



## Black Debutantes: A Collection of Early Works by Black Women Directors

# A Way of Life

### A Way of Life

Director: Amma Asante

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Cymru/Arts Council of Wales, ITV Wales

Presented by: UK Film Council

Made with the support of:

Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru/Arts Council of Wales

Presented by: ITV Wales

Production Company: AWOL Productions

Made with the support of: National Lottery through  
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ITV Wales, Tantrum Films

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Executive Producers: Paul Trijbits, Tristan Whalley

Executive Producer (Sgrin Cymru Wales):

Judith Higginbottom

Produced by: Charlie Hanson, Patrick Cassavetti,  
Peter Edwards

Line Producer: Meinir Stoutt

For UKFC: Senior Production Executive: Himesh

Kar; Senior Business Affairs Executive: Natalie

Bass; Head of Physical Production: Fiona Morham

For ITV Wales (Business Affairs Manager):

Sion Clwyd Roberts

Production Co-ordinator: Sophie Treacher

Production Accountant: Sarah Teboul

Accountant for ITV Wales: Mike McCullagh

Accountant for AWOL Films: Peter Kittle

Location Manager: Iwan Roberts

1<sup>st</sup> Assistant Director: Chris Miles

2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant Director: Nerys Phillips

3<sup>rd</sup> Assistant Director: Roger Thomas

Script Supervisor: Pamela Humphreys

Casting Director: Gary Howe

Written by: Amma Asante

Director of Photography: Ian Wilson

Additional Photography: Martin Hawkins,

Nanu Segal

Still Photographer: Rhian Ap Gruffydd

Digital Visual Effects: Christopher Mortimer

Editors: Steve Singleton, Claire Douglas

Production Designer: Hayden Pearce

Art Director: Arwel Jones

Props Buyer: Fraser Pearce

Costume Designer: Susie Lewis

Wardrobe Supervisors: Ian Chapman,

Carol Marshall

Make-up Designer: Magi Vaughan

Make-up Artists: Allison Sing, Liz Jones

Titles Sequence Designers: Ally Burnett, Red,

Seonaid Mackay

Data Monkey: Simon Leppington

Digital Intermediate: Red

Digital Post Producer: Tanya Johnson

Film Laboratory: Soho Images

Colourist: Gary Szabo

Music Composed by: David Gray

Music Mixed by: Iestyn Polson

Sound Supervisor: Tim Alban

Sound Recordist: Ian Richardson

Boom Operator: Damian Richardson

Dubbing Mixer: Richard Davey

Recorded at: Videasonics

Dialogue Editor: Rory Farnan

[Sound] Effects Editor: Haresh Patel

Foley Editor: Jessie Taylor

Foley: Tim Alban

Growing up in South London in the 1980s writer and first-time director Amma Asante recalls ‘the part of London I lived in seems so diverse now. It wasn’t then. We were one of two Black families living on a very long street.’ Looking at the new multi-cultural generation around her, Asante was moved to contemplate a story that would have meaning for her own young niece and nephew, half English, half Welsh, half Black, half white.

It was crucial to Asante that her depiction of race issues should not have a one-sided perspective. ‘I didn’t want to create an idea of “those good people from abroad, they know how to bring up their kids”,’ she explains. ‘I wanted to say, it’s all of us. This affects everyone.’

Specifically by placing her story within a community where there are in fact few Black people and race hate is used as language to express general angst, Asante was able to make a far more reaching comment on social issues. She elaborates, ‘I was trying to say it’s all of us. Hassan could be anyone in many ways. It’s about using verbal violence. It’s about not having a voice that contributes to the world you live in that creates this kind of feeling.’

Producer Charlie Hanson had worked with Amma Asante many times before, including her first BBC2 drama TV series *Brothers and Sisters*. ‘What appealed to me about *A Way of Life*,’ he says, ‘was that it was completely different to anything she had written before.’

Initially Asante had intended an established director to take on *A Way of Life* after the writing stage. It soon became clear however that her strong connection to the story and understanding of the characters meant that Amma should assume the directing role herself. ‘Eventually the financiers said stop pursuing other directors,’ recalls Asante, ‘just do it.’

In a project where a 17-year-old girl must carry the action in 110 scenes out of 114, handling a baby, and holding the audience, the pressure of casting the right actress was immense.

Nathan Jones who plays Gavin, Leigh-Anne’s brother, and Sara Gregory, who plays Julie Osman, Gavin’s girlfriend and Leigh-Anne’s despised half Turkish neighbour were cast fairly quickly. ‘It was chemistry on screen!’ says Jones of his relationship with Gregory. Jones, a martial arts world champion who jokingly describes himself as the Welsh Bruce Lee, recalls the audition process to be ‘a bit like *Pop Idol*.’ Intrigued by the script segment he had been given, he asked to read the full draft in his waiting time and was struck that Asante had put ‘blood, sweat and tears’ into the story.

