

## NGOZI ONWURAH: BFI SHINES A LIGHT ON THE DIRECTOR'S GROUND-BREAKING FILMS



*Shoot the Messenger*



*Welcome II the Terrordome*

- **10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Screening of *Shoot the Messenger* at BFI Southbank, Tuesday, 15 November**
- **Dedicated collection of short and feature films available to audiences across the UK on BFI Player through Black Britain on Film**
- ***Welcome II the Terrordome, Coffee Coloured Children, The Body Beautiful, Flight of the Swan, White Men are Cracking Up***

**London: Thursday, 10 November, 2016** – As part of its **BLACK STAR** season, the BFI is shining a light on British-Nigerian filmmaker, **Ngozi Onwurah** and her ground-breaking films. From her short film debut, *Coffee Coloured Children* in 1988, to her feature debut, *Welcome II the Terrordome* (1995), where she became the first black British woman director to have a feature film theatrically released in UK cinemas, Ngozi is known for blazing an important trail in the British film industry, bringing challenging storylines and insightful black characters to the screen.

The BFI will celebrate the **10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Shoot the Messenger*** with a special screening and event on **Tuesday, 15 November** at the BFI Southbank in London. Starring David Oyelowo and Nikki Amuka-Bird, the film aired on BBC at a time when it was rare for UK television to showcase films that focused exclusively on black casts, while also bringing to the forefront, provocative and disturbing subject matter. Cast and crew will reunite at the BFI's event, with a discussion led by

Nikki Amuka-Bird (work permitting) and Charles Mnene, producer Anne Pivcevic and vice chair of the Mental Health Taskforce, Jacqui Dyer. The discussion will be chaired by Patrick Vernon OBE.

***Welcome II the Terrordome***, available on **BFI Player** as part of the **BFI's Black Britain on Film project**, is Ngozi Onwurah's sole feature to date. With its title co-opted from a fierce track by New York rappers Public Enemy, the film provokes questions about race relations, drugs, crime and police brutality – many societal themes which are still relevant today.

A selection of Ngozi's short films are also available on **BFI Player**, including ***Coffee Coloured Children, The Body Beautiful, Flight of the Swan and White Men are Cracking Up***. The full selection can be found here: <http://player.bfi.org.uk/search/?q=ngozi+onwurah>

The **BFI's BLACK STAR season**, which runs until the end of the year, is the UK's biggest season of film and television dedicated to celebrating the range, versatility and power of black actors. The season's aim is to bring the work of black actors to a new generation of UK audiences, helping to reposition them and their performances in our collective memory.

**Black Britain on Film** complements the BFI's new blockbuster season **BLACK STAR** and is available to view on the BFI's VOD platform, BFI Player, mostly for free. It is part of the BFI's five-year **Britain on Film** project to digitise, and make available online, 10,000 films, from the BFI National Archive and the UK's national and regional film archives, by 2017.

**BLACK STAR will be available to audiences everywhere in the UK; in cinemas including BFI Southbank, on BBC Television, on BFI DVD/Blu-ray and online via BFI Player until 31 December.**

### ***Shoot the Messenger (2006)***

*With David Oyelowo, Nikki Amuka-Bird, Brian Bovell*

Rarely does a UK TV film focus exclusively on a black cast and subject matter like this provocative, disturbing and bleakly funny drama. Oyelowo brings electric intensity to the role of Joe, a teacher on a mission to save his black students from a life of gangs, crime and underachievement. When a seemingly minor incident spirals out of control, Joe turns against his own community, and his mind begins to unravel. Join us as our panel discuss the important issues this very brave and unique film raises.

### ***Welcome II the Terrordome (1995)***

*With Felix Joseph, Saffron Burrows, Suzette Llewellyn*

With its title co-opted from a fierce track by New York rappers Public Enemy, Ngozi Onwurah's sole feature to date is a rough diamond of 1990s British cinema, a harrowing blast of grungy exploitation. It begins with a haunting prologue set in North Carolina in 1652, where an Ibo family calmly drown themselves rather than succumb to the chains of slavery. It then jumps forward to immerse the viewer in a fetid slum of the near-future - the titular Terrordome - where drugs, crime and racism are as rife as the brutality visited upon the majority black inhabitants by the police.

