KINO LORBER
REPERTORY

seventy-seven

BABYLON

A film by Franco Rosso

U.S. Theatrical Premiere
March 8, 2019 in New York—BAM
March 15, 2019 in Los Angeles—Laemmle Glendale

World Premiere 1980 *Semaine de la critique* Cannes
North American Premiere 1980 Festival of Festivals [TIFF]
U.S. Premiere 1981 Los Angeles International Film Exposition [AFI FEST]
Winner 1981 *Evening Standard* British Film Awards Most Promising Filmmaker—Franco Rosso

United Kingdom
In English and Jamaican patois with subtitles
95 minutes • Color • 1.85:1 • DCP
A Kino Lorber Repertory / Seventy-Seven release

Publicity Contact
Gabriele Caroti • gabriele@seventy-seven.co

Distribution Contact
jhertzberg@kinolorber.com • Jonathan Hertzberg

Kino Lorber Repertory • 333 West 39th St. • Ste. 503 • New York, NY 10018
Seventy-Seven • 1000 Dean St. • Ste. 400 • Brooklyn, NY 11238

***Babylon* at 40**

Mamoun Hassan—February 2019

Forty years ago I backed my first film as managing director of the National Film Finance Corporation (N.F.F.C.). That film was *Babylon*. The Board members were invited to take a leap in the dark. The BBC had developed the script but had passed on it; the British Film Institute Production Board under Peter Sainsbury had rejected it. *Babylon* was a first film for the director. It had no stars, a wholly unfamiliar cast, and dialogue and accents that required subtitles in parts, as if it were a foreign film, which of course it was, to most people. It was violent, and it had no distribution guarantee or co-investor. I recommended we invest 83% of the budget: Anything less would not get the film made. It was unheard of. Historically, the N.F.F.C. offered 30% at most. Further, a couple of years earlier the N.F.F.C. had invested in Anthony Simmons's *Black Joy*, described by one critic as a "lightly ironic clash of cultures comedy". It had not been successful. The auguries were not good.

The script for *Babylon* was co-written by Martin Stellman and Franco Rosso. There was no producer attached, but Franco and Martin had Stephen Frears in mind as director. I knew Stephen and admired his work, but the script was uniquely authentic, born out of Martin's and Franco's direct experience of the lives of black youth in South London. I thought Stephen would make a fine film, but it would perforce be a foreign correspondent's view. Although neither of the two scriptwriters had directed a feature before, I suggested one of them should direct it. Franco became the director and Martin the associate producer. Chris Menges agreed to shoot the film and Gavrik Losey joined as producer. The Board finally agreed to my proposal.

The first five minutes of the film will tell you why I backed *Babylon*.

Kino Lorber Repertory and new distributor Seventy-Seven are releasing *Babylon* in the U.S. next month. The film opens at BAM in Brooklyn on 8 March, in Los Angeles on 15 March, and more widely after that.

Babylon lives.

Credits

Directed by **Franco Rosso**
Produced by **Gavrik Losey**
Screenplay by **Martin Stellman & Franco Rosso**
Music composed and arranged by **Dennis Bovell**
Ital Lion music by **Aswad**
Photographed by **Chris Menges, B.S.C., A.S.C.**
Edited by **Thomas Schwalm**
Associate Producer **Martin Stellman**
Art Director **Brian Savegar**
Sound **Ed Pise**
Production Manager **Ray Corbett**
Assistant Director **Raymond Day**

Blue [a.k.a. Dave] **Brinsley Forde, M.B.E.**
Ronnie **Karl Howman**
Beefy **Trevor Laird**
Dreadhead **Archie Pool**
Scientist [a.k.a. Spark] **Brian Bovell**
Errol **David N. Haynes**
Lover **Victor Romero Evans**
Elaine **Beverly Michaels**
Mum **Cynthia Powell**
Wesley [Mum's live-in boyfriend] **T. Bone Wilson**
Alan **Mel Smith**
Rastaman **Cosmo Laidlaw**
Fat Larry **Stefan Kalipha**
Carlton **Mark Monero**
Sandra **Beverley Dublin**
Sandra's Father **Granville Garner**
The Fence **Anthony Trent**
William **Donovan Platt**
Woman at lock-up **Maggie Steed**
Man on balcony **Bill Moody**
Sir Watts **David "Negotiator" Cunningham**
Compere **King Sounds**
Wolf [of Shaka Sound] **Malcolm Frederick**
Spooky [of Shaka Sound] **Patrick Worrall**
Jah Shaka as Himself

Financed by the **National Film Finance Corporation**
In Association with **The Chrysalis Group** and **Lee Electric Limited**

About *Babylon*

An incendiary portrait of racial tension and police brutality set in Brixton, London, the late Franco Rosso's ***Babylon*** has never been released in the United States—until now. Rated X in the U.K., it world-premiered at Cannes' *Semaine de la critique* in 1980 and went to Toronto (then known as the Festival of Festivals) for its North American premiere, but was passed on by the New York Film Festival. The *Time Out* headline from the film's cover story upon its British release in November 1980 read, "The movie the New York Film Festival found too hot to handle." Punk *doyenne* Vivien Goldman, who wrote the piece, cited the reasons: "being too controversial, and likely to incite racial tension."

