



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

To Sleep with Anger

+ intro by broadcaster and writer Kevin Le Gendre (Wednesday 29 March only)

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

Charles Burnett's intriguing mix of melodrama and allegorical fable has a seemingly happy middle-class African-American family living in Los Angeles visited by an old friend (Glover) from the South – a somewhat mysterious charmer whose presence proves disruptive for his hosts. Exploring the discrepancies of past and present, Christianity and mysticism, tradition and modernity, the film is at once enigmatic, thought-provoking and witty.

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In Charles Burnett's films, you always have to keep an eye on the kids, who are rarely main characters but play pivotal roles nonetheless. Consider his brilliant debut *Killer of Sheep* (1977), a neorealism-inspired drama of everyday life in LA's predominantly African-American Watts district. Its unforgettable first scene depicts a small, cowed-looking boy being lectured by a stern off-screen father-figure on the importance of fighting back against bullies in order to be a real man. After this bracing opening, we don't see this moon-eyed lad again – we never even find out who he is – but the point is sharp enough: innocence rarely lasts long for black children in this impoverished suburb, scarred by residential segregation, racist police brutality and the violent uprisings of 1965. In the rest of *Killer of Sheep*, children – playful sprites full of hope and humour – pepper the landscape. They are poignant counterpoints to the drudgery-stricken adults; funhouse mirrors of their own sad futures. In Burnett's third feature, the majestic and enigmatic *To Sleep with Anger* (1990), children are again crucial in a film ostensibly about adult relationships. The main narrative centres on Harry Mention (Danny Glover), a charismatic visitor from the Deep South who arrives one day on the doorstep of a middle-class churchgoing family in South Central Los Angeles. Mother Suzie (Mary Alice) and father Gideon (Paul Butler) welcome their old friend in, but it's not long before his uncanny presence, steeped in the folkloric southern traditions Suzie and Gideon have for the most part left behind, begins to cause severe ructions in the family fabric.

Gideon falls gravely ill, while Harry's insinuatingly macho behaviour has a particularly influential effect on Suzie and Gideon's grown-up youngest son, the petulant twentysomething Babe Brother (Richard Brooks), accentuating the animus between him and his older brother Junior (Carl Lumbly), and turning Babe Brother against his wife Linda (Sheryl Lee Ralph). Babe Brother and Linda's young son Sunny (DeVaughn Walter Nixon) doesn't say much, but he's quietly present in many scenes of tension and menace. He's also the only character able to dent Harry's swaggering confidence, when he accidentally brushes Harry's foot with a broom, a superstitious no-no that sends the visitor into paroxysms of uncharacteristic panic.

It's fitting, then, that Sunny is the architect of Harry's downfall. Early in the film, Sunny carelessly spills his marbles: no harm done. Later on, though, shortly after a huge confrontation between Babe Brother and Junior has ultimately brought the family closer than ever before, Sunny does it again. Harry trips over the marbles, falls to the floor, and suffers a fatal cardiac arrest. In a quietly ghoulish, politically charged postscript, Harry's dead body is left in the kitchen, covered only by a sheet. The medics won't take him

away, and the coroner is nowhere to be found. 'If he was white, they'd have had him on his feet and out of here' comments one family friend.

But there's another child in *To Sleep with Anger*: an unnamed boy (played by Burnett's son) who blasts incessantly and tunelessly on his trumpet. His unappealing peals ring across the neighbourhood, at one point causing Suzie to drop an egg on the floor, at another distracting Harry as he's about to bring down an axe on the neck of a chicken. Midway through the film, Suzie, concerned about Harry's sinister behaviour, questions him about the quality of his friendship. Harry retorts with a riddle: 'Like that boy next door playing his horn. If he was a friend, he would stop irritating people. But if he stops practising, he wouldn't be perfect at what he does someday.'

In an interview in July 2016, I asked Burnett about the boy trumpeter, and he replied: 'I used to play the trumpet when I was a kid, and I used to just drive the neighbours crazy. So that's where that came from. I used to intentionally leave the window open and just blow as loud as I could out of my room.' There's something autobiographical, then, about the film's spine-tingling coda. Following a shot of Harry's body still festering in the homestead, Burnett cuts to a shot of the boy honking away tunelessly. After a few bars, however, his awful playing magically, seamlessly becomes perfect – a soulful lament which provides the melody line of the song that scores the end credits. It's the sound of a modest yet brilliant filmmaker slyly announcing the perfection of his own craft.

