



S.O.U.L FEST X ABFF GLOBAL: LONDON 2023
OPENING NIGHT PREVIEW

Brother

Brother

Director: Clement Virgo

©: Brother Movie Inc.

a Conquering Lion Pictures, Hawkeye Pictures
production

With the participation of: Téléfilm Canada, Canada
Media Fund, Ontario Creates, Shaw Rocket Fund

In association with: Crave, Super Écran, CBC Films

Produced by: Damon D'Oliveira, Aeschylus Poulos,
Sonya Di Rienzo, Clement Virgo

CASTING: Deirdre Bowen

SCREENPLAY: Clement Virgo

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY: David Chariandy

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Guy Godfree

EDITOR: Kye Meechan

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: Jason Clarke

ART DIRECTOR: John Kim

COSTUME DESIGNER: Hanna Puley

MUSIC COMPOSER: Todor Kobakov

MUSIC SUPERVISOR: Jody Colero

RE-RECORDING MIXERS: Joe Morrow, James Bastable

SUPERVISING SOUND EDITORS: Jane Tattersall,
David McCallum

STUNT CO-ORDINATOR: Angelica Lisk-Hann

CAST:

Lamar Johnson (Michael)

Aaron Pierre (Francis)

Kiana Madeira (Aisha)

Lovell Adams-Gray (Jelly)

Maurice Dean Wint (Samuel)

Dwain Murphy (Dru)

Joris Jarsky (promoter)

Franco Lo Presti (Reilly)

Marsha Stephanie Blake (Ruth)

Jacob Williams (young Francis)

Sebastian Singh (young Michael)

Canada 2022

91 mins

Courtesy of Curzon

+ Q&A with Marvyn Harrison, owner of BELOVD Agency

When his childhood sweetheart Aisha returns to their Toronto neighbourhood of Scarborough for the first time in ten years, Michael is forced to revisit a family tragedy. Growing up as young Black boys in a neighbourhood prone to gang violence and police brutality, older brother Francis was Michael's best friend, protector and even parent when their Jamaican mother worked night shifts. As they grow older, Francis and Michael's lives diverge, as Francis immerses himself in Scarborough's West Indian community. But there remains a fierce, unconditional love between the brothers and their mother – it's them against the world. As a lonely and closed-off Michael is helped by Aisha to face the memories of a past that he's been shutting out, he may finally be able to break free and love again. Clement Virgo movingly adapts David Chariandy's bestselling book, creating a vibrant world and sensitively exploring complex but unbreakable family bonds.

Grace Barber-Plentie, BFI London Film Festival 2022

The only Jamaican-Canadian kid in the east Toronto enclave of Scarborough whose record collection is expansive enough to include Jimmy Cliff, Talking Heads and Anne Murray, Francis is beautiful, sensitive, and musically inclined: sitting by the stereo thumbing through LP sleeves, he looks like he was born with headphones on. He is also, before we even meet him in either of the pre-teen or young adult incarnations he inhabits in Clement Virgo's new feature *Brother*, already a memory to the people who loved him: a name, a face, and an ache.

The questions of what exactly happened to Francis, why, and how deeply it affected his doting younger brother Michael are left deliberately ambiguous by *Brother's* ambitious, time-shifting structure. Working closely from second-generation Canadian author David Chariandy's autobiographical novel, which unfolds in and around Scarborough in the late 1990s, Virgo shows an admirable willingness to disorient his audience, whether by withholding crucial bits of exposition or refusing to fully delineate between reminiscence and fantasy.

The result of this directorial strategising is a movie whose familiar (albeit locationally and culturally specific) coming-of-age tropes are suffused with a creeping, inexorable sense of dread. *Brother's* pressurised lyricism recalls the stylised approach of Virgo's groundbreaking 1995 debut *Rude* – still one of the most brazenly accomplished movies ever produced in Toronto.

What made *Rude* so remarkable was its colour-coded, graphic-novel brashness, and though Virgo's style has mellowed away from that film's Spike Lee-inspired aesthetic, he's still playing with ways to charge everyday locations with controlled poetic flourishes. The apartment that Michael and Francis share with their mother Ruth (Marsha Stephanie Blake) is at once sparse and cavernous, a world unto itself, sunlight refracted by strips of tinfoil meant to deflect the summer heat away from the windows. When Ruth pulls all-nighters as a waitress, the boys brace the front door with a chair, and her knocking reverberates like a ship's engine room; a television broadcast about a local convenience store robbery has the distorted quality of a horror movie, one blurry perpetrator staring defiantly through the surveillance camera and into the boys' shared psychic space.

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SIGHT AND SOUND

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Opening Night Preview: Brother + Q&A

Fri 1 Sep 20:10

S.O.U.L Fest Shorts and Awards

Sat 2 Sep 14:10

Preview: White Nanny, Black Child + Q&A

Sat 2 Sep 17:30

Preview: A Song from the Dark + Q&A

Sat 2 Sep 20:20



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For the majority of *Brother*, Michael is played by Lamar Johnson, who's got just the right mix of coiled wariness and humility for a character who exists in his older sibling's shadow. And, as cast by the broad, hulking Aaron Pierre, so memorable in Barry Jenkins' 2021 miniseries *The Underground Railroad*, Francis's shadow is long indeed. The sweetly humorous flashback involving his record collection, discovered and rifled through by his and Michael's apartment-block neighbour Aisha (Kiana Madeira), shows Virgo's dexterous touch with masculine dynamics: without remotely trying to hit on the younger girl – and fully cognisant of Michael's thermonuclear-level crush on her – Francis accidentally disrupts their courtship through force of pure charisma. Even when he gracefully makes a show of leaving the room to leave them to it, he isn't quite gone.

Leaving is Francis' lot in life: he never seems to belong at home, despite his best efforts, and eventually, he doesn't try to. His sense of difference, delicately acted by Pierre, leads him to try to locate his absentee father and towards a clique of fellow would-be musicians operating out of a barbershop. It also creates a distance from Michael and the chronically exhausted Ruth, who can barely look after herself, much less two kids on the edge of adulthood. What Francis can't get clear of is the gang culture that congregates in his neighbourhood; at once respectful and resentful of Francis' strength, his more aggressive peers keep their distance while looking ready to strike. Trouble finds Francis despite his best efforts, some of it from the other side of Toronto's thin blue line. The city's shameful contemporary history of police brutality (a good deal of it without much in the way of consequences for the uniformed culprits) haunts the edges of *Brother*, and when the otherwise benign Aisha lobs a well-placed rock at a parked cop car, it could almost be on behalf of the movie around her.

Exploring and interweaving different sensations of absence – the rituals of separation between young men, as well as between parents and children and young lovers – *Brother* is beguiling.

Adam Nayman, *Sight and Sound*, bfi.org.uk, 15 September 2022