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Daughters of the dust, Dash, Julie, 1991

DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

A FILM BY JULIE DASH

PRESSBOOK

Press Contact: **Larsen Associates**
330 Ritch Street, San Francisco CA
(415) 957-1205

DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

American Playhouse
in Association with WMG
present
A Geechee Girls Production

DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

starring
ADISA ANDERSON
BARBARA-O
CHERYL LYNN BRUCE
CORA LEE DAY
GERALDINE DUNSTON
VERTAMAE GROSVENOR
TOMMY HICKS
KAYCEE MOORE
EARTHA ROBINSON
ALVA ROGERS
CORNELL ROYAL
CATHERINE TARVER
BAHNI TURPIN
and KAI-LYNN WARREN
as "The Unborn Child"

Written and Directed by JULIE DASH, Producers JULIE DASH and ARTHUR JAJA,
Executive Producer LINDSAY LAW, Director of Photography ARTHUR JAJA, Editors
AMY CAREY and JOSEPH BURTON, Production Designer KERRY MARSHALL,
Original Music by JOHN BARNES

Partial Funding Provided by
The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship
The Georgia Humanities
Appalshop, Southeast Regional Fellowship
The Fulton County Arts Council
The Rockefeller Foundation

The National Black Programming Consortium

Produced in association with AMERICAN PLAYHOUSE
with Funds from the Public Broadcasting Service,
the Corporation for Public Broadcasting,
the National Endowment for the Arts
and
the Chubb Group of Insurance Companies

Running Time: 113 minutes

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

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The Cast

NANA PEAZANT	Cora Lee Day	BAPTIST MINISTER	Rev. Ervin Green
EULA PEAZANT	Alva Rogers	MINISTER'S ASSISTANT	Benjamin Gillens
YELLOW MARY PEAZANT	Barbara-O	PROCESSIONAL MAN	Ronald Daise
TRULA	Trula Hoosier	WOMAN BEING BAPTIZED	Marie Smalls
BILAL MUHAMMED	Umar Abdurrahamn	BAPTISMAL PROCESSIONAL	Lonnie Moon
ELI PEAZANT	Adisa Anderson		DeWitt Parker
HAAGAR PEAZANT	Kaycee Moore		Emma Robinson
MYOWN PEAZANT	Eartha D. Robinson		Taylor Thompson
IONA PEAZANT	Bahni Turpin		Virginia Green
VIOLA PEAZANT	Cheryl Lynn Bruce		Maceo Griffin
MR. SNEAD	Tommy Hicks		Archie Thomas
NEWLYWED MAN	Malik Farrakhan		Raymond Paige
DADDY MAC PEAZANT	Cornell Royal		Ervena Falkner
HAIRBRAIDER	Vertamae Grosvenor		J.R. Wilson
OLDER COUSIN	Sherry Jackson	INDIGO PLANTATION	Wilhemina Wilson
BAPTIST MINISTER	Rev. Ervin Green		Tarell Brown
BOATMEN	Marcus Humphrey		Shanna Parker
	Bernard Wilson		Belle White
NEWLYWED WOMAN	Althea Lang		Stanley White
WOMAN WITH BABY	Catherine Tarver		Maxine Royale
PEAZANT BABIES	Jasmine Lee		Georgia Wiggins
	Dalisia Robinson		Carolyn Garris
PEAZANT MEN	Willie Faulkner		Ella Powell
	Joe Taylor		Bernice Jenkins
	Frank Brown		Lillian Johnson
	Rueben Fripp		Jackie Parker
PEAZANT BOYS	Derrick Coaxum	YOUNG NANA PEAZANT	Sharria Johnson
	Neil Howard	YOUNG DADDY MAC	Leroy Simmons, Jr.
	Jared Warren	SHAD PEAZANT	Leroy Simmons
PEAZANT CHILDREN	Zenovia Green	ADR VOICES	Afemo Omilani
	Taira Miller		Taira Miller
	Tiffanye Hills	WALLA GROUP	Holiday Marble
PETE	Jamar Freeman		Sparkle Duncan
RE-PETE	Detrell Freeman		Teddy Gross
RICE HUSKERS	Vivian Dawson		Guadalupe Jones
	Inez Griffin		Rudy Costa
THE UNBORN CHILD	Kai-Lynn Warren		Agusta Stone
VIOLA'S MOTHER	Geraldine Dunston		Charles Burnett
ST. JULIEN LASTCHILD	M. Cochise Anderson		Geraldine Dunston
MOSS GATHERERS	Darrel Cook		
	Julius Cook		

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The Filmmakers

Written and Directed by
Producers

Executive Producer
Line Producer
Associate Producers

Director of Photography
Original Music Score
Editors

Production Designer
Casting
Costume Designer
First Assistant Directors

Second Assistant Director
Second Second Assistant Director
Production Coordinator
Assistant Production Coordinator
Production Secretary
Production Comptroller
Location Manager
Camera Operators

