



DVD LAUNCH

Great Noises That Fill the Air: Music, Poetry and Performance on Film + discussion

Tonight's DVD launch event will include a post-screening conversation between cultural producer, writer and musician Chardine Taylor-Stone and journalist, broadcaster and author Kevin Le Gendre.

Ten Years in an Open Necked Shirt

This was my first film out of film school and it took years to get made. I lived in London but I took a freelance job at Granada TV in Manchester to get to meet John. He once showed me a damp basement full of drafts of his work, which he had constantly refined. He and his friend, the artist Steve Maguire, used to sit working in small notebooks in a pub on the Bury New Road, with Steve sketching the clientele or characters from John's work. Theirs was a surreal, smoke-filled world reminiscent of the romantic poets. John's work had been in development for many years but had unexpectedly endowed punk with the fully articulated wit of a performance poet and stand-up comedian.

I was fortunate that Rodney Wilson of Arts Council Films favoured the project and when at last Channel 4 started commissioning, a co-production was agreed. I then needed to find a production company. The first advised that I should be thinking of a series of films but I was indifferent to commercial considerations so I went elsewhere. However, the tight schedule, and the film stock, evaporated all too quickly. By the time the film was made John had moved to Stevenage and was well into a record contract, and ambitious tours like the one featured with Linton Kwesi Johnson were possible. However, this moment also felt like the last chance to make the film. The shades were not just for effect – John has very poor, almost tunnel, vision. He once fell off a stage in Ireland and later stepped out of a train as it waited outside a station. He is also agoraphobic, so touring and performance must have been an ordeal. As for many performers, the crutch of heroin may have seemed something he could control, but it subsequently sidelined his career for years.

Participation of Arts Council Films gave the advantage of distribution to independent cinemas, universities and schools, so it was exciting that the production was for both cinema and television. To balance the dense and rich language, I wanted the film to be visually vibrant, so I worked with cinematographers who were attuned to fiction. All were NFTS graduates and did a great job, as did the sound recordist and editor. I also wanted to disrupt expectations by mixing observational cinema, performance, interview, musical and dramatic elements.

Most of the film was shot around tour dates in Manchester and Sheffield with random interviews with John and Linton arising and tour guests included. Another interview was added during the Hilary Mason shoot in London. In it, John says he is not a confessional poet – he would rather point the finger away from himself. It is difficult to do justice to John but I had hoped to probe his life and development in more depth, including his work alongside Steve

Maguire and *The Invisible Girls*, but the film does provide a broad sketch of a particular moment and was well received.

Nick May. Nick has made films including *The Hills Are Alive* and long-term film and photography works for an art gallery context, including *Till the Cows Come Home* (2006) and *FOODCHAIN* (2009). He now concentrates on painting.

Dread Beat and Blood

My reputation as a poet was built on the publication of my first collection, *Dread Beat An' Blood*, published in 1975 by Bogle-L'Ouverture, with a generous introduction by my mentor Andrew Salkey, the Jamaican novelist and broadcaster.

I couldn't believe my luck when, a couple of years later, I was approached by Franco Rosso who wanted to make a film about my work. I didn't know Franco but I knew of his film about the historic Mangrove Nine trial of Black activists who had organised a campaign against police harassment of the Mangrove restaurant.

Franco's proposal came at a pivotal time in my life. I was working at the Keskidee Community and Arts Centre in Islington as a librarian and educational resources officer, having just completed a nine-month stint as writer in residence in the London Borough of Lambeth. The timing was as propitious for Franco as it was for me.

As a member of the Race Today Collective and the Black Parents Movement, I was involved in a justice campaign for George Lindo, a Jamaican from Bradford who had been wrongfully convicted of robbery. I was also involved in the occupation of my local youth and community centre in Brixton, which the new warden for the Methodist church was trying to shut down because he resented the autonomy of the youth club members. Moreover, I had signed a deal with Virgin Records and began to record my first reggae album, *Dread Beat An' Blood*. There was no shortage of material for Franco to film.

By the time the eponymous film was finished, my career as a reggae artist was well on the way. I had hoped that the film would mean extra promotion for the record. Alas, it was not to be, because the scheduled date for the film to be shown on BBC2 was put back by the director general on the grounds that it could be prejudicial against the Tories. 'It Dread Inna Ingran', a poem I wrote for the George Lindo campaign, which was featured in the film, made reference to Margaret Thatcher's racist election campaign remarks. By the time the film was eventually broadcast in 1979, I'd already left Virgin and my second album, *Forces of Victory*, had been released on Island Records. Needless to say, the people responsible for promotions at Island were very pleased that I'd gotten exposure on television. More importantly, the campaign to free George Lindo from prison got national attention.