The first film directed by a black British woman to receive a UK theatrical release, this low-budget yet visually imaginative work was widely derided at the time, but it should be commended for its eyebrow-scorching passion. Moreover, it forges surprising links between near-mythical pasts and imagined futures to provoke prickly questions about contemporary race relations, police brutality and the limits of 'progress'.

### ***Coffee Coloured Children (1988)***

An intimate experimental monologue about the trauma of racial harassment and self-hate that accompanies growing up mixed-race, this short film examines the complexity of Britain's racial 'melting pot'. Performance art based in rituals of water and fire explores the psychological journey of trying to assimilate to and overcome the unachievable standard of whiteness.

### ***The Body Beautiful (1990)***

This autobiographical narrative redefines female beauty and sexuality by reflecting on filmmaker Ngozi Onwurah's relationship with her mother. Onwurah's discovery of her sexual appeal as a young model is combined with an intimate account of her mother Madge's experience of desexualisation after having a mastectomy. The cinematic treatment of the female body challenges viewers to acknowledge the rarely-seen sexuality and desire of (mature) women, outside of dominant beauty standards.

### ***Flight of the Swan (1992)***

A young girl leaves her Nigerian village to attend a ballet school in England. Fascinated by Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake, she dreams of performing as lead ballerina Princess Odette, but the girls in her close-minded ballet school mock her ideas of a 'black swan'.

### ***White Men are Cracking Up (1994)***

Masie Blue is an enigmatic Black Widow figure under investigation by detective Margrave for her involvement in the suicides of successful white men. Through the blurred lines of perception and reality, the myth of the black feminine mystique is explored under the guise of a murder mystery. Written by playwright Bonnie Greer, the film explores the fetishisation of Black women as a manifestation of white male insecurity.

### **Social Media:**

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**\*\*\* PICTURE DESK \*\*\***

**A selection of images for journalistic use in promoting BFI Southbank screenings can be found at [www.image.net](http://www.image.net) under BFI /BFI UK Publicity /BFI /BFI BLACK STAR / NGOZI ONWURAH**

**~ENDS~**

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

### **BFI BLACK STAR**

BLACK STAR is the UK's biggest ever season of film and television dedicated to celebrating the range, versatility and power of black actors. BLACK STAR celebrates the relationship between stars and the audiences who love them, spotlighting great performances by black actors on screen from the earliest years of cinema through to the present day, whilst exploring why opportunities to shine on screen have been historically limited for black actors. BLACK STAR celebrates films that feature black actors in central roles, bringing their work to a new generation of UK audiences and helping to reposition them and their performances in our collective memory. BLACK STAR is currently taking place across the UK, at BFI Southbank, on BFI Player and on DVD.

### **BFI BLACK BRITAIN ON FILM**

**Black Britain on Film**, a major new collection of over 150 film and TV titles that uncovers the heritage of black Britain. It features some of the earliest appearances of black Britons in two films by Mitchell & Kenyon, as well as ground-breaking post-war documentaries with fascinating insights into black communities. The collection includes lesser-known TV drama, contemporary features and films of iconic figures including **Paul Robeson, Muhammed Ali, Malcolm X** and **Martin Luther King**. **Black Britain on Film** charts changing attitudes and hidden histories spanning more than a century.

**Black Britain on Film** complements the BFI's new blockbuster season **BLACK STAR** and is available to view on the BFI's VOD platform, BFI Player, mostly for free. It is part of the BFI's five-year **Britain on Film** project to digitise, and make available online, 10,000 films, from the BFI National Archive and the UK's national and regional film archives, by 2017.

<http://player.bfi.org.uk/collections/black-britain-on-film/>

**Black Britain on Film** will include a touring programme of archive for cinemas and community groups from the Independent Cinema Office (ICO) and complementary programming with broadcast partners such as the BBC and London Live.

### **THE BFI**

The BFI is the lead organisation for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government

- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter. The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Josh Berger CBE.