1st Assistant Camera
2nd Assistant Camera
Additional 1st Assistant Camera
Camera Production Assistants

Sound Recordist
Boom Operator
Gaffer
Key Grip
Grips

Art Director

Set Dresser
Art Dept Production Assistant

Prop Master
Prop Assistant
Construction Foreman
Carpenters

Set Costumer
Wardrobe Assistant
Seamstress
Make-up Supervisor
Assistant Make-up
Hairstylist
Gullah Language Consultant
Caterer
Craft Services
Dailies Editor
Special Effects
Utilities Man
Office Production Assistants

JULIE DASH
JULIE DASH
ARTHUR JAF A
LINDSAY LAW
STEVEN JONES
PAM R. JACKSON
FLOYD WEBB
BERNARD NICHOLAS
ARTHUR JAF A
JOHN BARNES
AMY CAREY
JOSEPH BURTON
KERRY MARSHALL
LEN HUNT
ARLINE BURK
C.C. BARNES
NANDI BOWE
MILLER TOBIN
LARRY MEISTRICH
TERESA YARBROUGH
NANETTE GUIDEBECK
BEVERLY BALLZIGLER
KATHY RICHTER
ERIC MOFFORD
ARTHUR JAF A
N'JAI KAI
WILLIAM HUDSON
TOMMY BURNS
ROBIN MELHUI SH
SHARON PRYOR
JIMMIE FIELDER
VEDA CAMPBELL
CHRIS SIBERT
ALEX VLACOS
KEVIN HAMM
ALEX SAKHAROV
VALARIE VAN NORTE
MICHAEL KELLY
WILLIAMS
RICARDO BUTLER
DIOGENETTE
WILLIAMS
PETER KNOWLTON
FRANK FLEMING
UMAR ABDURRAHMAN
ALBERT MEGGETT
AJANI OFUNNIYIN
MSHINDE HARRIS
TIFFANY TAYLOR
WILHAMINE WILSON
GLORIA POLKE
ROSE CHATTERTON
BRYAN A. SEABROOK
PAMELA FERRELL
RONALD DAISE
SGT. WHITES'S DINER
BLANCHE SYPHER
KEITH WARD
WILLARD STEPHENS
ERNEST PARKS
ROBERT HORAN
PHYLISS RAYNOR
WANDA DAISE
MICHAEL SCOTT REID
ROSSIE COLTER

Location Production Assistants

Camera Truck Driver/Grip
Art Department Production Assistants

Production Assistants/Grips

Transportation Captain
Drivers

Interns

Post Production Supervisor
Supervising Sound Editor
Dialogue Editors

Sound Effects Editors

ADR Editor
Rerecording Mixers

Music Recorded by
Music Mixer & Engineer
Assistant Engineer
Authentic African Percussions
& Vocals Coordinated by
African Percussions & Vocals

Eastern Percussionists

Vocalists

Dailies
Titles & Opticals

Negative Conforming
Laboratory
Rerecorded by

LORNA JOHNSON
TRACIE MORRIS
RUSSELL MONDY
SARAH SHIELDS
GLORIA NAYLOR
MAGGIE DUGGAN
R.E. HENRY SUNSHINE
CHRIS BROWN
BRIAN CULBERTSON
BRIAN LEE HORLE
LARRY SIMS
KENNETH WRIGHT
J.T. MILLER
CALVIN CHAPLIN
MAGGIE DUGGAN
BRIAN CULBERTSON
CONNIE POLK
SANDRA COOK
SUSAN L. RAHN
AMY CAREY
MICHAEL PAYNE
INGEBORG LARSON
MELISSA PEABODY
DOUG BLUSH
RAY GREENE
SABRINA STEPHENSON
JEFF SCHIRO
JOSEPH ZAPPALA
KRIS CAMPBELL
JEREMY HOENACK,
M.P.S.E., C.A.S.
ROBERT MANAHAN
MELISSA SHERWOOD
HOFMAN, C.A.S.
OFF MELROSE STUDIO
JACK ROUBEN
ANDREW SCHEPS
BILL SUMMERS
JESUS PEDRO ORTA
MENGE HERNANDEZ
FRANCIS AWE
BILL SUMMERS
ELO
MANOOCHER
SADEGHI
ASHHD KHAN
ROSA PARRILLA
VALENTINA SOARES
ABIOLA
DIANNE RICHBURG
FELICIDAD
YVETTE BOSTIC
RADHAZ
HANIF NOOR
MOHAMMED
ALLEN FOVARY II
MICKI BUTLER
DU ART LABORATORIES
ATLANTA FILM
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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

JULIE DASH
PRODUCER/WRITER/DIRECTOR

Julie Dash was born and raised in New York City. She is an independent filmmaker who has received wide recognition for her work; Ms. Dash tours nationally and internationally with her films. Prints of her films, ILLUSIONS and FOUR WOMEN have been permanently archived at Indiana University and at Clark College in Atlanta. She is currently working on a series of films depicting Black women in the United States from the turn of the century to the year 2000 A.D.