Babylon follows a young reggae DJ[1] (Brinsley Forde, M.B.E., frontman of the British group Aswad) of the Ital Lion sound system[2] in Thatcher-era South London as he pursues his musical ambitions while also battling fiercely against the racism and xenophobia of employers, neighbors, police, and the National Front. Written by Martin Stellman (*Quadrophenia*) and shot by two-time Oscar® winner Chris Menges (*The Killing Fields*), with beautiful, smoky cinematography that's been compared to *Taxi Driver*, *Babylon* is fearless and unsentimental, yet tempered by the hazy bliss of the dancehall and set to a blistering reggae, dub, and lovers rock soundtrack featuring Aswad, Johnny Clarke, Yabby You, Cassandra, I-Roy, and Michael Prophet. The film, anchored by legendary dub innovator and reggae and punk producer Dennis Bovell's propulsive score, is also partly based on Bovell's false imprisonment for running a sound system, Sufferer's Hi Fi, in the mid-70s.

Taking inspiration from both *Mean Streets* and *The Warriors*, *Babylon* was written by Rosso and Stellman in 1973-74 as a "Play for Today," the BBC's acclaimed weekly filmed play series where many directors, including Mike Leigh, Stephen Frears, and Alan Clarke, cut their teeth. But the BBC wouldn't touch *Babylon*: "There was absolutely nothing that was about the life of young Londoners," Stellman said. "Absolutely nothing. We were operating in a complete vacuum." It took Gavrik Losey, son of director Joseph Losey, to sign on as producer and convince Chrysalis Records and Mamoun Hassan, the visionary new head of the National Film Finance Corporation, to back the project.

The film was released with subtitles in November 1980 to near-unanimous acclaim. But because the British Board of Film Censors gave it an X rating ("Certified X"—no one under 18 admitted)[3], it was ultimately financially

[1] In reggae parlance, the "DJ," often spelled out "deejay," is the equivalent of the "MC" in American rap or hip-hop. The practice of rhyming or talking over records at sound systems began in Jamaica in the 1950s. Influenced by American rhythm & blues radio DJs talking jive over records, reggae DJs (and rock steady and ska, two other genres which prefigured Jamaica's most famous export) took it one step further and "toasted" (rapped) over preexisting instrumentals of the hits of the day. The public's reaction was ecstatic, so records of these DJs "riding the riddims" were subsequently released. Partly due to the incessant experimentation of the producers, but mostly due to the economic necessity of reusing pre-existing music, DJ "versions" were created and the first "rap" records ever were released in the 60s in Jamaica.

[2] Sound Systems are essentially outdoor mobile discotheques, with a DJ and a selector (DJ in hip-hop parlance). "The roots of modern Jamaican music can be found in the sound systems of the 1950s. 'Sounds' were large outdoor parties where DJs would play the latest R&B and jump blues records. It was a fiercely competitive scene, with DJs blanking out the titles on the labels of their new records to stop rivals getting copies. As the decade progressed two rival sound systems proved more popular than the rest, Duke Reid's The Trojan and Clement 'Coxsone' Dodd's Downbeat. At the beginning of the 60s Reid and Dodd, the owners of the two leading sound systems of the time, took the next logical step and set up their own record labels: Treasure Island and Studio One. They would provide the backbone for the island's music industry over the next decade [and beyond]." (BBC)

