



BFI FAMILIES

FAMILY FRIENDLY FILM SCREENINGS,
ACTIVITIES AND WORKSHOPS



KIRIKOU AND THE SORCERESS

What's it about?

Karaba, a powerful sorceress, is responsible for the local spring running dry and for removing nearly all the male inhabitants of a West African village – but Kirikou is able to walk and talk as soon as he's born, and this quick-witted child is determined to right her wrongs. West African folk tales form the basis for this creative, mesmerising film from master animator Michel Ocelot.

Making 'Kirikou and the Sorceress'

Writer-director Michel Ocelot, who himself lived in Senegal as a child, recalls that the idea of the film came from a West African tale he read years ago: 'That story aroused something in me and I immediately took notes, with a film in mind. At the beginning, a small child is talking whilst still inside his mother's womb demanding his birth. The mother replies with similar audacity and the child gives birth to himself. He is a little boy who doesn't agree with what the villagers seek to make him think. Unlike them, he confronts the sorceress instead of accepting and fearing her authority. There must be a reason for her malice, and Kirikou wants to know what it is.'

As background to this story of a small boy determined to get an answer to a big question, the director wanted to put the real Africa on the screen, believing that it had never been portrayed properly before. ('*The Lion King*', he asserts, 'used African settings, but not Africa or Africans.')

As a result you will today see hoopoes, zorils, ground squirrels, wart hogs and snakes on the screen. They are not humanised; they cannot talk; they simply are and remain animals. Similarly, Ocelot did not wish to use the plants already shown many times before in animated films, so he imposed a rule on all his animators: all plants shown in *Kirikou* had to be exact reproductions of real tropical plants. He wanted each plant, even those hidden in the forest, to be a small artistic masterpiece.

When it came to choice of colours, Ocelot revived those that had stuck in his mind over the decades: 'I used the vivid memories of my childhood: an ochre village, the yellow savannah, the emerald forest, the green river, the hut of the sorceress – outside as grey and black as death, inside as red as hell – and the rainbow-coloured finale of a crowd at a fancy-dress party.'

Wanting the music to be equally authentic, Ocelot commissioned Youssou N'dour, the renowned Senegalese musician, to compose a soundtrack using only traditional West African instruments. N'dour accepted the task, and produced music which features such little-known instruments as the bafalon, the ritti, the cora, the xalam, the tokho, the sabaar and the belon.

This resolutely non-Disney stance of Ocelot's meant that the project of producing an animated feature-film mainly in France was a big gamble. Fortunately his producer is, like him, a man of faith: 'I believe that European audiences demand diversity in films and are culturally more sensitive than some other audiences. We never really had enough money, so for over five years minor miracles were needed on almost a daily basis. Nevertheless, nothing that was of creative importance to the film was left out or sacrificed.'

Notes by Terry Staples, adapted from information on www.kirikou.net

KIRIKOU AND THE SORCERESS (KIRIKOU ET LA SORCIERE)

Director: Michel Ocelot
Production Companies: Armateurs, Odec Kid Cartoons, Monipoly Productions, Trans Europ Productions, Studio O, France 3 Cinéma, RTBF, Exposure
Producers: Didier Brunner, Jacques Vercruyssen, Paul Thiltges
Screenplay: Michel Ocelot
Director of Photography: Daniel Borenstein
Layout Chief: Pascal Lemaire
Head Animator: Inga Riba
Colouring Directors: Benedicte Galup, Marie-Paule Paturand, Philippe Vercruyssen
Editor: Dominique Lefever
Production Designer: Thierry Million
Music: Youssou N'dour

Voice Cast

Tshilombo Lubambu (*uncle*)
Maimouna Ndiaye (*mother*)
Doudou Gueye Thiaw (*Kirikou as a baby*)
Awa Sene Sarr (*Karaba*)
Robert Lionsol, Marie Augustine Diatta, Isseu Niang, Adjoua Barry, Samba Wane, Sidney Kotto, Wéré Wéré Liking *

France/Luxembourg/Belgium 1998
70 mins

* Uncredited