Ms. Dash has a 1991/92 Fulbright Fellowship to London to collaborate on a screenplay with Maureen Blackwood of Sankofa. In 1989, she won a Rockefeller Intercultural Film Fellowship. In 1981, she was the recipient of a prestigious John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship for her work in film. She just completed her first feature length film, DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST, for an American Playhouse theatrical release in 1992. DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST won the first prize award in cinematography, for dramatic film, at the 1991 Sundance Film Festival in Utah.

Her critically acclaimed short film, ILLUSIONS, has won the 1989 Jury Prize for the Best Film of The Decade, awarded by the Black Filmmaker Foundation. ILLUSIONS was nominated for a 1988 Cable ACE Award in Art Direction, and was the season opener of "Likely Stories," The Learning Channel's new series showcasing fictional works by independent filmmakers. In 1985, she was a recipient of the Black American Cinema Society award for ILLUSIONS.

In 1986, she relocated to Atlanta, Georgia from Los Angeles. Ms. Dash had been selected by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to work as a directing apprentice, in Atlanta, on "Leader Of The Band". Later, she began working with the Atlanta-based National Black Women's Health Project on a six-part media presentation on adolescent pregnancy.

In 1985, 1983, and 1981, she was the recipient of an Individual Artist Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1981, she was awarded an Independent Filmmaker's Grant from the American Film Institute (AFI).

From 1978 to 1980, Ms. Dash worked for the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), in Los Angeles, as a member of the Classifications and Rating Administration. One of six voting board members, she made daily decisions that vitally affected the fortunes of more than 350 movies made each of those years; she screened all film for theatrical distribution in the United States to apply a G, PG, R or X rating. On several occasions during her three-year tenure with the Ratings board, she travelled to Pinewood Studios in London on special assignment screenings.

On two of these MPAA European assignments, Ms. Dash was able to attend and participate in the Cannes International Film Festival in France. At the 1980 festival, she co-sponsored a screening of short films by Black Americans in the Marche du Cinema. This screening led directly to the historic retrospective of Afro-American cinema held in October 1980 at FNAC in Paris at the Forum Les Halles.

In February of 1982, she travelled with a delegation of Black American independent filmmakers to attend a film festival sponsored by the National Film Theater of London and the British Commonwealth Institute. This festival occasioned the historical meeting of Black American independent filmmakers with their British counterparts.

In March of 1982, Ms. Dash, along with two other participants from the British tour, was invited to attend the Festival Against Racism in Amiens, France.

During the summer of 1983, two of her films toured throughout forty African countries in the Black Filmmaker Foundation's "American Films: A Touring Exhibition". This tour marked the first time that an African audience was exposed to the works of Black American independent filmmakers.

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

Julie began studying film production in 1969, at the Studio Museum of Harlem, in New York. Later, as an undergraduate at The City College of New York, she majored in psychology until she was accepted into the film studies program at The Leonard Davis Center for the Performing Arts, in the David Picker Film Institute. Before graduation, she wrote and produced a promotional documentary for the New York Urban Coalition, "WORKING MODELS OF SUCCESS"(1974).

With a B.A. in Film Production, Ms. Dash relocated to Los Angeles to attend the Center for Advanced Film Studies at the American Film Institute. At AFI, she studied under several distinguished filmmakers, including William Friedkin, Jan Kadar, and Slavko Vorkapich.

Influenced by Vorkapich's lectures on Kinesthetic responses in cinema, she conceived and directed FOUR WOMEN (1978), an experimental dance film that received a Gold Medal for Women In Film at the 1978 Miami International Film Festival. During her two-year fellowship at AFI, she completed ENEMY OF THE SUN, a feature length screenplay.

Ms. Dash directed DIARY OF AN AFRICAN NUN (1977), as a graduate film student at the University of California, Los Angeles. DIARY OF AN AFRICAN NUN, an adaptation of a short story written by Alice Walker, was screened at the Los Angeles Film Exposition (FILMEX) and gained her a Director's Guild Award for a student film.