[3] There was much criticism at the time of this decision, including a passionate critique by Alexander Walker of *The New Standard*: "The edgy concern this powerful film engenders in me is sharpened, however, by another kind of concern—namely that is has been placed out of bounds ot great numbers of the black community who will want to see it. Even though its actual violence is less, much less than many films certificated "AA," and open to 14-year-olds and up, *Babylon* has been given an "X" certificate excluding anyone not yet 18. It is the old, shameful story of censors who claim a paternalistic wisdom and a condescending right to "protect" anyone they think stupid or immature enough to misread the message. 'Confused and troubled' was how our film censor, James Ferman, saw young blacks who might go to *Babylon* that

unsuccessful. Still, it quickly became a cult film and was passed around by reggae aficionados via VHS bootlegs. It wasn't until 2008 that the film was restored and a new high-definition transfer was made from the original camera negatives, supervised and color graded by Menges. It was re-released for some special screenings in the U.K. Because of its obscurity in the U.S., it was never re-released. A single showing at BAM in 2012 from an HDCAM tape might have been the only legal stateside screening, both before and since.
The film had a small commercial release in Canada in 1981 by Pan-Canadian Film Distributors. (Toronto boasts a large Jamaican population, as well as a rich reggae culture; the film was well received at its 1980 North American premiere.) But in the United States, it was never released—until now.

March 8, 2019 marks the U.S. Theatrical Premiere of *Babylon*.

From *Babylon*'s original press notes

Franco Rosso and Martin Stellman wrote the original screenplay of *Babylon* for the BBC's "Play for Today" series. It was not picked up. At that point, they decided to turn it into a feature film and waited five years to go into production. They did, finally, due to their own persistence and the perception of Mamoun Hassan of the N.F.F.C. and Gavrik Losey, the film's producer. As Rosso explains it: "This was not an easy subject to raise film finance on. It falls into none of the obvious commercial categories and producers are notoriously myopic when it comes to evaluating the unusual. Mamoun gave us tremendous support, as well as the necessary finance and then Gavrik came in and turned it into a reality". Stellman adds, "Even then it wasn't easy. We were working on a shoestring budget. I was living in a bed sitting room in North London. Until a couple of weeks before filming, we were using that as our production office. Much of the casting was done there. I'd look around my room with all the papers scattered everywhere and think, 'this is ridiculous!'". *Babylon* was, in fact, the only film financed by the N.F.F.C. in 1980. When Losey came into the project, he raised further finance from The Chrysalis Group of Companies and from Lee Studios. "I went to Chrysalis, told them we were making a reggae film, and offered them a deal for the record. They didn't want to commit themselves to the record at that time, but amazingly they offered us $60,000 towards production simply because the man I approached believed so strongly in the film."

Babylon was filmed on a six week shooting schedule, entirely on location in South London and the West End. The production headquarters were above a rambling church in Deptford. The set was totally closed to visitors, including journalists, because of the film's sensitive subject matter and the fact that shooting was taking place in an area of London where there was racial tension. The cast of actors were carefully chosen, with the help of casting director Sheila Trezise, Rosso, and Stellman, who already had many contacts within the black community. Aside from the regular actors, there were many extras. The vast majority were West Indians living around the Deptford, Lewisham, Peckham, and Croydon area. "At first, the extras union said we could only use their members, but when they read the script, they realized that was ridiculous. There just aren't that many black members in the union."

---

hitting bach as whites was their only means of protest. I suppose at the age of 18 they'll no longer think that." *(See p. 15 for full article.)*

Original Press Quotes on *Babylon*

All taken from its Cannes premiere in May 1980 / original U.K. release in November

"Here's to a British film with more heart and soul than any home-produced feature of the last 20 years. Like the reggae music that pulses through it, *Babylon* is **rich, rough and real**. And like the street life of the young black Londoners it portrays, it's **threatening, touching, violent and funny**... **Explodes in the gut with a powerful mix of pain and pleasure**... Carries the infectious vigor of Jamaican features like *The Harder They Come* and *Rockers* into a close to home setting of sunless urban realism, could well outstrip the status of any of those titles and become a smash."
—Simon Perry, *Variety*

"Remarkable... Its hard edge is undeniable... Never lets go for a moment."
—Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*

"**Fearless**... Loud and musical and cheerful and funny, and also tragic." **—David Robinson, *The Times***

"**Superb, true, tough, electrically alive**... **One of the best British made films for years**. Has more shock potential than five put together... It begs no sympathy, imports no glamour, but transfers to the screen with powerful rough-edged vigor a picture that has never really been seen before."
—Alan Brien, *The Sunday Times*

"**Thoughtful and sophisticated**... An important picture." **—Philip French, *The Observer***

"**Gives a wholly believable, unsentimentalized, unglamorized feeling of what it is like to belong to a black community in London**... Captures the reality, the exuberance, the anxieties and the optimism." **—David Robinson, *The Times***[4]

"Powerful... Gets under the skin in every sense." **–Alexander Walker, *The New Standard***

"**Must** be seen." **—NME**

[4]David Robinson of the London *Times* loved the film so much, he wrote about it twice!