Ashley Clark, *Sight & Sound*, July 2002

Charles Burnett's first mainstream feature shows what a little well-spent money will do towards counteracting the nagging sense of miserabilism that weighed against the otherwise admirable qualities of his earlier independent features, *Killer of Sheep* (especially) and *My Brother's Wedding*. The opening scene is a case in point: a wonderfully spare yet elegantly detailed still life (not a little reminiscent of Errol Morris at his best) in which the portly Gideon, as formally posed and attired as a Victorian patriarch, sits staring expressionlessly to camera in a white room, behind him a portrait of a woman hanging above a buffet on which mysteriously igniting in a bowl of fruit that might have inspired a Cézanne canvas flames slowly spread to engulf him from head to toe.

Accompanied by the achingly sweet and yearning gospel notes of Sister Rosetta Tharpe's version of 'Precious Memories', the nightmare – for so it proves to be when Gideon wakes from dozing in the sun in his back garden – nevertheless leaves behind it a haunting after-taste of loss. The point, perhaps not too readily evident for a non-American white audience, seems to be that the Deep South remains a touchstone for 'home' in the collective memory, much more immediate and accessible than the hypothetical Africa of Black Power. For all its ineradicable associations with slavery, lynching and the burning crosses of the Klan, it was a place of roots, of togetherness. 'Then you knew your neighbour', Burnett has commented in an interview. 'Until the civil rights movement, and the riots, this community held steady. Isn't that strange, that after civil rights it fell apart?' In a sense, *To Sleep with Anger*, with the title suggesting some hopefully productive amalgam between activism and acceptance, threads a neutral but inquisitive way through the ramifications of this paradox.

With a whole string of superb performances, dialogue that manages the difficult trick of hitting notes both lyrical and earthy, and a magical gospel and blues score, *To Sleep with Anger* demonstrates Burnett's instinct for cinema every inch of the way.

Tom Milne, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1991

Borom Sarret

Sembene's classic short – one of the first African films made by an indigenous director – looks at the life of a cart-driver in Dakar; many of his customers are as poor as he is, while others are happy to take advantage of Senegal's colonial heritage. Both script and direction are characteristically direct and truthful, while allowing for poetic resonance and telling irony.

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BOROM SARRET

Director: Ousmane Sembène

Production Companies: Filmi Doomireew, Actualités Françaises

With the participation of: Ministère de la Coopération

Producer: Ousmane Sembène

Assistant Director: Ibrahima Barro

Written by: Ousmane Sembène

Photography: Christian Lacoste

Editor: André Gaudier

Cast

Ly Abdoulaye (*wagoner*)

Senegal/France 1963

18 mins

TO SLEEP WITH ANGER

Director: Charles Burnett

©/Production Company: SVS, Inc.

Executive Producers: Edward R. Pressman, Danny Glover, Harris E. Tulchin

Producers: Caldecot Chubb, Thomas S. Byrnes, Darin Scott

Associate Producers: Michael Flynn, Linda Koullisis

Production Executives (SVS): Michael Holzman, Jeffrey Ringler

Production Auditor: Todd Grove

Post-production Auditor: Lisa Mashburn

Supervising Production Co-ordinator: Alan Gershenfeld

Production Co-ordinator: James Beaton III

Production Manager: Susan Stremple

Location Manager: Earl West

Location Consultant: Kasey Jones

Post-production Supervisor: Carol Munday Lawrence

1st Assistant Director: Jonathan Meisler

2nd Assistant Directors: Kris Kregel, Sati Jamal

2nd 2nd Assistant Director: Stacey Matthew

Script Supervisor: Catherine Jelski

Casting Directors: Gail Levin, Lauren Lloyd

Extras Casting: Superior Casting

Casting Assistant: Kimberly Hardin

Screenplay: Charles Burnett

Director of Photography: Walt Lloyd

Additional Photography: John Simmons

1st Assistant Camera: Tom Yatsko

2nd Assistant Camera: Gregory Daniels

Key Grip: Tom Harjo

Dolly Grip: T.C. Eachus

Best Boy Grip: Joseph Thompson

Gaffer: Dino Parks

Best Boy: Barbara Kallir

Electrician: Willie E. Dawkins

Stills Photography: Glenn S. Capers

Editor: Nancy Richardson

Assistant Editors: Christi Moore, Plummy Tucker, Larry Moten

Production Designer: Penny Barrett

Art Director: Troy Myers

Set Dressers: Mia Ambrester, Rita Moshier

Prop Master: Joel Leroy Carter

Costume Designer: Gaye Shannon-Burnett

Wardrobe Supervisor: Joy Shannon

Wardrobe Assistants: Christina Harley, Diane Girskis, Donna Forbes, Bobbi Almoite

