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RETROSPECTIVE



CHARLES BURNETT



KILLER OF SHEEP

THE FILMS OF CHARLES BURNETT

Long treasured by many filmmakers, critics, and scholars as one of America's most accomplished film artists, yet relatively neglected by the general public, Charles Burnett's visibility has recently increased thanks to long-overdue revivals of his first two features, the epochal *KILLER OF SHEEP* and *MY BROTHER'S WEDDING*. Anthology expands on these opportunities to re-evaluate his work by presenting a survey of his career, including such little-seen recent films as *WARMING BY THE DEVIL'S FIRE* (his contribution to Martin Scorsese's PBS series on the Blues), and *NAT TURNER: A TROUBLESOME PROPERTY*.

Complementing the series will be a weekend devoted to a film which Burnett wrote and photographed, Billy Woodberry's much-acclaimed but rarely-screened *BLESS THEIR LITTLE HEARTS* (see page 5 for details).

"One of the most heartening recent developments in the world of American film has been the revival of interest in the work of Charles Burnett... Mr. Burnett's work is an indelible reminder of what real independence looks like." —A.O. Scott, *NEW YORK TIMES*

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KILLER OF SHEEP

1977, 83 minutes, 35mm. Preserved by the UCLA Film and Television Archive and distributed by Milestone Films.

KILLER OF SHEEP examines the black Los Angeles ghetto of Watts in the mid-1970's through the eyes of Stan, a sensitive dreamer who is growing detached and numb from the psychic toll of working at a slaughterhouse. Frustrated by money problems, he finds respite in moments of simple beauty: the warmth of a coffee cup against his cheek, slow dancing with his wife in the living room, holding his daughter. The film offers no solutions; it merely presents life — sometimes hauntingly bleak, sometimes filled with transcendent joy and gentle humor.

"A masterpiece. One of the most insightful and authentic dramas about African-American life on film. One of the finest American films, period."

—Dave Kehr

Preceded by:

SEVERAL FRIENDS (1969, 21 minutes, 35mm) Restored print courtesy of the UCLA Film and Television Archive.

The precursor of *KILLER OF SHEEP*, filmed while Burnett was a student, about an African-American family and their unemployed friends in South Central Los Angeles.

-Friday, February 8 at 7:15, Sunday, February 10 at 4:30, and Thursday, February 14 at 7:00.

TO SLEEP WITH ANGER

1990, 102 minutes, 35mm. With Paul Butler, Danny Glover, Mary Alice, and Carl Lumbly.

"In Burnett's 1990 succès d'estime, Paul Butler is quietly heroic as Gideon, a man of the South transplanted to Los Angeles who, with his wife, Suzie, has raised two sons according to the standards of hard work and old-time religion. Danny Glover gives his best performance — both ticklish and upsetting — as Harry Mention, an old acquaintance from down home who finagles his way into Gideon's family and exposes its fault lines. With his beguiling chivalry, Harry inspires Gideon and Suzie's nostalgia for the surefooted courtliness that has all but disappeared from their fragmented, contemporary lives, then proceeds to unleash forces of discord that bring family antagonisms to a flash point. This eccentric comedy-drama is a truly folkloric film. Burnett and his cast tap depths of mystery, soulfulness, and glee." —Michael Sragow, *NEW YORKER*

-Friday, February 8 at 9:15, Sunday, February 10 at 6:30, and Wednesday, February 13 at 9:15.

WARMING BY THE DEVIL'S FIRE

2003, 90 minutes, video. Courtesy of Jigsaw Productions.

Charles Burnett's contribution to the PBS seven-part series *THE BLUES* merges impressionistic storytelling with documentary footage in a tale about a young boy's encounter with his family in Mississippi and the tensions between the hellhounds of the blues and heavenly gospel tunes. Burnett, who based the story largely on his own childhood, says, "I always wanted to do a story on the blues that not only reflected its nature and its content, but also alludes to the form itself. In short, a story that gives you the impression of the blues."