Interview with Franco Rosso & Brinsley Forde

from *NME*—November 1980 by Chris Salewicz

Please note: contains spoilers—Do not read until you have seen the film.

Chris Salewicz meets two of the people behind the controversial Babylon:
Director Franco Rosso and Aswad's Brinsley Dan[5]

With a visual rhythm akin to the sound-system competition sequence that opens the film, Franco Rosso's *Babylon* will be seen in years to come as crucial to any understanding of the social situation in Britain at the beginning of the 80s.

Set predominantly among the South London black community, the film is an episodic account of the external and internal pressures that draw car mechanic and part-time toaster Blue (Aswad guitarist Brinsley Dan) into an ostensibly downward spiral that culminates in his impulsive stabbing of a racially abusive white. In the final scene, again at a sound system battle, he recovers his sense of self through a toasting performance the power of which is interrelated with the deeper understanding of Rastafarianism and black identity that he has gained during the course of the film.

"*Babylon* is as accurate as you can go in a film," says Brinsley.

"People are going to complain that it shows certain sides of life in Britain that can seem very negative. But, in fact, the film just provides, and tries to explain, certain details. It leads up to an incident where action becomes physical and violence is directed towards another person. Yet all it's doing, really, is showing the pressures that lead people to do certain things within that system."

Also seated in the front room of Brinsley's upstairs flat off of Portobello Road is the director of *Babylon*, Franco Rosso. He is concerned that the implied reasons for the problems portrayed in his film may not be clear to all. Franco feels, though, that they couldn't have been more explicit without altering its essence: Some people certainly wanted to show more than just the implications—they were worried that the points were not made sufficiently strongly.

"But in that case you'd enter a very difficult area. To do what they want you'd have to make something very close to direct propaganda. Which would leave a white audience totally and utterly outside of the film, and unable to come into it."

"To me," adds Brinsley, "the film is trying to show that we've got to work together, because we can't achieve anything on our own.

"Okay, Blue goes and stabs someone—his back is against the wall and he strikes out. But, in the end, it's down to the support of everyone—when everyone stands in the hall at the end it's about working together. Whatever happens there has been done together. It's the only way anything can happen."

It is five years since Franco Rosso and Martin Stellman wrote together the original draft of *Babylon* for BBC-TV's *Play For Today* series. It was never made, and so they decided to adapt the script as a feature film.

It wasn't until the end of last year that the National Film Finance Corporation (N.F.F.C.) came up with the necessary money for the six weeks of shooting and subsequent costs that Babylon required. Originally contacted

[5] At the time, Brinsley Forde was also known as Brinsley Dan, or Brinsley "Dan" Forde.

in an attempt to sell them the soundtrack LP, Chrysalis came up with £30,000 on the strength of the script rather than on that of the music—the company didn't commit itself to the album until some months later.

The final costs of *Babylon* have been remarkably cheap: as opposed to the two million spent on *Breaking Glass*, the Rosso film totted up £372,000 - roughly the same as any of the recent Dennis Potter TV films. Rosso, whose laconic liveliness is a constant reminder of his origins, was born in 1942 in Italy. His parents emigrated to England at the end of World War II. Educated at Camberwell Art College and the Royal College of Art (at which he was a contemporary of Ian Dury, who will star in his next—non-musical!—film), he worked as assistant editor to Ken Loach on *Kes*, and has directed promo films for John Lennon and Dury, in addition to having made a significant number of (mostly black-orientated) documentaries.

Dread Beat And Blood, his Omnibus documentary on Linton Kwesi Johnson, is the most widely known of these. He is amused rather than irritated by its having been rescheduled by the BBC until after the last General Election. Despite the unanimous critical praise heaped so far upon *Babylon* he regards its surprisingly harsh "X" certificate as the first of many crosses the film will have to bear.

Franco is certain his Italian background granted him a different perspective on England. "A lot of the film," he affirms in his South-East London accent, "is close to auto-biographical. Definitely! Obviously it's been moved on a few years. But instead of things getting better, they've got worse. There's a very natural sympathy, because a lot of my experiences are very similar, even though they may not be exactly the same—visually I'm not that different from English people, for example.

"Oddly enough, it was only when I was looking at the film the other night that I realised that similarity. I was amazed. So I suppose that must have been one of the reasons why sub-consciously I wanted to do the film."

Though he has been a member of Aswad since the group came together in 1975, the dynamically lethargic Brinsley Dan started off his career on the boards as an actor. British-born, of Guyanese parents, Brinsley had roles in many British children's TV plays, as well as John Boorman's *Leo the Last*, before discovering the, for him, greater joys of music.

