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## MOVIE REVIEW

# A Harlem Love Story

**BY KEVIN THOMAS**

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Arriving with no more advance publicity than the fine "Cooley High," "Aaron Loves Angela" (opening Thursday at selected theaters) proves to be yet another outstanding black film that offers a refreshing contrast to the usual blaxploitation pictures. It comes as a delightful surprise in the midst of the most disappointing year-end season in memory.

Gerald Sanford's script is simplicity itself and it has been directed with much feeling and eloquence by "Super Fly's" Gordon Parks Jr. Aaron (Kevin Hooks) is a bright, likable Harlem teen-ager who falls in love for the first time with a beautiful Puerto Rican girl, Angela (Irene Cara).

Theirs is a classic story of young love in all its awkwardness and hesitancy that flowers amid an atmosphere of constant tension and danger. As if the inexperience of youth wasn't enough for the kids to contend with, Aaron and Angela must deal with the racial barrier—the Puerto Rican youths on Angela's block are a very real menace to Aaron. What's more, Aaron's loving but embittered father (Moses Gunn), a onetime All-American, applies constant pressure to his motherless son to succeed as a basketball star—even though Aaron will never be tall enough to make it.

### **A Particular Poignance**

Nonetheless, the love these two immensely appealing young people feel for each other is strong enough to surmount—or at least circumvent—such obstacles, and they even play at keeping house in a condemned building. What they don't realize is that the floor directly above them is a meeting place for some drug dealers.

That such good, promising kids as Aaron and Angela are thrust in so violent a world gives the film its particular poignance. A lyrical slow-motion gambol in Central Park, a stolen ride on a Coney Island merry-go-round in the dead of winter, a wide-eyed visit to the Museum of Modern Art would seem sentimental clichés in most films. But here their vivid contrast to the grim realities of Harlem life serves as a kind of protest, a reminder that such young people are deserving of a better environment.

### **An Upbeat Film**

"Aaron and Angela," however, is an upbeat film, the best kind in fact, for its affirmativeness is earned by being expressed in the face of unflinchingly depicted peril.

Hooks, who was the eldest son in "Sounder," and Miss Cara, a seasoned veteran of stage and TV in her screen debut, are as skillful as they are fresh. As always, Moses Gunn impresses powerfully. Robert Hooks excels as a desperate good-bad man, a drug-pushing pimp that the film does not judge but rather presents as a tragic figure.

Ernestine Jackson is warm and funny as Hooks' lady, a good-natured woman who gently initiates Aaron into manhood. Leon Pinkney, a gifted comedian, scores as Aaron's best friend and Jose Feliciano, who contributed the film's dynamic score, and Walt Frazier make valid, effective guest appearances.