



MIAMI-DADE COUNTY

## Want to see the real Miami? New series strips away subtitles, stars minority actors

BY MARTIN VASSOLO  
*[mvassolo@miamiherald.com](mailto:mvassolo@miamiherald.com)*

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In the opening scenes of a new made-in-Miami web series, a timid social media star inadvertently films his mother's death in a once-jubilant hospital room.

The two had been singing an innocent and charming freestyle rap when the middle-aged woman begins to gasp for breath. A medical crew quickly rushes to her aid, but she dies. And it was all broadcast live for the son's stunned social-media followers to witness.

The camera then pans to a noisy club where the man's womanizing cousin maneuvers his way into bathroom sex with a stranger. The only thing standing between him and his carnal pleasure is a wake.

"Grown," a coming-of-age series set and filmed in Miami, features a captivating and dynamic mosaic of Miami's varying shades of crazy in the digital age. It also focuses on life through the lens of predominantly minority characters, putting a spotlight on stories from communities in Miami that the show's creators felt have gone untold.

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From left- Miami's Haitian-American filmmakers, actors and roommates Edson Jean and Joshua Jean-Baptiste with actress-writer Maria Corina Ramirez posed on SW Calle 8, before the premiere of a couple of episodes from their show *GROWN*, a scripted comedy series streaming this month on Complex. The premiere took place at MDC Tower Theatre in Little Havana Miami, on Tuesday, June 05, 2018.

Pedro Portal - pportal@miamiherald.com

The show is modeled loosely after the life experiences of Edson Jean and Joshua Jean-Baptiste, two Haitian-American men who star in the show and serve as head writers. Jean directs the show, and Maria Corina Ramirez, a Venezuelan-American credited as a co-creator, serves as story editor and a lead actor.

All three attended New World School of the Arts in Downtown Miami.

The show, made possible by a \$25,000 grant and a memories teeming with untold stories, debuted on the website Complex two weeks ago and is the first collaboration between Adaptive Studios and Complex Networks. The show runners held a two-episode screening of the raunchy show Tuesday night at the Tower Theater in Little Havana.

Jaie Laplante, the executive director of the Miami Film Festival who moderated the discussion, said the show is unlike anything he has seen before.

"The show is important because it is not safe" he said. "It's so authentic."

There are currently eight episodes of the show, each running about 22 minutes. It is the first scripted show to appear on Complex's website. Asked about plans for future seasons, Jean-Baptiste, 28, said that if enough people watch, "we will continue it."

"We are here today after a lot of people believed in it," he added.

Originally titled #Josh, the project won the 2016 Project Greenlight award and a production deal.

The show follows the story arcs of Josh and Wes, played by Jean-Baptiste and Jean, two cousins living together in Downtown Miami. Wes is an aspiring actor with a well-worn little black book. Josh is socially awkward and is trying to recover from his mother's sudden passing.

The two blindly follow each other through the phases of manhood — with Miami's kaleidoscopic landscape serving as their playing field.

Following the screening, the creators spoke about their project and fielded questions from fellow cast members and the viewing public. Despite the absence of state tax incentives for movies and TV filming in Florida, the trio refused to film the show anywhere but Miami. Producers failed in their attempts to persuade the show's creators to film parts in Georgia.

Jean-Baptiste and Jean said the creative process was cathartic because so much of what is in the show comes from real experiences.

Jean, who is 29, said it was important to him that the show tell stories of life as a Haitian-American in Miami specifically. For the show, the creators cast Haitian actors to play family members and other characters, not "Jamaicans with accents" as Jean-Baptiste put it.

"When people start to see themselves [on screen] for the first time ... it encourages them that their stories have value," Jean said. "It's like we don't exist in the media unless it's earthquakes."

There are scenes throughout the series in which characters speak in Spanish or Creole without subtitles, another subtle way the show keeps its authenticity.

These brief moments when the audience is trapped behind a language barrier, while not an obstacle to understanding the show's plot, give viewers a glimpse of daily life in Miami, where a short drive from Little Havana to Little Haiti can seem like an international flight.

"It was important to us to speak our languages," said Ramirez, 29.

Watch the show at <https://www.complex.com/video/grown-show/>.

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