



## RE-RELEASE PREVIEW

# Pressure + panel discussion

### Pressure

Director: Horace Ové

Production Company:

British Film Institute Production Board

Executive Producer for the BFI: Barry Gavin

Producer: Robert Buckler

Assistant Producer: Annabelle Alcazar

Continuity: Genise Michelle

Screenplay: Horace Ové, Samuel Selvon

Director of Photography: Mike Davis

Assistant Photography: Madelyn Most

Gaffers: Julian Litvinoff, Nigel Brook

Sparks: Albert Bailey

Graphic Presentation: Darrell Pockett,

Haydon Young

Editor: Alan J. Cumner-Price

Assistant Editors: Cathy Rolfe, Chuma Ukpabi

Illustrations: Una Howe

Theme Song Music Artist:

Boy Wonder and The Sisters

Theme Song Music: Boy Wonder

Theme Song Lyrics: Horace Ové

Sound Recordist: Chris Wangler

Sound Assistant: Frankie Hart

Dubbing Mixer: Tony Anscombe

BFI also wishes to thank the following:

Keskidee Centre, And So To Bed,

Ashanti Records, Trojan Records,

Capital Radio, Basil Smith

Cast:

Herbert Norville (*Anthony 'Tony' Watson*)

Oscar James (*Colin*)

Frank Singuineau (*Lucas*)

Lucita Lijertwood (*Bopsie*)

Sheila Scott-Wilkinson (*Sister Louise*)

Ed Deveraux (*police inspector*)

Norman Beaton (*Preacher*)

T-Bone Wilson (*Junior*)

Ramjohn Holder (*Brother John*)

John Landry (*Mr Crapson*)

Archie Pool (*Oscar*)

Whitty Vialva Forde (*Reefer*)

Marlene Davis (*Marlene*)

Dave Kinoshi (*Mike*)

Patrick Rennison (*Winston*)

Elvis Payne (*Joe*)

Winston Williams (*Jacko*)

Sharon Pearson (*black sister in Portobello Road*)

Ray Burdis (*Dave*)

Peter Newby (*Pete*)

John Blundell (*John*)

Dawn Geron (*Angie*)

June Page (*Sheila*)

Margaret Ford (*landlady*)

Brendan Donnison (*metal factory manager*)

Philip Jackson (*2nd CID officer*)

Trevor Hilton (*dog handler*)

Sally Carey (*secretary*)

John Lynn (*commissionaire*)

Corinne Skinner (*Tony's aunt*)

Thelma Kidger (*woman in train*)

Alfred Fagon (*black man in train*)

Tommy Vance (*radio DJ*)

UK 1975©

125 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

A BFI release

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

Widely regarded as the first black British feature film, Horace Ové's neorealism-inspired *Pressure* focuses on the tribulations of recent school-leaver Tony (Herbert Norville). Tony, like my own father, is a British-born son of first-generation immigrant parents who came to England from the Caribbean in the 1950s and 60s. Facing the myriad pressures listed in the film's sweetly intoned title track (parental, social, mental, 'Babylon' aka the police), the befuddled young man floats through Ové's episodic, quasi-Bildungsroman like a pinball in slow motion. His putative romance with a friendly white girl is scotched by a hostile landlady; he can't get a job (he's either shut out by racist employers or overqualified for menial labour); he's shown to be thoroughly ill-suited to the life of petty crime preferred by the group of jaded ne'er-do-wells he falls in with; and his Trinidadian parents – in particular his histrionic mother – are stuck in their ways.

Tony, however, gets the most aggravation from his older brother Colin (Oscar James), a staunch Black Power advocate. Colin laments his failure to 'get him [Tony] to think black', seemingly unable to grasp that Tony's experience as a young black man born in Britain is different to his own upbringing in Trinidad. 'You've got somewhere to go back to,' Tony tells Colin, 'You have the dream of sun, sea and palm trees. What have I got? Office blocks!' Yet Tony eventually becomes involved in the cause; not, one suspects, through any burning desire for political agency, but rather because his other avenues of advancement have disappeared. It just so happens that the first Black Power rally the luckless Tony attends is raided by police, who apprehend Colin on confected drugs charges.

Throughout, Ové views the British Black Power movement with a mixture of respect for its overarching mission to foster black pride, and scorn for its inherent contradictions and lack of political coherence. This approach is no better illustrated than in the final scene – a 'Free Colin' protest outside the Old Bailey – which blends a documentarian's sympathy with an undeniable sense of mockery of the shambolic nature of their efforts. The protest should constitute the film's big, triumphant finish. Instead it must qualify as one of the most depressing ever realised on film. In an atmosphere of deafening silence, against a glaucous grey sky, a ragtag group of demonstrators dourly traipse around in a circle. This being England, it doesn't take long for the heavens to open: a wicked but utterly believable *deus ex machina*. There's bleak humour here – it took my third viewing to catch the delicious sight gag of a white protester unwittingly holding up a sign reading 'White people are devils' – but the overall vibe is one of limp defeat.

In the sequence's final image, Tony, natty outfit now soaked through, enters the frame, evidently struggling against the elements. He gives up on the wooden pole and flings it to the ground, adding to the chaotic, debris-strewn tableau. He raises his banner above his head – its slogan 'Power to the people' now rendered bitterly ironic – and uses it to shield himself from the rain. In this subtle, entirely natural gesture, ideology is poetically subsumed by practicality. The frame suddenly freezes, the title song (lilting melody, bitter lyrics) plays again and the credits roll.

