been developing the film for two years, diving into the complexities of being mixed race in Canada.

Davis shares the screen with other mixed-race Canadians whom he considers mentors, including Cree-Métis actor Tantoo Cardinal and actor Thom Allison from the TV series *Killjoys*. Together, they address the fear of not belonging and the beauty of being mixed. “I decided to fit in wherever I wanted to fit in,” Allison says.

Showcasing a wide range of experiences was key for Davis:

“I can’t be the definitive example of what it means to be mixed,” he says. The director wants *MixedUp*—which premieres this fall—to empower any mixed-race person out there who feels othered. “I hope that anyone that has ever been judged for being incomplete ... can feel liberated and beautiful in their skin.”

By the film’s end, Davis is being cleansed with water, the white clay washing away from his body. The scene signifies a newfound sense of freedom for Davis—one that came, in part, from the process of making the film. “I can actually live as a mixed, Black man,” he says, “and that is my reality and my truth.” Updates on upcoming online screenings of *MixedUp* can be found at mixedup.ca.

— HEATHER TAYLOR-SINGH