I once heard my friend, novelist Caryl Phillips, tell an audience that when he was a student at Oxford more than 40 years ago, he came down to London to see the film and realised that he was the only person in the cinema. Since then, *Dread Beat and Blood* has been broadcast on numerous occasions on a community television channel, I've been told, and has now gained a sort of cult status. Along with *The Mangrove Nine* (1973) and *Babylon* (1981), Franco Rosso will be remembered for this film.

Linton Kwesi Johnson, poet, musician, broadcaster and writer
Extracts from *Great Noises That Fill the Air*, BFI DVD booklet, 2021

Chardine Taylor Stone is an award winning cultural producer Black feminist activist and writer. She was featured in *The Voice* newspaper as one of the Women Who Rocked the World in 2015, Diva Magazine’s LGBT Power List 2016 and BuzzFeed’s ‘The Most Inspiring British LGBT People of 2016’. A regular on the Pride Power List, in May 2017 Chardine won the British LGBT Award for ‘Outstanding Contribution to LGBT+ life’. In 2018 she was nominated by Diva Awards for LGBT Activist/Campaigner of the Year and has again been nominated by Diva Awards in 2020 for ‘Unsung Hero’. A committed trade unionist she is vice-chair of the Musician’s Union Equalities Committee and newly elected member of the London Regional Committee. Chardine is also a newly appointed trustee of London Black Women’s Project, a specialist and dedicated organisation for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women and girls who have experienced violence and abuse.

Kevin Le Gendre is a British journalist, broadcaster and author whose work focuses on Black music. He is deputy editor of *Echoes* magazine, has written for a wide range of publications, including *Jazzwise*, *MusicWeek*, *Vibrations* and *The Independent on Sunday* and is a contributor to such radio programmes as BBC Radio 3’s *J to Z* and BBC Radio 4’s *Front Row*. At the 2009 Parliamentary Jazz Awards Le Gendre was chosen as ‘Jazz Journalist of the Year’. He is the author of *Soul Unsung: Reflections on the Band in Black Popular Music* (2012), *Don’t Stop the Carnival: Black British Music: Vol 1 from the Middle Ages to the 1960s* (2018) and *Hear My Train a Comin’: The Songs of Jimi Hendrix* (2020).

TEN YEARS IN AN OPEN NECKED SHIRT

Director: Nick May
Producers: Elizabeth Taylor-Mead, Peter Berry
Sponsor: Arts Council of Great Britain
Production Companies: Metropolis Pictures, Channel Four Television Company
Executive Producer: Rodney Wilson
Script: Nick May, David Kelly
Lighting Camera: Oliver Stapleton
Additional Photography: Richard Greatrex, Steven Alcorn, David Scott
Lighting: Bruce Kington
Editor: John Mister
Music: The Invisible Girls
Additional Music: Mantovani and his Orchestra, Gordon Raitt
Sound Recording: Diana Rushton, Stuart Edwards

With

John Cooper Clarke
Linton Kwesi Johnson
Jules Deelder
Michèle Roberts
Attila The Stockbroker
Seething Wells
Cyrene Hilary Mason (*mother*)
Sally Cranfield (*lost woman*)
Andy de la Tour (*Raoul*)
Jan Carter, Luke Kelly (*The Chums*)
Philip Ward (*choirboy*)
Steven Bewley, Darren Ellis, Steve Langton, Mark Luxford (*boys*)
Andy Buxton, Andrew Constable
From Melody Maker: Patrick Humphries (*interviewers*)

UK 1982
61 mins

DREAD BEAT AND BLOOD

Director and Producer: Franco Rosso
Sponsor: Arts Council of Great Britain
Production Company: Rebel Movies
Script: Franco Rosso, Linton Kwesi Johnson
Camera: Ivan Strasburg, Pasco MacFarland
Editor: David Hope
Sound: Mike McDuffie, Eddie Tise, Steve Shaw, Richard King

With

Linton Kwesi Johnson
Poet and the Roots

UK 1979
45 mins

Great Noises That Fill the Air (2-Disc DVD Set)

Originally produced for the Arts Council between 1978 and 1996, these rare archive films showcase a diverse range of rich, inventive approaches to the urgent social and political contexts and motivations that trigger music and art making.

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