



POWER TO THE PEOPLE: HORACE OVÉ'S RADICAL VISION

Playing Away

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Directed by: Horace Ové

©: Film Four International

Production Company: Insight Productions

For: Channel Four

Producers: Brian Skilton, Vijay Amarnani

Associate Producer: Christopher Sutton

Production Accountants: Len Barnard,

Mary Breen-Farrelly, Deirdre Skilton

Production Co-ordinator: Dee Hodgson

Location Manager: Chris Thompson

Post-production Co-ordinator: Valerie Ames

Producer's Secretary: Susie Mercer

Runner: Michael Williams

Jobfit Trainees: Clyde Wilson, Michael Kitson

1st Assistant Director: Simon Hinkly

2nd Assistant Director: Paul Frift

3rd Assistant Director: Carol Brock

Continuity: Joan Marine

Casting by: Michael Barnes

Screenplay: Caryl Phillips

Photographed by: Nic Knowland

Camera Focus: Harriet Cox

Camera Loader: Shangara Singh

Camera Grip: Olly Hoeben

Gaffer: Mark Gibbon

Best Boy: Ossie Jung

Stills: Stephen Morley

Graphics: Chris James

Edited by: Graham Whitlock

Assistant Editor: Martin Morgan

Art Director: Pip Gardner

Assistant Art Director: Paul Fenton

Production Buyer: Richard Watts

Prop Master: Ray Perry Jr

Properties: Gary Bacon, Stuart Lillie

Carpenter: Robert Archbold

Stagehand: Keith Muir

Costumes: Alyson Ritchie

Wardrobe Mistress: Amelia Davies

Chief Make-up Artist: Vivien Placks

Assistant Make-up Artist: Amanda Knight

Chief Hairdresser: Mark Nelson

Titles and Opticals: Peter Govey

Laboratory: Kay/MGM Laboratories Ltd.

Music: Simon Webb

Theme Song by: Junior

Music Mixer: Jim Preen

Sound Recordist: Christian Wangler

Sound Boom Operator: Ronald Bailey

Dubbing Mixer: Alan Dykes

Sound Editors: Chris Godden, Stuart De Jong

Transportation: Andrew Carton-Kelly,

Michael Leigh, Sidney Checkter

Lighting: Film & TV Services

Cast:

Norman Beaton (*Willie Boy*)

Robert Urquhart (*Godfrey*)

Gary Beadle (*Errol*)

Brian Bovell (*Stuart*)

Nicholas Farrell (*Derek*)

Stefan Kalipha (*Louis*)

Helen Lindsay (*Marjorie*)

Joseph Marcell (*Robbo*)

Bruce Purchase (*Fredrick*)

Sheila Ruskin (*Viv*)

Trevor Thomas (*Jeff*)

Suzette Llewellyn (*Yvette*)

Mark Barratt (*Kevin*)

Valerie Buchanan (*Pat*)

Jim Findley (*Boots*)

Julian Granger (*Mick*)

Ram John Holder (*Willf*)

+ intro by writer Caryl Phillips (Tuesday 24 October only)

In *Playing Away* the Brixton Conquistadores, a black cricket team from south London, accepts an invitation to play a 'friendly' charity game in a rural, gentrified Suffolk village. The cricket match is the highlight of the village's 'Third World Week' and the all-white villagers are a mixture of old colonials, well-meaning public school types, and bigoted country yokels. The fictitious village of Sneddington is a throwback to the type of sleepy picture-postcard village seen in Ealing film comedies of the 1950s, so on their arrival the Conquistadores are warmly received in the village square. When the Brixton team roll up in their battered mini-bus, they are confronted with an embarrassing opening ceremony in which a brass band plays 'Island in the Sun'. In spite of this, hostilities soon surface from the locals, and the visiting Brixtonians retaliate. One film critic described the film as 'a sort of all-black *EastEnders* meets all-white *The Archers*.'

