



**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**

# Young Soul Rebels

## Isaac Julien on 'Young Soul Rebels'

I suppose *Young Soul Rebels* is a film which tries to deal with a number of questions that people would rather sweep under the carpet at this moment, especially in Europe because of 1992 and the reformation of European cultural identity. There are new barriers being put up symbolically and psychically – around national identity, racial identity, nationality and citizenship. All this brings up a number of anxieties for people like myself who are Black and were born here in Europe, the new Europe.

*Young Soul Rebels* is set in London in 1977, a time when questions of national identity came to the forefront of British consciousness because it was the Queen's Silver Jubilee year. And there was a counter-narrative postulated by the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen'. There's an interesting quote from Johnny Rotten's single: 'There is no future in England's dream. Don't be told what you want. Don't be told what you need.' I think that needs to be repeated at this moment.

The other reason *Young Soul Rebels* is set in 1977 is because I was a soul boy at that time and Nadine Marsh-Edwards, the producer, was a soul girl. And we were interested in 1977 as the moment in Black British culture when you witnessed Black style becoming a social force – a kind of resistance through style, if you like. You can recognise those things much more in Black music coming from Britain today – Soul II Soul and Neneh Cherry – and the way those things have been culturally exported to the US.

So we wanted to talk about where that began. At that time there were no examples of the signifying practices of expressive Black culture in the dominant media in this country. So we used to listen to a lot of American R&B – funk jazz, it was called. It filled a gap because there were no radio stations playing Black music here except Greg Edwards on Capital radio three hours a week on Soul Spectrum.

*Not even Donna Summer?*

Donna Summer was huge with the gay, urban audience in 1977 and 1978. There were a number of clubs that were starting to play that music, but I think it's only now that you can see the fruition of those influences from the Black diaspora, if you like. Now you have something which I think you can call 'authentic' Black British funk, which is a hybrid, in the same way as American rap is.

*What did you do when you were a soul boy?*

I suppose I did very much what Caz and Chris or Tracy do in the film. You were very interested in style, in American music, and in questions around national identity and Britishness, although you couldn't really articulate it clearly. It was very much like a gap, a lack. When Chris in the film runs through the estate and everybody is listening to the Queen's speech on television, you are totally enveloped in those discourses of high British nationalism. It was very difficult to articulate any alternative reading of being British – being Black and British were almost incompatible. Hence Paul Gilroy's witty book title, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*.

I am very interested in opposing the different essentialisms which are fashionable at the moment. Part of the new wave of Black independent filmmaking –

represented by Hanif Kureishi in Stephen Frears's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), or his view in *London Kills Me* (1991), or by films like *Handsworth Songs* (1986), or *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986), or *Looking for Langston* – has tried to grapple with this question of identity, which seems to be at the crux of the emerging debates around cultural representation and political representation. So it's quite difficult work trying to think through the complexity and multiplicity of cultural and racial and sexual differences. One of the underlying themes of *Young Soul Rebels* is that 'difference' does make a difference, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you have to enter into the tunnel vision of essentialism to provide answers. I think something is happening which is more hybrid and complex.

Some people may think that in *Young Soul Rebels* I'm trying to do this 'family of man' number. I don't think I am, but I am articulating 'difference' and people trying to live with 'difference' and people trying to love with 'difference'. We all discuss 'difference', but living with difference appears to be really difficult. Some of the work ACT UP has been doing around the Aids crisis has been interesting. In their new film, *Without Frontiers*, you can see that the crisis has thrown up a number of problems in the Black community and the Latino community where people have to meet across difference with the gay community. This work represents the cutting edge for me.

*Young Soul Rebels* is in a sense about marginality and about transgression in those marginal spaces. The park is interesting as a symbolic space because it has a dual function. In the daytime, it is the site of family pleasures, heterosexual pleasures, and at night it is a space that takes on a different excitement. The characters who go there – TJ and Ken – aren't 'out'. I imagine these characters as people who would have sex and then would turn back to their respective communities – not 'out' at all. But Ken has problems with his desire, in reconciling his own drive.

