



RE-RELEASES

Alma's Rainbow

Alma's Rainbow

Director: Ayoka Chenzira

Production Company: Crossgrain Pictures

Producers: Howard Brickner, Charles Lane, Ayoka Chenzira

Line Producer: Geri Jasper

Screenplay: Ayoka Chenzira

Director of Photography: Ronald K. Gray

Editor: Lillian Benson

Costume Designer: Sydney Kai Inis

Make-up: Al Grundy

Music: Jean-Paul Bourelly

Sound Recordist: Michael Lazar

Cast:

Kim Weston-Moran (*Alma Gold*)

Victoria Gabrielle Platt (*Rainbow Gold*)

Mizan Nunes [i.e. Mizan Kirby] (*Ruby Gold*)

Lee Dobson (*Blue*)

Isaiah Washington (*Miles*)

Jennifer Copeland (*Babs*)

Keyonn Sheppard (*Pepper*)

Roger Pickering (*Sea Breeze*)

Sydney Best (*William B. Underdo III*)

Sandra Daley (*Cynthia*)

LaVora Perry (*Nzingha*)

Ayoka Chenzira (*nun*)

USA 1993

89 mins

Digital

A TAPE Collective release

Part of TAPE Collective's SNAPSHOT programme, which explores and celebrates the multi-faceted experiences of Black Girlhood

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'I could write a book on the response to *Alma's Rainbow*. The film took a long time to make. I raised all the money independently. Distributors came and looked at the film, and there was a real split between what the men thought about it and what the women thought about it. The response by women has been overwhelmingly positive. The response by men, who write the checks, was that it was not an action piece. There was no Black pathology; there was no movie point of reference for three Black women driving a story. They also see that it is not a linear narrative in the tradition of exposition, climax and resolution. The editing and story-telling are based on the emotions of the characters. This is something that women understood and men did not. We found a distributor who was not interested in selling it only to twenty-something white guys in the suburbs. Unfortunately, the arrangement with the distributor and our company did not work out; we did get the film back, however, unencumbered. This film grows out of mothers being afraid of their daughters' own budding sensuality.' – Ayoka Chenzira

'The matter of patriarchy within families is close to my heart. I think of my great grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, and my aunts who all had a firm, beautiful hand in raising me. I long for more representations of these generational villages on screen, like those we experience in Ayoka Chenzira's work. Ms Chenzira's *Alma's Rainbow* is a gorgeous clarion call for our young Black girls, heralding the community, creativity and confidence that is the pride of our culture.' – Ava DuVernay, producer/director

'I am delighted to have this opportunity to join you in presenting Dr Ayo Chenzira's first feature film. As you know, *Alma's Rainbow* was one of the first full length dramatic narrative films produced and directed by an African American woman in the 20th century. Chenzira's much celebrated and award winning early work is essential viewing today as much as it was when first released in 1994.' – Julie Dash, director

'Ayoka has been and remains an important filmmaker whose works inspire and celebrate the richness of Black culture. Through her vision, we witness the pain and beauty of the Black experience in a way that encourages hope and love. We need this.' – Ruby Dee

Alma's Rainbow is a coming-of-age comedy-drama about three Black women living in Brooklyn. Ayoka Chenzira's feature film explores the life of teenager Rainbow Gold (Victoria Gabrielle Platt) who is entering womanhood and navigating conversations and experiences around standards of beauty, self-image, and the rights Black women have over their bodies. Rainbow attends a strict parochial school, studies dance, and is just becoming aware of boys. She lives with her strait-laced mother Alma Gold (Kim Weston-Moran), who runs a hair salon in the parlour of their home.

When Alma's free-spirited sister Ruby (Mizan Kirby) arrives after from Paris after a ten-year absence, the sisters clash over what constitutes the 'proper' direction Rainbow's life should take. Alma has fooled herself into believing she has no need of male companionship and advises her daughter to follow her example. Ruby encourages both her niece and her sister to embrace life – and love – fully and joyfully. *Alma's Rainbow* highlights a multi-layered Black

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Alma's Rainbow

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women's world where the characters live, love, and wrestle with what it means to exert and exercise their agency.

Alma's Rainbow was written, directed, and produced by artist/educator, Ayoka Chenzira. An award-winning, internationally acclaimed film and video artist, Chenzira was one of the first African Americans to teach film production in higher education. She is also noted as the first African American woman animator. Chenzira has a cameo in the film as one of the two nuns Rainbow runs into at her school. It was an accidental appearance as the actress who was supposed to be in the scene couldn't make it to the set that day.

The script was originally titled *In All My Born Days*. It was filmmaker Julie Dash who named the film *Alma's Rainbow*. Dash and Chenzira were both protégées and close friends of filmmaker/playwright Kathleen Collins. Chenzira chose Collins' co-producer/cinematographer Ronald K. Gray to shoot her first feature.

Ayoka Chenzira remembers: 'Parts of the film are autobiographical. My mother did own a beautiful beauty parlour where women came and told the most amazing stories and offered their opinions about the world. But mostly I wanted to make *Alma's Rainbow* because as an adult living in Brooklyn, New York, I knew a lot of young girls who were having difficulties with their mothers. The stories were all the same. Mothers were holding daughters very, very close for fear of being teenage moms. And the daughters were becoming very creative at inventing ways to get out of the watchful eye of the mother. So, it's in the centre of this dance, where *Alma's Rainbow* is situated.

When it was time to show the film to potential distributors, they seemed very confused. I realised that they had not had a lot of exposure to African American history or Black life or culture because they kept wondering how a single mother could own such a beautiful home. It seemed to be an unusual thing for them, and they were much more comfortable with stories where there was 'more urban blight' than there was beauty on the screen.

Alma's Rainbow was the first and only movie that I've shot using 35mm film. It was shot in 21 days, and it cost \$350,000... I am still very proud of *Alma's Rainbow*. It was produced at a time when there were no films from the standpoint of an African American girl, particularly one that was trying to come into one's sense of one's self... I think we did okay. (Smiles.)'

Production notes