The first time I saw *Pressure*, I was shocked at the ending's abruptness, but further viewings reveal it as making perfect sense. A conventional conclusion would not only have jarred with the film's broadly observational style, but would also have contradicted the unresolved, work-in-progress nature of its central character; for better or worse, this is Tony's Britain, and he's here to stay, however grim things might be in the present.

It's a shame that the fiercely talented Ové was unable to develop a proper career as feature filmmaker. A prolific photographer and documentarian, Ové's

## POWER TO THE PEOPLE: HORACE OVÉ'S RADICAL VISION

**Horace Ové: Reflecting the People – A Career Retrospective** + panel and Q&A with actor Lennie James, producers Annabelle Alcazar, Peter Ansoorge, Tara Prem and Marcus Ryder, chaired by Samira Ahmed  
Mon 23 Oct 18:00

### Playing Away

Tue 24 Oct 18:10 (+ intro by writer Caryl Phillips);  
Tue 21 Nov 20:45

**The Black Safari** + intro by director Colin Luke +  
**Skateboard Kings**

Sat 28 Oct 15:15

**James Baldwin and the 'N' Word: Baldwin's N\*\*\*\*\*** + Q&A with author Colin Grant and additional guests (tbc)

Sat 4 Nov 14:10

**King Carnival** + intro by Michael La Rose, George Padmore Institute + **Reggae**

Tue 7 Nov 18:00

**Play for Today: A Hole in Babylon + Play for**

**Today: The Garland** Shai Mala Khani

Sun 12 Nov 15:00

**Dabbawallahs** + pre-recorded intro by producer Annabelle Alcazar + **Who Shall We Tell?**

Fri 24 Nov 18:00

## HORACE OVÉ: FILM INFLUENCES

### Pather Panchali

Wed 18 Oct 20:35; Mon 30 Oct 17:50; Tue 14 Nov 14:30

**Seniors' Free Matinee: La dolce vita** + intro  
Mon 23 Oct 14:00

**Bicycle Thieves** Ladri di biciclette

Tue 14 Nov 18:20; Sun 19 Nov 18:40; Fri 24 Nov 20:45

With special thanks to the Ové family for all their guidance and support for this season

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only other film to hit UK cinemas was 1986's *Playing Away*, although *Pressure* was undoubtedly influential – most obviously, the police-raid plot and the political enlightenment of a central character both featured in Menelik Shabazz's *Burning an Illusion* (1981). But wouldn't it have been nice to have seen Tony – or at least a version of Tony – grow up on screen, reflecting a particular element of British society in the same way that the famously freeze-framed Antoine Doinel (in Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* in 1959) did for the French? Sadly, the black British experience is one that's been badly underserved in our national cinema. As such, the poignancy of *Pressure*'s final image extends far beyond the text.

Ashley Clark, *Sight and Sound*, December 2013

**Annabelle Alcazar** worked as a film and TV producer for over 25 years in the UK, including on *Pressure* (1978) and producer of two documentaries, *Who Shall We Tell?* and *Dabbawallahs*. All 3 were directed by her husband Horace Ové. She returned to Trinidad in the mid-1990's where she was line producer on many music videos and ads including for Jay-Z, Eric Benet and Rihanna. From 2007 to 2018 she was Programme Director at the Trinidad+Tobago film festival. She is currently working on organising Horace's photographic archive.

**Herbert Norville** is a British actor. Norville was a member of the Anna Scher youth theatre in Islington. He played lead character 'Tony' in BFI production *Pressure* in 1976, 'Daytona Dave' in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and inmate Toyne in *Scum*. He also appeared in another Alan Clarke film, *The Firm* (1988) as Yusef's brother. He has also appeared on British television in *The Bill*, *Minder*, *Crown Court*, *Big Deal* and *The Young Ones*.

**Caryl Phillips** is the author of numerous plays for the theatre, television, and radio. He is best known as a novelist and essayist; his many books include the novels *Crossing the River*, *A Distant Shore* and *The Lost Child*, and the non-fiction titles *The European Tribe* and *Colour Me English*. He wrote the screenplay for *Playing Away* (directed by Horace Ové) and the Merchant Ivory production of V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur*. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a Fellow of the Royal Literary Society, he is Professor of English at Yale University.

**Rhea Storr** explores Black and mixed-race cultural representation with an interest in the in-between, the culturally ineffable, translation, format and aesthetics. Her work is often concerned with Caribbean diaspora in the UK. This includes an interest in representing Black subjects in rural spaces and the politics of masquerade. Frequently working in photochemical film practices, Rhea Storr considers counter-cultural ways of producing moving-image. She is currently researching for a PhD at Goldsmiths around Black experimental filmmakers and the use of 16mm film.

Selected exhibitions/screenings include: BFI London Film Festival, New York Film Festival, CPH:DOX, Blackstar Festival, Hamburg International Short Film Festival, European Media Art Festival, Museum of African American History and Culture, Somerset House, Whitechapel Gallery and Lisson Gallery. She is the winner of the Aesthetica Art Prize 2020, Louis Le Prince Experimental Film Prize and won the Royal Photographic Society's Award for Creative Contribution to Art in Moving Image 2023.

**Chair: Dr Clive Chijioke Nwonka** is Associate Professor in Film, Culture and Society at UCL, and a Faculty Associate of the UCL Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation. Dr Nwonka's research centres on the study of Black British and African American film, with a particular focus on the Black aesthetics, images of Black urbanity and the modes through which Black identities are shaped within forms of Black popular culture. Nwonka is the author of the book *Black Boys: The Social aesthetics of British Urban Film* (2023), the co-editor of the book *Black Film/British Cinema II* (2021) and is the author of the forthcoming *Black Arsenal: Race, Cultural Memory and Black British Identity* (2024).