

BFI POLL REVEALS UK'S FAVOURITE BLACK STAR PERFORMANCE: SIDNEY POITIER AS "MISTER TIBBS"

In the Heat of the Night



Angela Bassett's courageous portrayal of Tina Turner in *What's Love Got to Do with It* voted as top performance by over 100 industry experts

London: (**embargoed until 16:30 BST**) Thursday 20 October, 2016 – To mark this week's official launch of its **BLACK STAR** season, the BFI announced today that **Sidney Poitier's** critically-acclaimed and seminal performance as Detective Virgil Tibbs in *In the Heat of the Night* (dir. Norman Jewison, 1967) has been voted the public's **Favourite Black Star Performance** in a poll which included 100 performances spanning over 80 years in film and TV. Running alongside the public poll, a separate poll of over 100 industry experts voted for Angela Bassett's Oscar®-nominated performance as Tina Turner in *What's Love Got to Do with It* (dir. Brian Gibson, 1993).

UK Public Poll

Pam Grier followed in second place with her terrific turn as the titular character in Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* – an homage to the 1970's era of Blaxploitation films in America; **Michael K. Williams** was number three with his unforgettable portrayal of the legendary Omar Little, the openly gay, notorious stick-up man with a strict moral code feared by drug dealers across the city of Baltimore, in the socially and politically charged hit television series *The Wire*. British actor **Chiwetel Ejiofor** followed in fourth with his visceral portrayal of Solomon Northup, his break-out performance in Steve McQueen's ground-breaking, Oscar®-winning true story, *12 Years A Slave*; and **Morgan Freeman** rounded out the top five with his acclaimed, quiet and

layered performance in Frank Darabont's Oscar®-nominated cult classic, *The Shawshank Redemption*.

The Top 10 Favourite Black Star Performances voted by the public:

1. **Sidney Poitier** (*In the Heat of the Night*, 1967)
2. **Pam Grier** (*Jackie Brown*, 1997)
3. **Michael K. Williams** (*The Wire*, 2002-2008)
4. **Chiwetel Ejiofor** (*12 Years a Slave*, 2013)
5. **Morgan Freeman** (*The Shawshank Redemption*, 1994)
6. **Samuel L. Jackson** (*Pulp Fiction*, 1994)
7. **Denzel Washington** (*Malcolm X*, 1992)
8. **Whoopi Goldberg** (*The Color Purple*, 1985)
9. **Angela Bassett** (*What's Love Got to Do with It*, 1993)
10. **Sidney Poitier** (*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, 1967)

From **Angela Bassett** in *What's Love Got to Do with It* to **Whoopi Goldberg** in *The Color Purple*, **Samuel L. Jackson** in *Pulp Fiction* and **Denzel Washington** in *Malcolm X*, the poll's top 10 results include an array of fan favourites, critically-acclaimed and award-winning performances. They vary in their diverse subject matter and characters – exploring racism, sexuality, violence, Blaxploitation, civil rights, music, poverty, love, politics, to name just a few.

“Sidney Poitier's iconic performance lights up a thrilling film, the scalding power of which hasn't dimmed in the near half-century since it was released. In his own inimitable way, Poitier imbues Mister Tibbs with poise, power and endless reserves of dignity — he takes the high road when others choose to go low, but stands for no nonsense either. Tibbs is as much of a hero for our times as he was for his, and the results of this poll only confirm that fact.” **Ashley Clark, BFI Black Star season programmer**

Baroness Floella Benjamin OBE, DL, one of the poll's industry experts and known for her breadth of work and great contribution to British film, television, literature, theatre and politics also commented on Sidney's Poitier's performance, *“To me, he is the finest black actor of our time and has been truly inspirational.”*

***In the Heat of the Night*, which will be re-released by Park Circus from 18 November in select cinemas across the UK** as part of the BFI's BLACK STAR season, won five Oscars® in 1968, including Best Picture, Best Actor (for Rod Steiger), Best Screenplay and Best Editing. Directed by Norman Jewison, the film is not only a hard-hitting murder mystery, but also entertaining, atmospheric and insightful in its reflection of American society at the time.