Key Make-up Artist: Diane Hammond

Make-up Assistant: Alvechia Ewing

Hair Stylist: Ken Walker

Hair Stylist Assistant: Danny Irby

Titles/Opticals: Cinema Research Corporation

Music: Stephen James Taylor

Trumpet: Ramon Flores

Drums: Willie Ornelas

Bass: Jim Lacefield

Keyboards: Dave Loeb

Guitar/Harmonica: Stephen James Taylor

Violins: Sid Page, Charles Veal, Pat Johnson, Jennifer Johnson

Violas: Carol Castillo, Hershel Wise

Cellos: Larry Corbett, Dane Little

Music Supervisor: Budd Carr

Music Editor: Jeff Charbonneau

Choreography: Gaye Shannon-Burnett

Sound Mixer: Veda Campbell

Supervising Engineer: Gerry Lentz

Post Sound Supervisors: Patrick M. Griffith, Ellen Heuer

Re-recording Mixers: Ken Polk, Ken Teaney

Dialogue Editors: Joe Mayer, Terri Fiyalko

Sound Effects Dialogue: Lew Goldstein

ADR Recordist: Rob Luna

Foley Artists: Joan Rowe, Catherine Rowe

Foley Recordist: Rody Hassano

Unit Publicist: Skye Dent

Cast

Danny Glover (*Harry Mention*)

Paul Butler (*Gideon*)

Mary Alice (*Suzie*)

Carl Lumbly (*Junior*)

Vonetta McGee (*Pat*)

Richard Brooks (*Babe Brother*)

Sheryl Lee Ralph (*Linda*)

Ethel Ayler (*Hattie*)

Julius Harris (*Herman*)

Sy Richardson (*Marsh*)

Davis Roberts (*Okra Tate*)

DeVaughn Walter Nixon (*Sunny*)

Reina King (*Rhonda*)

Cory Curtis (*Skip*)

Paula Bellamy (*Mrs Baker*)

Wonderful Smith (*preacher*)

DeForest Coven (*Fred Jenkins*)

John Hawker (*MC*)

Irvin Jr. Mosley (*William Norwood*)

Marguerite Ray (*Loviray Norwood*)

Rai Tasco (*Phil*)

Lorrie Marlow (*Cherry Bell*)

Jimmy Witherspoon (*Percy*)

Carnetta Jones (*woman in labour*)

Christina Harley (*nurse*)

James Grayer (*man at hospital*)

Robin Scholer (*ER nurse*)

Mark Phelan, Robert Terry Lee (*paramedics*)

Greta Brown (*Virginia*)

Sip Culler (*neighbour*)

USA 1990©

102 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Touch of Evil

Mon 27 Mar 20:45; Tue 4 Apr 14:30; Sun 9 Apr 18:30; Fri 28 Apr 20:45

Wild Strawberries (Smultronstället)

Tue 28 Mar 20:50; Wed 12 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Fri 14 Apr 20:50; Mon 24 Apr 14:30

To Sleep with Anger + Borom Sarret (The Wagoner)

Wed 29 Mar 18:10 (+ intro); Mon 10 Apr 12:45; Wed 12 Apr 18:00

Rio Bravo

Thu 30 Mar 20:20; Sun 9 Apr 12:50; Fri 21 Apr 20:20

Aguirre, Wrath of God (Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes)

Fri 31 Mar 21:00; Thu 13 Apr 21:00; Thu 20 Apr 18:15

Last year in Marienbad (L'Année dernière à Marienbad)

Sat 1 Apr 12:50; Mon 3 Apr 20:30; Sat 8 Apr 18:20; Tue 18 Apr 20:45

La Grande Illusion

Sat 1 Apr 13:00; Wed 12 Apr 20:40; Sat 15 Apr 18:00; Fri 21 Apr 18:15

The Godfather Part II

Sat 1 Apr 16:00; Sat 22 Apr 18:40; Sun 30 Apr 16:30

Nashville

Sun 2 Apr 17:50; Sat 8 Apr 20:00; Sat 29 Apr 16:30

The Passenger (Professione: reporter)

Wed 5 Apr 18:00 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Fri 7 Apr 20:20; Sun 16 Apr 18:15; Thu 27 Apr 18:10

Pickpocket

Thu 6 Apr 20:45; Tue 11 Apr 14:30; Mon 17 Apr 20:50; Mon 24 Apr 20:50

The Portrait of a Lady

Fri 7 Apr 14:30; Wed 19 Apr 17:50 (+ intro); Sat 29 Apr 20:15

Code Unknown (Code inconnu)

Sun 9 Apr 15:45; Wed 26 Apr 18:15

The Lady Eve

Mon 10 Apr 18:15; Sat 15 Apr 12:40; Sun 30 Apr 14:15

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