



**RE-RELEASES**

# The Harder They Come

Jimmy Cliff brings a knockout soundtrack and charisma aplenty to this classic crime drama. A film that needs no introduction to anyone with so much as the slightest interest in reggae or Jamaican culture, *The Harder They Come* celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. Besides its credentials as an explosive action thriller with a killer soundtrack, it is universally credited with introducing reggae and the roots movement to the world as a serious cultural proposition. Perry Henzell's unfiltered portrait of Jamaica's music industry, the emerging Rasta faith and how so many Jamaicans lived, both in the town and the country, redefined a genre of music, giving it context and weight. Five decades on, that excitement and sense of discovery remain undimmed.

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away the film's ending.

## A contemporary review

The plot of *The Harder They Come* was apparently in part suggested by Jimmy Cliff's own life story, and to that extent the film is as much a star vehicle for him as any Hollywood version of the country hick making his way in the big city might be. But Perry Henzell (a graduate from BBC drama and, like most of the crew and cast a Jamaican) has used his simple plot as a springboard to something altogether more ambitious.

The film is the first Jamaican feature, and it's alive with a fierce post-colonial national pride (extending to dialogue in Jamaican patois, warranting subtitles), and an equally fierce hatred of the heritage from three hundred years of colonial rule, expressed in a well-developed left-wing critique of the capitalist society and the repressive church. Behind the action lies a series of comparisons: between orthodox 'missionary' religion and the native Rastafarian sect; between church music (which sublimates physical feeling) and reggae (which boisterously expresses it); between shanty town and luxury villas; between Jamaican native culture and the society of the Jamaican/American bosses. The broad view emerges naturally from Henzell's careful emphasis on detail, which is always integral to the action: a domino game in a back alley, a noisy audience laughing at an especially violent Italian Western. The methodical analysis of corruption within the police force, and within the music business, is notably uncompromising. And Henzell's expert use of a largely non-professional cast gives the film an air of social authenticity.

This said, it must be admitted that *The Harder They Come* has little but the general area of concern in common with say, Latin American agit-prop filmmaking. Henzell has spent many years making commercials, and his film has production values glossy enough to compare with anything from the United States. The use of reggae background music is as commercial as it is 'revolutionary'. To Henzell's credit, however, he knows this very well himself and does not end the film with a pseudo-radical gesture. Ivan's death is certainly heroic, but its heroism is mitigated by his spending his final minutes of life imagining himself the invincible super-hero of a movie, cheered on by a theatre audience. The film's awareness of its own limitations consolidates its remarkable achievement.

**Tony Rayns, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1972**

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## THE HARDER THEY COME

*Directed by:* Perry Henzell

*©/Presented by:* International Films

*Produced by:* Perry Henzell

*Production Manager:* Yvonne Jones

*Assistant Directors:* Robert Russell, Tony Straw

*Written by:* Perry Henzell, Trevor D. Rhone

*Cameramen:* David MacDonald, Peter Jessop, Franklyn St. Juste

*Camera Assistant:* Ernest Davis

*Gaffer:* Roy Marsden

*Edited by:* John Victor Smith, Richard White, Reicland Anderson

*Art Director:* Sally Henzell

*Processing:* Humphries Film Laboratories

*'The Harder They Come' Recorded at:* Dynamic Sounds – Kingston

*Sound:* Bob Povey, Winston Rodney

Beverly Anderson (*housewife*)

Clover Lewis (*market woman*)

Elijah Chambers (*Longa*)

Alton Ellis (*Ivan's double*)

Prince Buster (*DJ at dance*)

Ed 'Bim' Lewis (*photographer*)

Bobby Loban (*Fitz*)

Joanne Dunn (*barmaid*)

Adrian Robinson (*newspaper editor*)

Don Topping (*DJ*)

Karl Leslie (*Freddie*)

Sandra Redwood (*girl*)

Ulla Fraser, Carol Lawes (*Elsa's friends*)

Aston 'Bam' Wynter (*drunk*)

Man-i Hartman (*Rupert*)\*

### Cast

Jimmy Cliff (*Ivanhoe 'Ivan' Martin*)

Janet Bartley (*Elsa*)

Carl Bradshaw (*José*)

Ras Daniel Hartman (*Pedro*)

Basil Keane (*preacher*)

Robert Charlton (*Hilton, recording company manager*)

Winston Stona (*detective*)

Lucia White (*mother*)

Volair Johnson (*pushcart boy*)

Jamaica 1973©

102 mins

\* Uncredited

A BFI release

The screening on Fri 5 Aug 18:15 will be introduced by Reggae season curator and author Lloyd Bradley

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## NEW RELEASES

### Hit the Road (Jaddeh Khaki)

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

### Conscientious Protectors

From Mon 1 Aug

### The Feast

From Fri 19 Aug

### Where Is Anne Frank

From Fri 19 Aug

### Queen of Glory

From Fri 28 Aug

## RE-RELEASES

### The Big City (Mahanagar)

Continues from Fri 22 Jul

### Paris, Texas

Continues from Fri 29 Jul

### The Harder They Come

From Fri 5 Aug (+ intro by season curator and author Lloyd Bradley on Fri 5 Aug 18:15)

### Burning an Illusion

From Fri 19 Aug

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## FROM JAMAICA TO THE WORLD: REGGAE ON FILM

### Rockers

Thu 4 Aug 20:40; Sat 13 Aug 14:45

### No Place Like Home: Redux

Fri 5 Aug 21:00; Fri 19 Aug 18:40

### Riddim Moves – A Dancehall Day Event

Sat 6 Aug 13:00-18:00

### Dancehall Queen

Sat 6 Aug 18:40; Tue 9 Aug 18:20

### Steppin' Razor: Red X

Sun 7 Aug 18:00; Sat 20 Aug 14:45

### Rudeboy: The Story of Trojan Records

Fri 12 Aug 18:20; Sun 28 Aug 18:30

### Better Mus' Come

Sat 13 Aug 18:15; Sat 27 Aug 20:45

### Sprinter

Sat 13 Aug 20:40; Fri 26 Aug 18:10

### African Redemption: The Life and Legacy of Marcus Garvey

Mon 15 Aug 20:40; Sun 28 Aug 14:50

### Reggae Futures

Sat 20 Aug 17:30

### Lion of Judah, War in Ethiopia, 1935-1936 + discussion

Tue 23 Aug 18:20

### Bob Marley: The Making of a Legend + Q&A with directors

**Esther Anderson and Gian Godoy**

Tue 30 Aug 18:10

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email [prognotes@bfi.org.uk](mailto:prognotes@bfi.org.uk)

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