Her most publicized and critically examined work, ILLUSIONS (1983), a drama set in 1942, completes the first segment of her series about Black women in the United States. Clyde Taylor writes in Freedomways Magazine, "Black independents (film) have passed through several conceptual periods in which one doctrine or style was dominant; now they seem to be moving towards greater diversity. An important harbinger of this mellowing out is Julie Dash's remarkable ILLUSIONS, which, like recent developments in architecture and jazz, is post-modernist in its historical eclecticism. Dash's refreshing challenge is to assume that her audiences can think and bring to their viewing of her work some knowledge of cinema. Set in a Hollywood studio during World War II, when commercial film production was at its most propagandistic, ILLUSIONS plays inventively on themes of cultural, sexual, and racial domination. While its touch is light and entertaining, it offers the most searing revelation in any medium of the expropriation of Black popular culture by the U.S. mass culture industry...".

THE DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST is the cinema of images and ideas.

Images play a major role in the complex process that shapes our identity. When images of African-American women are depicted on the screen by someone outside of our culture, it is a projection of that filmmaker's mind -- not an expression of our reality. The films that I make are from a Black aesthetic and from an African-American woman's reality. I make the kinds of films that I've always wanted to see.

My films are about women at pivotal moments in their lives; enigmatic women who are juggling complex psyches; who speak to one another in fractured sentences, yet communicate completely through familiar gestures and stances; women who remind me of my old neighborhood and the women who raised me.

My approach to the writing and directing of this film has been to evoke ancient sensibilities, to challenge the conventional formats of representing Black women in the genre of historical drama.

- JULIE DASH

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

ARTHUR Jafa
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Arthur Jafa, "A.J.", is a native of Mississippi, born in Tupelo, and raised in Clarksdale, the home of Delta blues. Jafa studied film at Howard University with Haile Gerima and worked with Charles Burnett on "My Brother's Wedding" and on Chris Choy's "Mississippi Triangle." DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST, his feature film debut, was honored with the award for Best Cinematography at the 1991 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah.

Jafa has directed several short films and is currently preparing his first feature project as director, titled "Stainless", which will employ his Black Visual Intonation Apparatus©.

Based in New York, he is a recipient of a 1991 New York State Council on the Arts grant. He also works as a music video director/producer and continues to work as a cinematographer. Most recently, he has worked with Jackie Shearer on "The 54th Regiment" for the PBS series American Experience, and worked again with Julie Dash on "Praisehouse", a performance film featuring the dance group Urban Bushwomen, for Alive From Off Center.

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Set in the legendary Sea Islands of the South at the turn of the century, DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST follows a Gullah family on the eve of its migration to the North. Led by a remarkable group of African-American women, who are carriers of ancient African traditions and beliefs, the extended family readies itself to leave behind friends, loved ones and an entire insulated way of life. Can these women hold fast to their ancient religious beliefs, or will they be swept away into the race toward an era of science and industry? This richly costumed drama, structured in tableaux to mirror the art and icons of its ancient African past, is a testimony to the secret celebrations and packed-away sorrows of African-American women.

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

ABOUT THE FILM...

DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST is the story of conflict and struggle between changing values in the early 1900's as a Sea Island Gullah family prepares to migrate, leaving their land and legacy for the promise of the North.

The story unfolds over the course of a family picnic, a last supper. Along the way, the film saturates us with impressionistic colors, African symbolism, Gullah rituals, cooking, dialect and the sound of field cries, all expressing the complex resonances of the Gullah lifestyle. The film is structured in the way that an African Griot would recount a family's history. Rather than having a linear structure, the Peazant family's story is recalled, remembered and recollected in a manner that evokes the oral tradition.

The film focuses on the women of the Peazant family, carriers of traditions and beliefs firmly linked to their African heritage. They are the descendants of African captives who worked the indigo, rice and cotton plantations during slavery. These unique African-Americans speak a distinct language called "Gullah" or "Geechee". These women carry in their heads and pockets "scraps of memories", bits and pieces of family memorabilia left by their earliest remembered ancestors. Among those memories are recollections of a group of Ibo captives who, refusing to live in slavery, "walked on water to get back to Africa."

DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST is set on an island among the hundreds of sea islands along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. It is an all Black community. The landowners, unable to withstand the heat, insects, and the threat of yellow fever, live across the river on the mainland.

NANA PEAZANT (Cora Lee Day), the 88 year old matriarch of the Peazant family, fights to hold on to ancient religious beliefs at the dawn of a new century. Her granddaughter EULA (Alva Rogers) was raped by a landowner and is now pregnant. Eula's husband ELI (Adisa Anderson) believes that she is carrying the child of the rapist. Tormented by Eula's pregnancy, Eli cannot bear to talk to Eula, nor embrace her as his wife. Nana has been wrestling with the spirit world in an effort to keep her family from leaving their island; now she must turn all of her attention to the storm raging inside of Eula's womb. Nana Peazant calls upon her ancestors to ensure that Eli is the father of his wife's child.

