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**For Immediate Release  
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**RETROSPECTIVE OF FILMS BY CHARLES BURNETT  
CASTS A PERSONAL AND REALISTIC LIGHT ON CONTEMPORARY  
BLACK AMERICAN LIFE**

**America Becoming: A Charles Burnett Retrospective  
April 6 through 20, 2001**

SAN FRANCISCO, March 27, 2001 — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts presents a poignant series of films and shorts that chronicle contemporary Black American life in *America Becoming: A Charles Burnett Retrospective*, a retrospective of works by independent filmmaker and Wattis Artist-in-Residence Charles Burnett. Born in Mississippi and raised in Watts, Burnett later played a key role in the “L.A. Rebellion” of the 1970s—a movement of young African-American filmmakers who emerged from the UCLA Film school. While Burnett is one of the most important African-American filmmakers of our time, he has earned little recognition for his work. In contrast to the one-dimensional black stereotypes and storylines evoked by many Hollywood features, Burnett’s films are deeply personal and realistic portrayals of black families and communities. Organized by Film/Video Curator Joel Shepard, *America Becoming* features insightful films about slavery, police brutality, the 1960s Civil Rights movement, urban ghetto life, and the rural south. Two special Youth Matinees will also be shown, with FREE admission. Burnett will be present at the screenings held on April 13, 14, and 15.

Burnett made his feature debut in 1977 with the acclaimed *Killer of Sheep* (1977), a tale about a black slaughterhouse worker who loses touch with his family and his community. While the picture never gained widespread notice, it won festival honors at the Sundance and Berlin Film Festivals, and was declared a “national treasure” by the Library of Congress. His next films, including *To Sleep with Anger* (1990), were plagued by distribution difficulties, and Burnett subsequently turned to television to create *America Becoming*, a documentary about US Immigration. *The Glass Shield* (1994), his next feature film, was a fiercely political work that examined racism and corruption in the LAPD, while *Nightjohn* (1996),

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Burnett's first period piece based on a Gary Paulsen novel, unfolds an intense drama of courage as a slave defies the law and teaches a young slave girl to read. As part of the retrospective, YBCA also presents the West Coast premiere of Burnett's most recent film, *The Annihilation of Fish* (2000), a quirky romance starring James Earl Jones and Lynn Redgrave.

Tickets are \$6, \$3 for students, seniors, and YBCA Members (unless otherwise noted).

**Friday, April 6, 7:30 pm, *Nightjohn* (1996, 96 min, 35mm)**

**FREE Admission**

Terrence Rafferty of *The New Yorker* called *Nightjohn* the best American movie of 1996. An intense drama of courage and humanity in the face of the brutality of slavery, it's the tale of a slave who defies the law by teaching a young slave girl to read. Preceded by *Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland* (1998, 14 min, 16mm), the powerful testimony of a woman's transformation by the Civil Rights movement.

**Friday, April 6, 9:15 pm, *The Glass Shield* (1994, 108 min, 35 mm)**

This deeply political film is a sincere and persuasive look at racism and corruption in the LAPD. Based on a true story, *Glass Shield* avoids the cliches of the standard police thriller. Starring Ice Cube, Elliott Gould, and Bernie Casey.

**Friday, April 13, 8pm, *Killer of Sheep* (1977, 87 min, 35mm)**

**CHARLES BURNETT IN PERSON**

Declared a "national treasure" by the Library of Congress, Burnett's first film is a tale of ghetto life depicting the alienation of a black worker who gradually loses touch with his family and community. Preceded by *When it Rains* (1995, 12 min, 16mm), in which Burnett transforms the social problems of eviction and homelessness into a parable on the value of community.

**Saturday, April 14, 8 pm, *To Sleep with Anger* (1990, 102 min, 35mm)**

**CHARLES BURNETT IN PERSON**

Harry Mention (Danny Glover), an old friend from the rural south, arrives on the doorstep of a Los Angeles family, wreaking subtle and not-so-subtle havoc on their lives. Blending African, African-American, and Native American myths, Burnett looks at what happens when the devil comes disguised as a long-term house guest.

**Friday, April 20, 8pm, *The Annihilation of Fish* (2000, 114 min, 35mm)**

**WEST COAST PREMIERE**

Burnett's latest theatrical feature, starring James Earl Jones and Lynn Redgrave, is the provocative and touching tale of two misfits finding love and a renewed sense of purpose in their twilight years. Preceded by *Olivia's Story* (1999, 14 min, 16mm), a young Korean-American woman's recounting of a painful war.

**CHARLES BURNETT YOUTH MATINEES**

**Sunday, April 15, noon, *Finding Buck McHenry* (2000, 95 min, video)**

**CHARLES BURNETT IN PERSON**

**FREE Admission**

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When a young boy gets cut from a Little League baseball team, he sets out to form his own. He persuades a school custodian (Ossie Davis) to be the coach, and begins to suspect that the man is really an ex-Negro League legend who disappeared years ago.

**Sunday, April 15, 2 pm, *Selma, Lord, Selma* (1999, 96 min, video)**

In Alabama in 1965, a young girl is touched by a Martin Luther King, Jr. speech and becomes a devout follower. Her commitment is tested when she joins others in the famed march from Selma to Montgomery.