Caz knows that he's gay. The kind of questions he puts forward in his debate with the Black garage owners – 'Do you still care about TJ's death in the same way now that you know he was gay?' – are the kind of questions I want to put forward to the Black community because I think they're very important questions. In a way, it's a bit of a back door to questions about Aids and the Black community, because there is a constant denial and disavowal of these issues. The ACT UP slogan 'Silence = Death' has resonances for the Black communities too, because proportionally Aids is on the increase faster in these communities.

*What moved me in the film was the expression of sexuality – a mixing of pleasure and danger that you don't often see on the screen. But even that's disturbing. What kind of film did you think you were making?*

We pursued a number of different questions and they led us to those particular ends. The question of having the murder is slightly autobiographical: one of the screenplay writers, Derek Saldaan McClintock, was wrongfully suspected of a murder in 1977 and was questioned by the police. Derek McClintock is mixed race; the other writer I worked with, Paul Hallam, is white and gay, so these issues came up. Can you rely on police accountability around gay people being murdered? Is it important to the community? We think it should be, so we tried to draw a narrative that would seduce audiences to those questions which might not be sympathetic. I think different genres have different apparatuses for seducing audiences. And in some ways, the film isn't of the thriller genre at all. It's a murder mystery, a coming-of-age movie – a buddy movie, if you like.

**Isaac Julien interviewed by Amy Taubin, *Sight and Sound*, August 1991**

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## YOUNG SOUL REBELS

*Director:* Isaac Julien  
*Production Companies:* British Film Institute Production Board, Sankofa Film and Video  
*In association with:* La Sept  
*Production Companies:* Film Four International, Kinowelt Filmverleih, IberoAmericana Films  
*Executive Producers:* Colin MacCabe, Ben Gibson  
*Producer:* Nadine Marsh-Edwards  
*Production Executive:* Angela Topping  
*Production Manager:* Joanna Beresford  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Winnie Wishart  
*Location Manager:* Michael Kelk  
*Post-production Co-ordinator:* Eliza Mellor  
*Technical Supervisor:* Andy Powell  
*Assistant Directors:* Ian Ferguson, Peter Heslop, Stephen Robinson, Ian Hickinbotham, Bill Rudgard  
*2nd Unit Assistant Directors:* Jonny Kurzman, John Withers  
*Assistant Director (2nd Unit):* Steve Millson  
*CASTING:* Gilly Poole, Suzanne Crowley  
*Screenplay:* Paul Hallam, Derrick Saldaan McClintock, Isaac Julien  
*Director of Photography:* Nina Kellgren  
*2nd Unit Photographers:* Steve Tickner, Mike Metcalfe  
*Camera/Steadicam Operator:* Andy Shuttleworth  
*Special Effects:* Any Effects  
*Special Effects Supervisor:* Tom Harris  
*Editor:* John Wilson  
*Production Designer:* Derek Brown  
*Art Director:* Debra Overton  
*Scenic Artists:* Joanna Craze, Annie Lapaz  
*Storyboard Artist:* John Hewitt  
*Costume Designer:* Annie Curtis Jones  
*Costume Advisers:* Joey Attawlia, Debbie Little  
*Wardrobe Supervisor:* Caroline Pitcher  
*Wardrobe Master:* Anthony Black  
*Wardrobe Mistress:* Lisa M. Johnson  
*Make-up Artist:* Yvonne Coppard  
*Titles:* Neville Brody, Frameline  
*Opticals:* Studio 51  
*Music:* Simon Boswell  
*Music Supervisors:* Bonnie Greenberg, Ian P. Hierons, Jill Meyers  
*Choreography:* Foster George  
*Sound Recordists:* Ronald Bailey, Martine Couche  
*Sound Re-recording:* Aad Wirtz  
*Sound Editor:* Zane Hayward  
*Dialogue Editor:* Patrick O'Neill  
*Additional Sound Effects:* Steve Farrer, Nigel Heath, Simon Fisher Turner, Marvin Black  
*ADR Editor:* Shirley Shaw  
*Foley Artist:* Jack Stew  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Clive Curtis