HAAGAR PEAZANT (Kaycee Moore), an outsider who has married into this Gullah family, looks forward to embracing the culture of the North. Haagar seeks to distance herself and her children from the remote Sea Islands and to leave behind the old folks like Nana Peazant and their "hoodoo mess!" Haagar tries to rule the Peazant family with her indomitable will. Before the day is over, Haagar and Nana Peazant lock horns in a battle for the spiritual leadership of the family.

At the picnic, Eula seeks out YELLOW MARY (Barbara-O), who has returned home "ruined" after having worked as a wet nurse and prostitute in Cuba. On the eve of her family's departure, Yellow Mary is determined to reclaim her place in the Peazant family history.

Eli and Eula are compelled by the will of Nana Peazant to seek a fellowship with their ancestors through spiritual possession. In his possessed state, Eli sees that the child Eula is carrying is his.

In the final moments of the film, Nana Peazant leads her family through a ritual of spiritual regeneration. In the ceremony, Nana creates a talisman. She calls it her "hand", and it is to be carried by her family into the urban centers of the North. With a photographic style that is breathtaking, DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST is a sensuous drama that is full of the unexpected.

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION...

Hard work combined with vision does pay off. Just ask Atlanta-based filmmaker Julie Dash. After an odyssey of nearly 15 years researching her ancestral roots, searching for funding, and battling major hurdles and obstacles to complete her first independent feature film, Ms. Dash is bringing her unique vision of African-American culture to the screen with *Daughters of the Dust*.

Growing up in a housing project in Queens, New York, she did not have much interest in the arts. In fact, her first exposure to filmmaking, a film class at the Studio Museum in Harlem, was just "something to do." Eventually, however, she earned two degrees in film production, went on to direct a series of short films focused on African-American women, and began gathering information for *Daughters*.

Her own Gullah heritage, from her father's side of the family, inspired her to write the script, which she began in 1976 while studying at the American Film Institute. "I'd never thought about it that much until I went to college," says Dash. "Then I started learning about the Sea Islands, and the West African culture that's still prevalent there, and I realized things like why my father had a particular accent...the stories from my childhood began to make sense...I wanted to do something dramatic around those ideas, the language, the food, the people, the way they moved and walked."

Ms. Dash's script was originally funded by the National Endowment for the Arts as a short, but the story kept growing. She spent close to ten years researching the Gullah tradition, from New York's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, to UCLA's libraries. A 1981 grant from the Guggenheim Foundation for Research allowed her to intensify her research on the Sea Island culture and religion, and also to collect stories from relatives from the area. This extensive research is reflected in the African-born Gullah dialect of the film's actors and the production design of the film, which is rich in symbols of the West African cultural practices retained by the Sea Islanders, original African- and Middle Eastern-inspired music, and depiction of various religions, including traditional West African worship ritual, Santeria, Islam, Catholicism and Baptist beliefs.

Money was pieced together through a Rockefeller Fellowship and from grants awarded by the Fulton County Arts Council in Georgia, the Georgia Humanities and Appalshop Southeast Fellowships, and the National Black Programming Consortium. In 1987, with a trailer put together using these funds, Ms. Dash went to a PBS weekend retreat at Sundance and was able to interest Lynn Holst from PBS's American Playhouse. Eventually, American Playhouse provided \$650,000, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting committed \$150,000.

With these production funds, Ms. Dash was able to assemble a cast including local Gullah actors, and she made a conscious effort to use actors and technicians who had supported Black independent film and theater in the past. Filming began on the Sea Islands in October 1989, right at the time Hurricane Hugo devastated large parts of the coast; production had to be halted for a week, and the cast was plagued with insects. Cast and crew persevered, and the film wrapped after 28 grueling days. It was in post production up until its appearance at the 1991 Sundance Film Festival.

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

ABOUT THE CAST...

ADISA ANDERSON Eli Peazant

Like many of the actors in DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST, Adisa Anderson, a native of Los Angeles, has a history of working with Black independent filmmakers. Adisa was featured in several independent films, including Nigerian director Tunde Ogunleye's "After The Lights" and Alile Sharon Larkin's "A Different Image". He also acted as dialogue coach for a number of films, including Julie Dash's award-winning short, ILLUSIONS. Most recently, he has appeared in Atlanta filmmaker Keith Ward's short film "Dance Among Strangers".

Anderson received his initial training as an actor at UCLA's School of Dramatic Art, where he received his B.A. and M.F.A. in 1979. He received the university's highest honor, the Hugh O'Brian Best Actor Award. Judges for this honor included Walter Matthau, Penny Marshall and Rob Reiner. It was at this competition that casting director Ruben Cannon saw Anderson and gave him his first professional assignment in the television series "Roots: The Second Generation".