Preceded by:

THE HORSE (1973, 13 minutes, video)

A boy's coming-of-age story. On and around the porch of an abandoned, disintegrating farmhouse, an assortment of characters anxiously await the violent death of a horse.

-Saturday, February 9 at 4:00 and Tuesday, February 12 at 9:00.

MY BROTHER'S WEDDING

1983, 115 minutes, digital video. Restored by the Pacific Film Archive and distributed by Milestone Films.

In 1983, Charles Burnett sent his rough-cut of *MY BROTHER'S WEDDING* to his producers. Ignoring his request to finish the editing, they rushed it to a festival screening, where it received a mixed review from the *NEW YORK TIMES*. With distributors scared off, *MY BROTHER'S WEDDING* was tragically never released. When Milestone first acquired the rights to *MY BROTHER'S WEDDING*, Burnett requested the chance to complete his film the way he wanted to almost 25 years ago.

Now, following a beautiful restoration by the Pacific Film Archive and a beautifully-accomplished digital re-edit by the director, *MY BROTHER'S WEDDING* is back, and like his initial effort, it is an eye-opening revelation — wise, funny, heartbreaking and timeless "A treasure that demands to be unearthed in all its funny-sad tenderness." —*VILLAGE VOICE*

"If a better film has been made about black ghetto life, I haven't seen it." —Jonathan Rosenbaum
CHICAGO READER

-Saturday, February 9 at 6:00, Monday, February 11 at 9:15, and Wednesday, February 13 at 7:00.

RETROSPECTIVE



TO SLEEP WITH ANGER



THE GLASS SHIELD

THE FILMS OF CHARLES BURNETT, CONT.

THE GLASS SHIELD

1994, 109 minutes, 35mm. With Michael Boatman, Lori Petty, Richard Anderson, Michael Ironside, Elliott Gould, and Ice Cube.

Michael Boatman plays a young, naive black man who is the first of his race to be assigned to the Los Angeles Edgemar police station, located in the heart of the beleaguered inner city. He finds himself in a precinct where violent, racist and corrupt cops have closely bonded against outsiders or any interference. The new recruit's only ally is the sole woman (Petty) in the Edgemar ranks. Burnett's hard-hitting film examines what it really means to be persona non grata in one's chosen profession and community, and what a man will give up to fit in.

"[Burnett] dramatizes a simple and profoundly political idea: you can't know yourself until you know what you're a part of. In its quiet way, this is the most subversive American movie in years." —Terrence Rafferty, NEW YORKER

**—Saturday, February 9 at 8:30 and
Monday, February 11 at 7:00.**

NAT TURNER: A TROUBLESOME PROPERTY

2003, 58 minutes, video. Courtesy of California Newsreel.

In 1831, Nat Turner led a slave rebellion in Virginia that resulted in the murder of local slave owners and their families — as well Turner's execution. At once an ambivalent cultural hero, a revolutionary figure and a subject of countless literary works, Turner has remained a "troublesome property" for those who have struggled to understand him and the meaning of his revolt, often resulting in controversy. NAT TURNER examines how the story of Turner and his revolt have been continuously re-told since 1831, adopting an innovative structure by interspersing documentary footage and interviews with dramatizations of different versions of the story, using a new actor to represent Turner in each.

"[M]agnificent. It is required viewing by all who are deeply concerned about the nature of race relations in America." —Cornel West, Princeton University

Preceded by:

WHEN IT RAINS (1995, 13 minutes, 16mm.) Print restored by the UCLA Film and Television Archive.

Watts, 1960's. On a mission to save a mother and her children from eviction by the landlord, the main character's quest for money turns into a superbly comical, outrageous expedition through the lives and attitudes of various characters. A parable on the value of community.

OLIVIA'S STORY (2000, 14 minutes, 16mm.) Written by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson. Print courtesy of Ms. Kim-Gibson.

A Little League baseball game becomes the unlikely context for this lyrical drama about memory and loss, told from the perspective of a Korean-American woman and her grandmother.

**—Sunday, February 10 at 8:30,
Tuesday, February 12 at 7:00, and
Thursday, February 14 at 9:00.**