



AFRICAN ODYSSEYS

Passing Through

Passing Through

Director: Larry Clark

Production Company: American Film Institute

Production Manager: Penny Bannerman

Screenplay: Ted Lange, Larry Clark

Photography: Roderick R. Young, George Geddis

Camera Operators: Charles Burnett, Bob Allen,

Myko Clark

Editor: Larry Clark

Sound: Julie Dash, Carol Vasunaga

Cast:

Nathaniel Taylor (*Eddie Warmack*)

Clarence Muse (*Papa Harris*)

Pamela B. Jones (*Maya*)

Johnny Weathers (*Brimmer*)

Bob Ogburn (*Skeeter*)

Della Thomas (*Carmen*)

Sherryl Thompson (*Trixie*)

Mwako Cumbuka (*Ajaes*)

George Turner (*Turner*)

Cora Day (*Oshun*)

USA 1977

105 mins

+ intro and Q&A with journalist and broadcaster Kevin Le Gendre and musician Tony Kofi

Larry Clark on 'Passing Through'

What led you to make Passing Through?

I had finished *As Above, So Below* and Ted Lange [the screenwriter] approached me and said he had a script for a film about a jazz musician and the relationship between the musician and his grandfather, based on a short story. Ted wrote the screenplay. I had creative freedom in terms of approach, like a stream of consciousness (at times). It was a film not just about jazz as something that drops out of the sky, but about the music as social protest.

All of those things spoke to me. It just offered great creative and political possibilities. Jazz is the sum total of the Black American experience. It is an expression of our history here in the United States, so that interests me. I like also the creative process of jazz, it's very spontaneous, and I thought I could bring those things to film. The subject matter gave me the opportunity to do something original. There were movies on jazz where jazz was in the background, but there had never been a film that really expressed what jazz meant politically.

Tell me about the central protagonist, Eddie Warmack.

I wanted a strong main character, a proactive main character with the possibility of growth, musically and personally. The character is searching for his grandfather, someone we can relate to. With Black films in the US the male characters were very weak, like Stepin Fetchit. Growing up I didn't know anybody like that. The only place I saw emasculated Black men was in Hollywood movies; it wasn't in my neighbourhood. The movies projected an image for other white Americans. We weren't like that. The Warmack character reflected the people that I grew up with. You didn't see them on screen back in the 70s, apart from maybe blaxploitation.

Regular Hollywood movies spent a lot of time emasculating African-Americans, Native Americans and Asians until Bruce Lee came along and broke that stereotype. Hollywood was also propaganda; they were propagating a lot of harmful images. I wanted to propagate positive images. Hollywood propagates myths. So the question is how do you kill a myth? The only way you can kill a myth is with another myth.

Horace Tapscott wrote the soundtrack and also appeared in the film. He is a seminal figure in jazz history, founder of the Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra, which is a great source of inspiration for leading contemporary artists like Dwight Trible and Kamasi Washington. How did you meet Tapscott?

Yes, he's an important part of it. A friend put me in touch and we met at a restaurant. He was very professorial, and he said 'you know you don't need to look out there for someone to score your film as there are people right here in your community.' He was very much into community. So was I, and that's where my film people came through. I trained them myself: the bulk of my crew were African-Americans from right there in the community.

So it was a perfect fit (with what Horace was doing). He said 'come to a rehearsal'. I did and saw these fabulous musicians from all over LA, practising. Horace scored my first film and that was like a learning process for me and for him. And then when I did *Passing Through* I started talking to Horace about the story. He gave me some really good ideas about exploitation in the music industry. He contributed a lot to the story.