Undoubtedly one of the key reasons for the film's success was Sidney Poitier, who is devastatingly cool and charismatic as Philadelphia homicide detective Virgil Tibbs. Tibbs arrives in a small Southern backwater to visit his mother but becomes embroiled in a murder investigation when he's picked up by the local police simply for the 'crime' of being black. When Tibbs' profession is confirmed, he's teamed with a racist redneck sheriff (Steiger) to help with the investigation – a riveting partnership that reflects the era's desperately strained race relations.

Over 100 industry experts, including film critics, film festival programmers, filmmakers, actors and cultural experts shortlisted the performances, while the ultimate winner was decided by the public. **The results have been published in full online at <http://www.bfi.org.uk/black-star/black-star-poll>.**

While this was by no means an exhaustive list of stand-out performances, it is a pertinent reminder of the rich history of great performances by black actors, and the impact of black actors in telling memorable stories that connect with global audiences through their creation and portrayal of unforgettable characters.

Industry Expert Poll

The industry experts also voted from the shortlist for their Top 10 Favourite Black Star Performances, selecting as their number one choice, **Angela Bassett's** captivating and powerful, Oscar®-nominated performance in Brian Gibson's ***What's Love Got to Do with It***.

The Top 10 Favourite Black Star Performances voted by industry experts:

1. **Angela Bassett** (*What's Love Got to Do with It*, 1993)
2. **Pam Grier** (*Jackie Brown*, 1997)
3. **Sidney Poitier** (*In the Heat of the Night*, 1967)
4. **Denzel Washington** (*Malcolm X*, 1992)
5. **Whoopi Goldberg** (*The Color Purple*, 1985)
6. **Chiwetel Ejiofor** (*12 Years a Slave*, 2013)
7. **Juanita Moore** (*Imitation of Life*, 1959)
8. **Dorothy Dandridge** (*Carmen Jones*, 1954)
9. **Marianne Jean-Baptiste** (*Secrets and Lies*, 1997)
10. **Danny Glover** (*To Sleep with Anger*, 1990)

Ashley Clark commented, "*Topping the critics' poll is Angela Bassett who, as Tina Turner in the searing biopic What's Love Got to Do with It, gave a performance for the ages—vigorous, vulnerable and vivacious.*"

British actress Pearl Mackie, who also contributed as an industry expert to the poll and who will be co-starring in the upcoming season of ***Doctor Who*** shared her thoughts on Angela Bassett's performance, "*This film remains vividly etched in my memory. The violence that Anna Mae (Turner) suffers at the hands of her husband Ike is brutal and humiliating, but what really struck me is the gnawing inner turmoil Bassett depicts so beautifully that this monster attacking her is the man she desperately loves.*"

The results were unveiled today **on BBC Radio 4's The Film Programme** by BLACK STAR programmer Ashley Clark. **BBC Arts is a key partner of the BFI's BLACK STAR season**, with BLACK STAR themes and content being explored across BBC television, radio and online, helping to bring the season to the widest possible audiences across the UK.

The **BFI's BLACK STAR season**, which will run 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.

The **BFI's BLACK STAR Symposium**, an industry event which took place during the BFI London Film Festival, kicked off the discussion surrounding the season with a key note speech from British producer and actor, **David Oyelowo** (*A United Kingdom, Queen of Katwe, Selma*) challenging the film and TV industries to affect positive change and create greater opportunities for diverse creative leaders in the US and particularly the UK.

As part of the Symposium, the **BFI unveiled the first phase of new statistical research** which highlights the representation of black actors in British films. **The first findings focus on films**

released in the UK over the past ten years (2006-2016) and clearly indicate that a major shift is needed within the industry to increase the inclusion and representation of black actors in film.

In the past 10 years, only **13% of UK films have featured at least one black actor in a leading role** and **59% of UK films have not featured a single black actor in any named character role.**

The poll results for the top 10 Favourite Black British Star Performances will be announced the week of 7 November.

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 from 17 October – 31 December.

To explore the **full results** of **Favourite Black Star Performances** in television and cinema, visit <http://www.bfi.org.uk/black-star/black-star-poll>

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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 under BFI /BFI UK Publicity /BFI /BFI BLACK STAR /BFI Favourite Black Star Performance Poll

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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.

About 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.