BARBARA-O Yellow Mary

From Dayton, Ohio, Barbara-O has worked almost exclusively for Black independent filmmakers over the past 20 years. Her earliest roles were in Haile Gerima's "Child Of Resistance" and the classic Black independent feature "Bush Mama". She has also co-starred with Muhammad Ali in "Freedom Road". She previously worked with Julie Dash when Dash was a student at the American Film Institute and as the lead in "Diary Of An African Nun", an adaptation of the short story by Alice Walker.

CHERYL LYNN BRUCE Viola Peazant

Cheryl Lynn Bruce, a native of Chicago, received her Bachelor of Arts in Speech and Theater from the University of Illinois, where she also did graduate study. She received Chicago's 1990 Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Ensemble for the Northlight Theatre production of "From The Mississippi". Bruce was seen in the Goodman Theatre's premiere of "Death And The King's Horseman" by Wole Soyinke. She also performed in the world premieres of "Advice To The Players" and "Execution Of Justice" at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville. In Chicago, Bruce toured with Victory Garden's "Takunda" and appeared with South African author Gcina Mhlophe in "Have You Seen Zindile?" at the Chicago Theatre Company. She performed in the Chicago, San Diego, London, and Broadway productions of Steppenwolf Theatre Company's Tony Award-winning adaptation of John Steinbeck's "The Grapes Of Wrath." She also appeared in Costa Gavras' film "Music Box" and in the ABC mini-series "Separate But Equal" with Sidney Poitier.

CORA LEE DAY Nana Peazant

Cora Lee Day first worked with Julie Dash in the California desert on Larry Clark's "Passing Through", the classic jazz feature film that came out of the Black independent film movement in the seventies. She has also worked with acclaimed independent director Haile Gerima on "Bush Mama" along with Barbara-O and has appeared on the television series "Frank's Place". She has worked as an extra and in bit parts in numerous films and network television series.

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

TOMMY HICKS
Mr. Snead

A native of Gary, Indiana, Tommy Hicks graduated from Indiana State University with a major in theater. He worked extensively off-off Broadway, and on Broadway. He has toured nationally with the Broadway play "What The Winesellers Buy" and internationally in the Mideast and Europe with the off-Broadway play "The King Trilogy".

A veteran of daytime soap operas and public television, Hicks' most acclaimed roles were in the Spike Lee films "Joe's Bed-Stuy Barbershop: We Cut Heads, as numbers king Nicolas Lovejoy, and in "She's Gotta Have It" as Jamie Overstreet.

In addition to DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST, Hicks is in Robert Townsend's new film "The Five Heartbeats" and the independent feature "Delusions", directed by Carl Colpeart.

KAYCEE MOORE
Haagar Peazant

Kaycee Moore has appeared as a lead actress in two classic Black independent films: Charles Burnett's award-winning "Killer Of Sheep" and Billy Woodberry's "Bless Their Little Hearts". She also worked with John Cassavetes in "Opening Night" and in many other feature film productions. Residing in Kansas City, Missouri, Moore is presently executive director of the Kansas City Chapter For Sickle Cell Disease, Inc.

ALVA ROGERS
Eula Peazant

Alva Rogers has done performance art/theatre with Urban Bush Women, Laurie Carlos, Kaylynn Sullivan and Lisa Jones. She appeared in Spike Lee's "School Daze".

A critically acclaimed singer, she has presented her original compositions and arrangements in New York at The New Museum, Knitting Factory, The Kitchen, P.S. 122, the Performing Garage and Dixon Place. She took part in P.S. 122's 1990 Field Trip, performing at the Milwa.

Rogers was featured soloist at the 1986 New Bel Canto Vocalist Series and the First and Second Annual Women in Improvisation festivals. She has also performed with Butch Morris and his ensembles. Her debut album on S.O.U.L./MCA was released this spring.

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

JOHN BARNES
ORIGINAL MUSIC COMPOSITION

John Barnes is a composer/producer/arranger/musician who has played and collaborated with a variety of acclaimed artists. Some other popular musicians he's worked with include Marvin Gaye, Quincy Jones, Herb Alpert, Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, Lionel Richie and the Pointer Sisters.

For the soundtrack of DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST, he has assembled an impressive collection of musicians and styles to evoke the magic and mystery of the film's theme.

In composing the soundtrack, Barnes spanned continents and musical genres by using a myriad of instruments, including the synclavier, the Middle Eastern santour, African bata drums and African talking drums. He successfully mixed synclavier-based percussion with authentic music from Africa, India and the Middle East.

One of the composer's aims was to depict various religions - including traditional West African worship ritual, Santeria, Islam, Catholicism and Baptist beliefs - through musical expression.