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Mon 24 Jul 14:00

Art in the Making: Sickert's London + intro by historian, writer and artist Kate Aspinall +

Walter Sickert: Painter of the Third Floor Back

Tue 25 Jul 18:10

Silent Cinema: The Signal Tower + intro by film historian Kevin Brownlow

Sun 30 Jul 15:40

Relaxed Screening:

Fantasia + intro and discussion

Mon 31 Jul 18:00

Missing Believed Wiped Special: Kaleidoscope at 35: The Long Lost Show Part One

Sat 5 Aug 12:00

Missing Believed Wiped Special: Kaleidoscope at 35: The Long Lost Show Part Two

Sat 5 Aug 15:00

Seniors' Free Talk: Angwal Embrace + intro and Q&A

Mon 7 Aug 11:00

Seniors' Free Matinee: Heat and Dust + intro and Q&A with Adrian Garvey, Film Historian

Mon 7 Aug 14:00

Experimenta: Metal Machine Movies

Wed 16 Aug 18:10

Relaxed Screening: Gregory's Girl + intro and discussion

Mon 21 Aug 18:20

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Art in the Making: Grove Music + discussion

Tue 22 Aug 18:20

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And there are some real interesting unintentional similarities between the film and Horace's life. Warmack is looking for Papa, and this is the acronym of Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra, Horace's group. It was an interesting coincidence that I hadn't thought about until after we'd put things together.

What exactly was the LA Rebellion?

The LA Rebellion was not an anti-Hollywood movement. Hollywood wasn't even in most of our rear-view mirrors. We were pro what we were doing. It was about how we were gonna change film. Hollywood wasn't a reference. I was in undergrad school in Ohio, and then I went to UCLA. I drove to Los Angeles and got into the film programme in the summer. I promised myself I would have one foot in UCLA life and the other in the African-American community.

I developed a film workshop under the acronym PASLA (Performing Arts Society of Los Angeles), created by Vantile Whitfield, who had been one of the first Black students at UCLA. He would give us money to make films, and people from the community came to the workshops. They didn't work in Hollywood or want to go to film school; they were very young – 21 or 22 – and they would take equipment from UCLA to the community.

How do you feel about Passing Through today, 46 years after it was made?

Ousmane Sembène said that the artist must not be too far in advance of, but definitely not behind the people. The trick is to get it just right. I think *Passing Through* did that.

Interview by Kevin Le Gendre, bfi.org.uk, 12 July 2023

Tony Kofi is a British Jazz multi-instrumentalist born of Ghanaian parents, a player of the Alto, Baritone, Soprano, Tenor saxophones and flute. Having 'cut his teeth' in the Jazz Warriors of the early 90's, award-winning saxophonist Tony Kofi has gone on to establish himself as a musician, teacher and composer of some authority. As well as performing and recording with Gary Crosby's NuTroop and Jazz Jamaica, Tony's playing has also been a feature of many bands and artists he has worked/recorded with, including US-3, The World Saxophone Quartet, Courtney Pine, Donald Byrd, Eddie Henderson, The David Murray Big Band, Sam Rivers Rivbe Big Band, Andrew Hill Big Band, Abdullah Ibrahim, Macy Gray, Julian Joseph Big Band, Harry Connick Jr, Byron Wallen's Indigo, Jamaaladeen Tacuma's Coltrane Configurations and Ornette Coleman. His fluent and fiery hard-bop style makes him constantly in demand. He currently leads his own Tony Kofi Quartet, Tony Kofi Sphinx Trio, Future Passed Trio and is also the co-founder with Jonathan Gee of the Monk Liberation Front, a group that is dedicated to the music of Thelonious Monk. Tony's latest project sees him performing with Alex Webb's Café Society Swing, Arnie Somogyi's Jump Monk, Larry Bartley's JustUS Quartet, Adrian Reid Quartet, a double leaders project with Alan Barnes called Aggregation, Orphy Robinson's Bobby Hutcherson songbook project, Alina Bzhezhska Quartet, Jo Harrop's Fever, Portrait of Cannonball (Music dedicated to Cannonball Adderley) Tony Kofi and the Organisation, a recent project which he co leads on the Baritone Saxophone.

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).