

Citizenfirst

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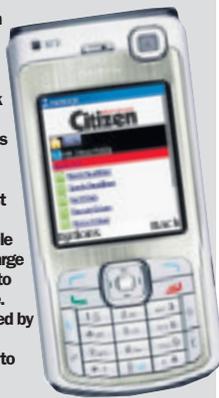
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Film director
 and screenwriter
 Segun Oguntola
 arrived in Milton
 Keynes in 2007
 after growing up in
 south east London
 and spending five
 years developing a
 film industry in the
 Gambia, west Africa.
 He was
 immediately
 struck by how so
 many cultures and
 backgrounds were
 represented in the
 city's new population
 – and set out to find
 why so many people
 come here to make
 a new start, and
 become part of the
 MK Mix.

**Ursula White of Wolverton
 Unlimited has lived in MK
 all her life and heads up
 the Electric Picture Palace
 Project. The aim is to
 make independent cinema
 more accessible and to
 better reflect the diverse
 perspectives and experiences
 in the city.**

**Who are you and what is your
 background?**

I was born in Bristol, one of five
 children. We moved to Greenleys in
 1974. You could say I grew up as the
 city grew up around me. There was
 nothing fixed in our lives as children
 here, the changes to the surrounding
 landscape were huge and the social
 and economic life of our family was
 often difficult. As a child you know
 nothing else but I think what I wanted
 most was to feel at home. Milton
 Keynes has often made me feel
 dislocated and I don't just think it is
 just me.

I was educated locally at the
 progressive Stantonbury Campus. I
 didn't learn any grammar there or the
 history of the British monarchs for
 instance – the latter doesn't bother
 me particularly now. I had my first
 child at the age of 19 and by the age
 of 21 I was a single parent of two. I
 went back to school and then on to
 university in Norwich to study drama
 and film taking my lovely children
 with me. After university with a fellow
 student I set up a Prince's Trust
 Business: Catapult Theatre a touring
 company running from Madcap
 Theatre. I wrote two plays including:
 The Treatment – about an imposter
 doctor who falls in love with a
 hypochondriac set in a hospital starved
 of resources. The company lasted
 for two years but we were working 15
 hour days and not paying ourselves
 – we could not survive – the kids
 needed shoes!

I then got a job as a project
 manager at Inter-Action arts centre
 based at Peartree Bridge, initially
 working with disabled people to set
 up art projects and then helping to
 establish a Chicken Shed outreach
 inclusive theatre project for 100
 children from all backgrounds.

What attracted you to MK?

It's opposite for me, I longed to
 permanently escape from MK to a
 place that had a rich, busy cultural
 life but I found myself returning to
 the place where my family was. So
 that, curiously, my children would feel
 rooted even if I did not. Now I find I am
 stuck here so I may as well make the
 most of it and I am starting to like it a
 bit more now.

I live in Wolverton where you can
 walk down the street and know, pretty
 much certainly, that you will bump
 into people you know. Community
 in that sense is very important
 to me. I have lived within isolated
 communities in MK over the years
 and I would not go back to that. I still
 get lost in Milton Keynes sometimes.
 It can feel quite dream like here and a
 bit Truman Showesque.

The health of the city can be
 detected through the community's
 ability to embrace cultural life. We
 have a long way to go from being
 identified with just shopping and
 roundabouts but the attitude here is
 good and it is possible, to make things
 happen here, but it is not without
 significant struggles and challenges.

What's the most striking

the mk mix



**difference you've found between
 MK and the place where you've
 lived the longest?**

Most of us here are migrants of
 one kind or another and so naturally
 want to get together with like minded
 souls. A vibrant artistic community
 is what I strive for and we have some
 great places to go. Mostly it is the
 people here that inspire me and make
 me feel that it's not all that bad. I
 love the green spaces in MK and I
 love the woodland. More trees, less
 paperwork!

**Please tell us about the ways in
 which you are involved in MK Life.**

As a child and young person I had
 been a peace campaigner – I had
 learnt to take a stand against the
 odds. I have been recently involved
 in a save the nursery campaign and
 now I am involved with a very exciting
 project to develop the independent
 cinema offer in Milton Keynes.
 Along with many other people here
 I had been bemoaning the chances
 of seeing different sorts of films
 regularly here.

My belief is that film more than
 any other medium has the capacity
 to reach out – it is an accessible
 medium that most people have some
 contact with. We had hoped to buy
 the old Picture Palace building in
 Wolverton and convert it back into a
 cinema but the building is no longer
 available So we've re-grouped to
 review our options. We have a very
 diverse and interesting city and
 the films we see should enable us
 to enjoy and understand different
 perspectives.

**If you came here within the
 last five years. How easy have you
 found it to settle here?**

I would say that isolation and
 separation are the biggest challenges
 for new arrivals in Milton Keynes. I
 suppose it takes time anywhere to get
 to know people but when you move
 you have to impose and get out there

and tell people you're around.

**We're interested in highlighting
 ways in which MK's diversity is
 working in practice**

We began a touring cinema
 programme called Vagabond Cinema
 Project that brings film to audiences
 in different venues across the city.
 The project has found a creative and
 enjoyable way to link up with other
 groups in the city. Cinema like no
 other medium is capable of speaking
 to a variety of groups.

**Are you planning to stay in MK
 for a fixed time for work or family
 reasons?**

I will be here for a while to come no
 doubt.

**If someone who had never been
 to MK before was considering
 moving here to make a new life,
 what's the best piece of advice you
 could give them?**

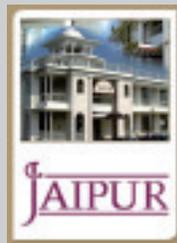
A new arrival could do worse than
 say "this is my city and I have the
 ability to make things happen and to
 change things for the better." In city
 years MK is just a baby but is growing,
 changing and evolving all the time so
 there's room for lots to happen.

**Tell us something about the
 city/country of your origins which
 only a local would know.**

I think we are all migrants to this
 island and most of us if we look far
 enough back will find our ancestors
 are from other places in the world.

**What would you say to people
 who can't find anything good to
 say about the city?**

I am not so sure we need to be
 so worried about what other people
 think they will come round one day.
 Yes it is a manufactured city but full of
 history and if you want to get closer to
 feeling connected to MK then find out
 more about its past. As Living Archive
 say: "Dig where you stand"



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