Barnes drew from his own spiritual beliefs - which include a respect for astrology - in composing music for DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST. For instance, he wrote the UNBORN CHILD's Theme in the key of "B", the key of Libra, representing balance and justice, he says, because "this character was coming into the world to impart justice, a healing, upon her father and mother and her family".

Similarly, he wrote NANA's Theme in the key of "A," representing the Age of Aquarius, or the new age that was imminent for Nana's family.

The film's closing theme, called the ELEGBA THEME, was written in the key of Taurus, "D" sharp (or "E" flat). Barnes says, "It is the key of the Earth, the key ruled by love." The lyrics, "Ago Elegba", "...show the way Elegba..." he says, "are about people moving forward after having been given love and dignity and now facing the crossroads.

In the African diaspora, Barnes says, "we all feel what each other does...whether we know the people, understand the language or know the culture." The music of DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST has resonance, a transcendence that aims to make audiences feel the Peasant family's story, even as they view it.

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PRODUCTION DESIGNER'S STATEMENT

The aesthetic ideal for the production design is, in a phrase, "economy of means, richness of expression." This concept has been the over-arching principle in the lives of Black people throughout the diaspora. In DAUGHTERS, we sought to magnify that idea as a subtext to the story of the Peasant family.

We had two main objectives in the design of DAUGHTERS. First, to create a credible period environment in which the story could be told, then to infuse that environment with evidence and symbols of the African cultural practices retained by Black Sea Islanders to astonishing degrees.

The primary site of retention display is the cemetery. Here a direct cultural link with Kongo-Angola grave decoration is undeniable. As in the Kongo, the use of sculpture pottery, cups, clocks, and other personal effects of the deceased on the grave are meant to "honor the spirit in the earth, guide it to the other world, and prevent it from wandering or returning to haunt survivors." One can imagine the density accumulated through generations of this practice. That's what we were going for.

The whole world of the Peasants was to resonate with spiritual and aesthetic parallels to their African ancestors. A pet turtle has the Kongo symbol for the cosmos painted on his shell. The house is wallpapered with newspaper to protect against witches. The children's room, covered with the accumulated drawings of generations of Peasant children, reminds us of the cave drawings of southern Africa. Outside, a bottle tree to protect against malevolent spirits stands between the house and Eli's blacksmithing shed, ringed with barren trees painted bright green to represent Ogun, the West African god of iron and the forge. Even Nana's chair, the matriarchal throne, is a structure of branches and twigs grafted onto an existing chair. Everything was designed to highlight continuity in the African tradition and richness achieved with economy of means.

- KERRY MARSHALL

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DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST

SYMBOLISM AND THE PEAZANT FAMILY

Most characters in American narrative films are grounded in parameters dictated by the archetypal Greek gods and goddesses of classical western literature. The crucial underlying references for the family in DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST, the Peazants, are the deities of classical West African cosmologies.

NANA PEAZANT, age 88, played by Cora Lee Day, represents traditional African based socio-cultural beliefs. Nana is the great grandmother of the Peazant family; she is the link between the old and the new. The musical score surrounding Nana echoes of the African deity Oshun; the young "daughter" who is leaving home to seek her fortune in the city. It's a melancholy and ancient Yoruba-based tune expressing Nana's sense of loss of family.

Nana's narration usually begins with "I recollect..." as recollection implies religious contemplation, and things temporarily forgotten that are brought back. Inside of an old rusting tin can, Nana carries what she calls her family's "scraps of memories." These are bits and pieces of her family's physical history among the Sea Islands. Among those scraps of memories is a piece of her mother's hair. In a final scene, a ritual that can be called a "root revival of love", Nana constructs a "hand" from her scraps of memories combined with a piece of her own hair. Nana makes the "hand" to protect her family on their journey North; it's a talisman for them to keep with them in their future.

EULA PEAZANT, age 22, played by Alva Rogers, represents continuation of the Peazant family. Eula is dedicated to the maintenance and growth of the Peazant family. Her character adapts well in both the sacred and secular worlds. She is willing to migrate North with her husband and family, yet equally satisfied to remain in the Sea Islands with the old souls. Eula represents the West African deity Oya Yansa, the spirit of the winds of change. Eula is pregnant (with the Unborn Child). We find her distraught and seeking guidance from the ancestors because her husband believes she is carrying the child of a white rapist. Eula's crisis is symbolic of the Peazant family's movement toward growth and change in their difficult decision to leave behind all that is known to them and migrate North.

ELI PEAZANT, age 25, played by Adisa Anderson, is the husband of Eula. Eli represents Ogun, the deity of iron and war. Eli's musical score reflects Ogun's confusion and his anger; and the maintenance of an allegiance to a West African male secret society. We see Eli performing secret society hand signals of the Sande clan, hand signals that we can see today performed by urban gang members who have little, if any, recollection of their forefathers as they battle among themselves in cities around the United States. Eli is symbolic of the loss of the African-American male's warrior status -- the "sons of drums" still fighting to determine their own destiny in the New World.