## Cast

Valentine Nonyela (*Chris*)  
Mo Sesay (*Caz*)  
Dorian Healy (*Ken*)  
Frances Barber (*Ann*)  
Sophie Okonedo (*Tracy*)  
Jason Durr (*Billibud*)  
Gary McDonald (*Davis*)  
Debra Gillett (*Jill*)  
Eamonn Walker (*Carlton*)  
James Bowyers (*Sparky*)  
Billy Braham (*Kelly*)  
Wayne Norman (*Biggy*)  
Danielle Scillitoe (*Trish*)  
Ray Shell (*Jeff Kane*)  
Nigel Harrison (*CID man*)  
John Wilson (*park policeman*)  
Brian Conway (*policeman*)  
Mike Mungarvan (*policeman*)  
Sayan Akaddas (*Asian punk girl*)  
Shyro Chung (*TJ*)  
Adam Price (*bouncer*)  
Michael Mascoll, Freddie Brooks (*soul boys*)  
Rodreguez King-Dorset (*Irvine*)  
Lloyd Anderson (*barber*)  
Adam Stuart, Astley Harvey (*men in barber shop*)  
Peter Harding (*radio producer*)  
Richard Jamieson (*football supporter*)  
Mark Brett (*stallkeeper*)  
Joan Harsant (*blue rinse woman*)  
Verona Marshall (*Trish's friend*)  
Frankie Palma (*Trish's friend*)

UK/France/Germany/Spain 1991  
100 mins

The screening on Wed 2 Feb will be introduced by  
BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair

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## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

### To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar

Tue 1 Feb 18:20; Fri 25 Feb 20:45

### Young Soul Rebels

Wed 2 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair); Thu 17 Feb 20:45

### All About My Mother (Todo sobre mi madre)

Wed 2 Feb 20:45; Wed 16 Feb 21:00

### Beautiful Thing

Thu 3 Feb 20:45; Mon 14 Feb 20:30

### The Handmaiden (Ah-ga-ssi)

Fri 4 Feb 17:50; Sat 12 Feb 20:10; Sun 27 Feb 17:50

### Rent

Sat 5 Feb 12:30; Sun 20 Feb 18:10

### Maurice

Sun 6 Feb 15:20; Mon 14 Feb 18:00

### The Watermelon Woman

Mon 7 Feb 20:45; Sat 26 Feb 20:30

### Happy Together (Chun gwong cha sit)

Tue 8 Feb 18:15 (+ intro by Yi Wang, Queer East); Sun 13 Feb 15:20

### My Own Private Idaho

Tue 8 Feb 20:45; Wed 23 Feb 18:00 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair)

### Brokeback Mountain

Wed 9 Feb 17:45 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality

Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair); Mon 21 Feb 20:25

### Go Fish

Wed 9 Feb 20:40; Sat 26 Feb 18:20

### Rope

Thu 10 Feb 18:30; Tue 22 Feb 14:30

### Victim

Thu 10 Feb 20:40; Sun 13 Feb 13:00; Mon 21 Feb 18:00

### Desert Hearts

Fri 11 Feb 20:40; Wed 16 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by BFI Head

Librarian Emma Smart)

### My Beautiful Laundrette

Sat 12 Feb 18:20; Tue 15 Feb 20:45; Sat 19 Feb 20:45

### A Fantastic Woman (Una mujer fantástica)

Sun 13 Feb 18:40; Tue 22 Feb 20:50

### Mädchen in Uniform

Fri 18 Feb 20:30; Sat 26 Feb 16:00

### Moonlight

Thu 24 Feb 14:30; Mon 28 Feb 20:45

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