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Small Island, Big Dreams: John P. Wheatley, St. Thomas Native and Atlanta-based Filmmaker, Honored by BET

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Janeke Simon **February 27, 2022**

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John P. Wheatley

“I was always fascinated by the arts, I was always fascinated by music. And I realized that you could make a lot of money having fun.”

St. Thomas native John P. Wheatley is enjoying his time in the spotlight, after having been recognized for his media work in BET’s Black Film Friday series.

The filmmaker got an early start in the entertainment industry as a teenage DJ, rocking the turntables at local events while he was still in high school. Wheatley says he took that same ability

to sonically energize a crowd and translated it into his work as a visual storyteller.

“From the time I got a taste of being able to create and visually tell stories, and evoke emotions from people, I knew at that point that’s all I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”



John Wheatley on set with cast members in St. Thomas filming an episode of Julee Lansiquot's [Coconut Vybes](#).

Creator, artist, storyteller – Wheatley describes the process of developing a project from a client's concept as “turning on God mode”, as he imagines exactly how to bring that intellectual property to life on a screen.

The results of that creative process have been nothing short of incredible, with Wheatley racking up director credits on everything from music videos ([Kardinal Offishal – Kill Shot](#)) to documentaries ([My Virgin Islands Carnival 2010](#)) to TV series ([Partners in Crime: The Next Generation Atlanta](#)). Most recently he's worked on projects with global beauty brand [Lancôme](#), major financial firm [Ally](#), and AMC Networks' streaming service [ALLBLK](#).

The creative director of Dominion Global — a boutique entertainment and media consulting firm — says his motivation comes from the energy he receives from giving birth to people's dreams.

“That gets me high, because then I get to see people walking their purpose, and feel[ing] good about something that they had that God put inside of them.”



John Wheatley, left, with Gospel Singer Kirk Franklin.

He expresses admiration for other USVI natives who've gone on to make a name for themselves on the mainland; Rashida Hodge — [senior AI expert](#) at Microsoft, Rashawn Ross — [touring member of the Dave Matthews Band](#), and [Benny D](#) - Akon's DJ and musical director. Wheatley believes the secret to his, and his fellow Virgin Islanders' success on the mainland, comes from a sense of perhaps having something to prove. "We have to be more aggressive with our dreams, because of our small-island heritage".

Wheatley is also aggressive about connecting and collaborating with people who share his heritage. Apart from Dominion Global, which is his vehicle for working on large commercial projects, Wheatley also recently teamed up with another St. Thomas powerhouse — Theron Thomas, acclaimed songwriter & producer who's worked with everyone from Rihanna to Usher — to form Oswald Avenue, a production company that's focused on bringing original concepts to life. Some upcoming projects from the duo include an animated film centered around the quintessential Caribbean festival - Carnival - as well as a gritty, futuristic drama series that explores how thoughts in one universe can influence events in another. Speaking about his collaboration with Thomas, and his penchant for working with other creatives from the USVI, Wheatley says it's elementary: "We've got to put each other up".

Wheatley's seat at the pinnacle of the creative process came only after years spent honing his technical skills. His words of advice for anyone looking to make a name for themselves in the industry: know thy craft.

"If you're a camera person, know your camera inside out. Don't let nobody else on set know more about that camera than you know about that camera. If you're audio tech, know your bag and know your audio bag, know your mixers, know your mics, know your frequencies, know everything about that. Nobody's supposed to know about your job more than you do."

That commitment to perfecting his skills is why, even as he has largely moved into directing and production, Wheatley is still sought out to contribute on large-scale projects on the basis of his prowess behind the camera — as he was when filming on an in-the-works documentary on late rapper Nipsey Hussel came to Atlanta. He credits his work ethic as the reason he is constantly in demand. "Nobody ain't gon' outwork me".

Watch BET's Black Film Friday featuring John P. Wheatley [here](#).

Correction: Feb. 27, 2022 at 12:03 p.m.

A previous version of this article included an incorrect photo byline. The individual in the embedded photo with Wheatley is Gospel Singer Kirk Franklin, not R. City's Theron Thomas. We've updated the article to reflect the correct information.