THE UNBORN CHILD, played by Kai-Lynn Warren, is the storm raging inside Eula's womb. The Unborn Child occupies space in the world of the sacred and the secular. She embodies the duality of existence that African-Americans experience in the United States. The Unborn Child has one foot in this world and one foot in another. She is Eshu Elegba, the guardian of the cross roads. When she becomes impatient with her parents' (Eli and Eula's) dilemma about who has fathered her, the Unborn Child comes out of her mother's womb and walks among them as a five-year-old -- to help them.

YELLOW MARY PEAZANT, played by Barbara-O, represents the African-American woman's loss of her self-esteem during slavery and Reconstruction. Yellow Mary is a prostitute who maintains a very independent lifestyle. Yellow Mary's name is derived from the name of the African goddess Yemonja, who is also known as the Mother of the Sea, Mother of Dreams, Mother of Secrets, and often referred to as the Veiled Isis. Yellow Mary's return home, to Ibo Landing, is depicted as a universal rite of transition. The symbolism of her entrance speaks directly to this character's personal dilemma. When we first see her, she is isolated in an intermediate position in life. She is on a boat enroute to Ibo Landing. Yellow Mary returns home wearing an elaborate veil that separates her from the outside world (of prostitution) as well as from her family. Yellow Mary is accompanied by her "girlfriend" TRULA

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(another prostitute). These two women stop by Ibo Landing to bid Yellow Mary's family farewell; they plan to continue on together to Nova Scotia, Trula's place of birth, in search of a new life together.

VIOLA PEAZANT, played by Cheryl Lynn Bruce, joins Yellow Mary on the same boat to Ibo Landing. Viola is Yellow Mary's cousin and a devoted Baptist who has been trained as a missionary. Viola reflects a syncretism of ancient African beliefs and Christianity. Viola's character attempts to escape her history and the trauma of her second-class citizenship within her newfound religious beliefs. Baptism, the total immersion in water, "crossing the river Jordan", the religious imagery of what comes after death is easily acceptable to Viola. She is an emotional woman. Viola's present form of religious hysteria and ecstatic seizure replace her forgotten physical communions with ancient spirits in possession.

HAAGAR PEAZANT, played by Kaycee Moore, is a self-educated progressive striver who desires to leave behind all that ties her family to their African heritage. Haagar embodies the ethos of the African-American urban migration -- the primordial push that propels us all to move onward, to seek more, to become, to grow and change. That Haagar leaves behind an isolated and insulated traditional society at the turn of the century for the inclusive bureaucratic impersonality of the modern world is a continually unfolding drama.

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GULLAH LANGUAGE CONSULTANT'S STATEMENT

As I grew up on St. Helena Island, the word "Gullah" identified the speech of inhabitants of the coastal island of South Carolina and Georgia. It was synonymous to "Geechee," "broken English", "bad English". I nor my eight older siblings were allowed to speak it; our mother was a school teacher and both parents were graduates of Penn School, the first school in the south for freed Blacks. I heard it spoken everywhere, though. At church, in the grocery store, on the school bus, among neighbors, the rapidly spoken, rhythmic creole slave language flourished. "Morning" was "dayclean"; "turtle" was "coota"; "three" was "shree"; and "Isn't that so?" was "Enty?"

Today, "Gullah" denotes a way of life for a peculiar and special group of African-Americans who have maintained the purest forms of African mores in this country. Several years ago, I was asked to help with the Sea Island Translation Team, headquartered on St. Helena Island. This volunteer project was translating the Bible into Gullah (as part of Wycliffe Bible Translators, Inc.)

Gullah bonds its speakers with others of the African diaspora. About 90 percent of the vocabulary is English, but the grammatical and intonational features are largely West African. Our West African forebears skillfully developed Gullah as a communication system effective enough to make themselves understood in a strange land where even their talking drums (which could transcend cultural and lingual barriers) were prohibited. When the enslaved Africans were brought to the coastal islands of South Carolina and Georgia, their secondary, or trade language, became the dominantly used creole language, known today as Gullah. They've maintained their African-born speech patterns and customs because the unbridged waterways isolated them from the mainlands for years.

My wife Natalie and I created a multi-media story theater production about Gullah heritage to help preserve the culture and inform about its significance. Because much of our history is not recorded in books, we must -- in our homes, schools and churches -- endeavor to show, on a small or large scale, that the day-to-day living of our race had made the greatest contributions to life as we know it. Our songs, stories, endurance, faith, unquenchable hope, and ways of speech have shaped a nation. We need not be ashamed.

- RONALD DAISE

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