Months and months passed, with the team seeing up to 60 prospective teens a day. One rainy Saturday morning in Aberdare, in a workshop consisting almost entirely of 12-year-olds, Asante found her Leigh-Anne. ‘Steph was sat in the back and she was so much older than the rest, and she had a good face,’ she remembers. ‘Different to what I’d imagined Leigh-Anne to look like. But she really got the script.’

Having been through the stage school system herself, and with a good understanding of its tendency to ‘factory produce’ young actors, Asante was keen to cast teenagers with a different approach. Gary Sheppard (Robbie) for

Fight Co-ordinator: Kevin McCurdy  
Consultant: Robert Chesshyre  
Unit Publicity: Keeley Naylor, emfoundation  
Cast:

Stephanie James (*Leigh-Anne Williams*)  
Nathan Jones (*Gavin Williams*)  
Gary Sheppard (*Robbie Matthews*)  
Dean Wong (*Stephen Rajan*)  
Sara Gregory (*Julie Osman*)  
Oliver Haden (*Hassan Osman*)  
Brenda Blethyn (*Annette Lewis*)  
Eli Williams (*Rebecca Williams*)  
Darcy Williams (*Rebecca Williams*)  
Lydney Richards (*Helen*)  
Victoria Pugh (*social-worker*)  
Amy Morgan (*Karen Williams*)  
Gareth Gethin Evans (*Evin*)  
Philip Howe (*Jacob*)  
Ri Richards (*Brenda Williams*)  
Nick McGaughey (*Terry Williams*)  
Karen Elli (*Helen's mother*)  
Marlene Griffiths (*Mary*)  
Trystan Gravelle (*student*)  
Marged Esli (*social security officer*)  
Christine Pritchard (*matron*)  
Lydney France (*housing officer*)  
Stephen Scott (*house officer*)  
Matthew Jenkins (*Daryn*)  
Lindsey Williams (*Donna*)  
Siriol Jenkins (*librarian*)  
Claire Isaac (*WPC 1*)  
Lynne Seymour (*WPC 2*)  
Tony Squire (*male officer*)  
Michael Conway (*Danno*)  
Rhys Pettican Reh (*little boy in park*)  
Rhys Jones (*little boy playing football*)  
UK 2004  
91 mins  
35mm

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example, was cast on a scowl. 'He walked in and scowled at me, I thought "interesting!"' laughs Asante.

Producer Peter Edwards explains, 'One of the things which has given me great pleasure is the real feeling of this being a Welsh film, with something important to say to the rest of the world. The authenticity of it I think has had an impact on the kind of casting and the style of acting as well, which then creates credibility.'

To strengthen Asante's vision of a new multicultural Britain the young actors were cast in roles that didn't necessarily tie in with their racial backgrounds. Dean Wong, who plays Stephen, remembers his self-doubt when auditioning: 'To be honest, I was supposed to be playing a 15-year-old half Asian kid. And I'm thinking, I am never gonna get this at all.' Asante explains the similar thinking behind the casting of Sara Gregory, and Oliver Haden who plays her father: 'Oliver Haden is of Turkish Cypriot descent, he was born in the UK. But Sara Gregory who plays his daughter isn't. Yet she could be half Turkish, she could be half anything.'

Oscar nominee Brenda Blethyn (*Secrets and Lies*, *Little Voice*) came on board the project when she was sent the script by Charlie Hanson, an old friend. Struck by the originality of the idea she immediately said yes. Blethyn plays Annette, the grandmother of Leigh-Anne's daughter. Their relationship on screen is heated with Leigh-Anne attacking Annette verbally and physically. Blethyn describes her co-star as 'a raw talent. It's a huge role for this young girl to be taking on. It's a very emotional journey; it's like a roller coaster. You've got to pull it from every part of you.'

In many ways directing the established professional actors was a greater challenge to Asante than working with the unschooled teens. 'Of course,' she laughs, 'when Brenda turned up she was fantastic. Very concerned that she should give me what I want and brought so much of her own talent to the piece.'

*A Way of Life* was filmed entirely on location in Wales, primarily in Barry, Swansea, Cardiff and Pontypridd in the Welsh valleys. Producer Patrick Cassavetti summarises, 'because of Amma's commitment to making it here in South Wales – we've worked closely within the fabric of local culture. She created a very strong sense of place; albeit that it was made up of different locations, she created a patchwork that had a reality and had an atmosphere that was very germane to the piece that we were making.'

Production notes