



Black Debutantes: A Collection of Early Works by Black Women Directors
UK Premiere

Test Pattern

Test Pattern

Director: Shatara Michelle Ford

Executive Producers: Brooke Jordan,
Brittany S. Hall

Producers: Pin-Chun Liu,

Shatara Michelle Ford, Yu-Hao Su

Written by: Shatara Michelle Ford

Director of Photography: Ludovica Isidori

Editors: Matt Tassone, Katy Miller

Production Designer: Eloise Ayala

Costume Designer: Brionna Rowe

Music: Robert Ouyang Rusli

Music Supervisor: Alison Rosenfeld

Sound Designer: Thomas Ouziel

Cast:

Brittany S. Hall (*Renesha*)

Will Brill (*Evan*)

Gail Bean (*Amber*)

Drew Fuller (*Mike*)

USA 2019

82 mins

Digital

Director's notes

Test Pattern complicates the easier narratives of sexual assault. #metoo, Times Up, and modern feminism have caused a world-shaking shift in power, empowering individual victims of sexual assault and bringing the cause of justice into the halls of power and behind the doors of boardrooms. But the story of sexual assault is not just that of victims rising up and villains being torn down. Every day brings another story, another fight, another layer.

Here we reflect on those two messages we tell ourselves: victims of sexual assault should report it, and we will fight for them when they do. What if, for one Black woman in Austin, neither of those is true?

Realisation

I was interested in crafting a feminist nightmare. My goal was to get audiences to feel the shock and horror I experience at times, just being alive as a Black person and as a woman. The audience shouldn't reflect on this simply as a thrilling experience, but rather as a cold splash of water or the uncomfortable feeling of recognition after seeing some unpalatable element of themselves when they look in the mirror.

I wanted to distil the conclusions I made after reading countless news articles about the lack of access to rape kits for most people in America (if they know about them at all, and if those kits ever get tested), coupled with the deluge of #metoo accounts from women reflecting on all types of sexual assault and boundary violation. I wanted audiences to have an account of a Black woman navigating the oft-terrifying experience of being a woman alongside the equally terrifying experience of existing as a Black person inside a white-supremacist patriarchy.

A 37-page script

In October 2017, I wrote a sparse but structured script with minimal dialogue. I knew from the outset that *Test Pattern* would live in long takes and that I would flesh out the characters after working with the leads to further develop their roles and getting to know them. Brittany S. Hall and Will Brill were cast in March 2018. For the five and a half weeks leading up to production, I spent time with the actors separately and together, getting to know them personally while they tried on and uncovered their characters in rehearsals. After every conversation I had with them, the details of the script would further solidify and take shape. I wanted us to have a shared understanding of the characters and for Brittany and Will to have ownership of their respective roles by growing them together. The final shooting script grew by 11 pages and the long takes and spontaneous moments filled in the rest.

Tone

Influenced by Hitchcockian tonal shifts, *Test Pattern* can be divided into three parts: romantic comedy (before Renesha's assault), psychological thriller (during), and realist drama (after). The idea is to express how our lived experience isn't just one genre. There are moments in our lives that can feel super light-hearted, but in retrospect or in a different context can be painful. There are other times in our lived experience, especially for those with

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

25 & Under: Introduction to Black Debutantes

Thu 1 May 18:40 Blue Room

Pariah

Thu 1 May 20:50; Sun 25 May 18:20

UK Premiere of 4K Restoration: Will

Sat 3 May 18:10; Thu 15 May 20:30

Losing Ground

Sat 3 May 20:40 (+ pre-recorded intro by Nina Lorez Collins); Sun 11 May 15:20

Sugar Cane Alley Rue Cases-Nègres

Sun 4 May 18:10; Sat 17 May 20:40

What My Mother Told Me

Mon 5 May 14:50; Wed 21 May 20:40

Welcome II the Terrordome

Mon 5 May 18:30; Sat 17 May 12:30

Naked Acts

Thu 8 May 18:20 (+ extended season intro by Rógan Graham); Wed 14 May 18:15

Special Preview of new 4K Restoration: Compensation

Thu 8 May 20:55; Sat 24 May 18:20

Drylongso

Sun 11 May 18:45; Thu 22 May 20:30

Black Debutantes Shorts Programme: Performance Pains

Wed 14 May 20:30; Fri 30 May 18:15

A Way of Life

Fri 16 May 18:15; Tue 27 May 20:50

Exhibiting Black Cinema

Thu 22 May 18:20

UK Premiere: Test Pattern

Fri 23 May 18:40; Sat 31 May 18:10

Woman with a Movie Camera: Mountains

Thu 29 May 18:15

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marginalised identities and/or people of colour, that can feel downright scary-while those around you experience the opposite. It comes to the point that you doubt that what you're experiencing is real and that your feelings are justified-which is frightening in itself.

Social Commentary

I believe that America is going through a period of cultural and political crisis, not dissimilar to that of the period from the late 1960's to the mid 1970's. The levels of anxiety, distrust and angst mixed with a desire to question and expose were prevalent in cinema of that era. Inspired by John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) and Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975), I wanted to keep as much of the film as I could in the wide, as a larger motif to express the idea that my characters are products of their environment and part of a larger system. I intended to thereby force my audience to potentially re-evaluate their own role within our society and question their feelings about the characters and events being presented to them.

The Score

I was certain that the score for *Test Pattern* should be used as a motif and would incorporate classical elements. I listened to a ton of Brahms, as I dug through trying to find Renesha's emotions in music. Editor Katy Miller introduced me to Kelsey Lu and her brilliant use of the cello. It was then that the cello became attached to Renesha and strings became a larger component of the conception of the score. Working with the composer, Robert Ouyang Rusli we focused on creating something unconventional. We listened and learned from Bernard Herrmann and Jonny Greenwood and discussed elements of neo-classical films and their use of orchestral cues. We also had many discussions on the role of music in films, and on the way that it can embolden or subvert stereotypes on screen. As a result, we were highly intentional in our process. In the end, Rob constructed something beyond my wildest dreams. He created a string-heavy soundtrack that utilised string sounds in a tactile and physical way. Much of the percussion in the film comes from hitting the wood and strings of violins and cellos. The score is the absolute lifeblood of the movie.

Editorial

Influenced by Paul Thomas Anderson's *Phantom Thread*, Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Sam Mendes' *Revolutionary Road* and Derek Cianfrance's *Blue Valentine*, *Test Pattern*'s structure follows the linear narrative of Renesha and Evan's relationship, but it is pulled in different directions by a guiding principle: we follow Renesha's greater processing of her relationship with Evan and how that relates to her assault. Katy and I talked a lot about what it looks like structurally to express Renesha as a product of her environment, trapped by societal constraints and social mores. Editor Matt Tassone and I went through scene by scene, ensuring that the choices we made were led by how Renesha was feeling in each moment.

Production notes