The script is by the black novelist and playwright Caryl Phillips – who was born on the Caribbean island of St Kitts, but raised in Leeds and Birmingham – and throughout the story he cleverly highlights the cultural clashes between the two teams. Occasionally the confrontations are explosive, but generally *Playing Away* is a gentle, humorous film. The coming together of the two cricket teams is hardly friendly, but for the most part *Playing Away* is very funny. Anyone expecting deep social commentary will be disappointed for this is first and foremost light entertainment. Said Phillips in an interview with Tony Sewell in *The Voice* newspaper (22 November 1986): 'It doesn't deal with the ills of the black community. My motives were different. I wanted to make a film that was entertaining and interesting – that would appeal to as many people as possible.' However, Phillips' does give the film some serious insights into the black characters that distance them from the usual one-dimensional stereotypes perpetuated in popular British cinema. Consequently there are some sharp and lively performances from a formidable cast of black British actors who were clearly overjoyed to participate in a feature film that celebrated Britain's black community instead of portraying them as 'problems' or the butt of the joke. The excellent black cast included Brian Bovell, Gary Beadle, Jim Findley, Archie Pool, Stefan Kalipha, Joseph Marcell and Suzette Llewellyn. However, though primarily an ensemble piece, *Playing Away* does have a leading man: the brilliant Norman Beaton. He plays Willie Boy, the peace-loving team captain who is desperate to hold everything together, mostly in a drunken haze, while trying to decide whether or not to return to the Caribbean after finding the 'Mother Country' something of a disappointment.

The film is the second fiction feature directed by the Trinidadian Horace Ové. His first, *Pressure* (1975), was funded by the British Film Institute and dealt with the then-timely subject of troubled black youths in Britain's inner cities. He said he was drawn to *Playing Away* because it used cricket 'as a metaphor of relations between West Indians and the English. Cricket is the one game that West Indians are very proud of and very good at, and it's the one game that they know they beat the old masters at. I particularly liked the idea of pointing up the ridiculousness of racism, on both sides, and exploring how it enters into people's lives and what takes place.' But I also wanted to make the film genuinely funny.'

Patrick Holt (*the colonel*)
Elizabeth Anson (*Sandra*)
Juliet Waley (*Julie*)
Ross Kemp (*Sonny*)
Gareth Kirkland (*Tommy*)
Archie Pool (*Steadroy*)
Errol Shaker (*Desert-Head*)
Femi Taylor (*Masie*)
Larry Dann (*John*)
Neil Morrissey (*Ian*)
Charles Pemberton (*constable*)
Roddy Maude-Roxby (*vicar*)
Zulema Dene (*Miss Rye*)
Ian Cross (*David*)
Jimmy Reddington (*tavern barman*)
Mary Tempest (*Angie*)
Lucita Lijertwood (*lady in telephone box*)
UK 1986©
100 mins
Digital

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 Anson, 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

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Some critics complained that the film looked as if it was made for television, while others commented that some of the white characters came across as stereotypical oiks, with the black characters getting all the good lines. After its premiere at the 1986 London Film Festival, *Playing Away* was given a general release the following year and was popular, in spite of an embarrassing marketing slogan: 'a really black comedy!' It was later shown on Channel 4 television. It deserves to be seen again, and recognised for not only holding a place in the history of British cinema as one of the very few films to have a black writer and director, but for being a minor classic. Funny, poignant, affectionate, *Playing Away* is a real winner.

The clever and charismatic Norman Beaton is impressive from start to finish. In the 1970s Beaton became one of Britain's leading stage and screen actors. When he was named Best Film Actor in 1977 by the Variety Club of Great Britain (for *Black Joy*), he was the first black British actor to be honoured with a film award. Among his most memorable television successes were *The Fosters* (1976-7), the first all-black situation comedy series; *Black Christmas* (1977); *Empire Road* (1978-9), Britain's first all-black drama series; *Nice* (1984); *Big George Is Dead* (1987); and *Little Napoleons* (1993), but his most famous role was the manic barber shop owner in the long-running situation comedy series *Desmond's* (1989-94) on Channel 4.

Towards the end of his life, Norman Beaton reflected on the roles available to black actors in Britain: 'My own view is that what you've seen me in are the only roles that are available for black men in this country, and they don't really reflect our views, our understanding of life, our intelligence, or where we are coming from. In that respect I would say that Caryl Phillips' scenario for *Playing Away* did get around that particular hurdle. It lived up to nearly all the expectations that black people ought to be living up to. But what I find difficult to come to terms with is the absence of a heroic figure like Paul Robeson in all the work I've done. There is no writer on that scale, or in those grand, magnificent terms for film and television about a black figure who we admire or aspire to be like.'

Norman Beaton died in Georgetown, Guyana in 1994. Carmen Munroe, who played Beaton's wife in *Desmond's*, told *The Voice*: 'He put his whole life and soul into any part he was asked to play and never spared himself. He worked at his craft and produced brilliance. His particular blend of comic energy and professional application will be missed most keenly in the future when excellence is sought.'

Stephen Bourne, article from BFI DVD booklet of *Playing Away*

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