Even aside from the undoubted publicity spin-off that Aswad will receive from *Babylon*, the group's star is certainly in the ascendant. For some two years now the five-piece outfit has been regarded as the finely perfected spearhead of British reggae bands. It's ironic, indeed, that *Hulet*, the most recent Aswad LP, has been licensed by Grove Music to Island, who in 1977 dropped the group after one LP.

"Now," shrugs Brinsley, "that people have got the knowledge that something's happening, they'll just go and take a listen.

"The problem has been that up till now we just haven't had the facilities to do what we wanted. But we were given a chance to do 'Warrior Charge' as a Disco-45 for Chrysalis, which is in the film and which has caused the buzz again. But if a company had just put something into us they would have got that long ago. 'Warrior Charge' is just a small part of what's really there."

"It's very funny," adds Franco. "In *Sounds* there was a review of the film and they completely hated it—which is fair enough. But the guy who reviewed it is so fuckin' hip that one of the points he made was that no decent sound system would ever play "Warrior Charge".

"What he didn't know, of course, was that Shaka was playing all the dubs of 'Warrior Charge' and couldn't get enough of them. It was like snobbism in reverse. Very odd."

Indeed, in *Babylon*, the character of Ronnie, a white would-be Rasta, suggests much of the identity confusion prevalent amongst obsessive white reggae freaks.

Says Brinsley: "It's that thing of reversing roles. Like a black youth trying to become a white youth, or vice-versa. You can never do it. You have to be who you are. And you have to realise you can still get on together."

Another central theme of *Babylon* is the iniquity of the "Sus" law. "A black kid," points out Franco, "is going to be used to having a certain kind of treatment. If it's late at night and a car with a load of white guys in it follows him he'll either panic and run, or stop and hope. If he runs, the cops in the car will have triggered off within them an automatic response: they assume they're seeing guilt."

Working as advisor on *Babylon* was the former London policeman who'd had the same task on the "controversial" Tony Garnett TV series, *Law And Order*. "He told us," explains Franco, "that that sort of situation gets really exciting for a copper: His adrenalin really gets going. In fact, if that happens it's almost better to take what's coming to you. Because once you run, those guys really get into it.

"It was the same with the final scene. He told us that they all carry things like sledgehammers—in the boots of their cars. He used to, he said, and all his detective mates. Which is why we let them sledgehammer the door down. If those two cops who initially approach the downstairs door couldn't have got entry they'd have gone mad. The cops would have just kept coming, -and they would've massacred the people in the hall."

The final scene is based on an actual incident. Some six years ago the Carib Club (aka Burton's) in Willesden was raided. Franco: "Dennis Bovell was inside for six months just waiting as a suspect. He'd been playing the sound system that night, and they claimed he'd been egging the people on.

"A couple of cops ran in and started trying to arrest people and when they got turfed out a fight started. More police came and lined the stairs and as people were leaving they were physically attacked."

Hearing the sound of children's voices in the street, Brinsley opens his window and peers out. Three black children, of primary school age, are trying to attract his attention: they want to know when *Babylon* will open and whether they may go and see it. Reluctantly, Brinsley has to point out to them it is an "X". "See," he says, closing the window, "they're exactly the age-group who should see the film—to make sure they don't end up stabbing people when the pressure gets too much.

"But," he shrugs sadly, "the system won't allow them to watch it. I wonder why?"

Interview with Martin Stellman

from *Wax Poetics*—April 3, 2014 conducted by Seb Carayol

There has been—before and after Babylon—*quite a few reggae-themed movies. Why did you and Rosso choose to focus on the sound-system scene in London?*
I was working in an area of the city called Deptford as a youth and community worker. It was kind of a rough area. I was in my mid-twenties, and I was a huge reggae fan. I'm from London, and ever since I was a kid, I was a huge fan of black music; I grew up with early Stax and Tamla Motown. So I kinda moved to the parallel musical world of reggae, and because of my youth work, I became involved with a proper sound system. Back then, sound system dances were called blues dances; they were at really funky venues. They would be at the back of a church hall, for example; they might be at a youth center, and they would be absolutely jam-packed. And the big speakers would be there, and it would be the whole thing, just as you see in Babylon. It was just fascinating.

How did it go from that fascination to making a movie about it?
I had three jobs at the time. One of them was to be a freelance journalist, working for *Time Out*. I once wrote an article for them about Native American Indians, and Franco Rosso, who I didn't know at the time, got in touch with me and said, "I loved your article. I'm really interested in doing something with you; I'm a filmmaker." He was already working as a director of documentaries.
Then I wrote another article for *Time Out* about young blacks in my neighborhood —unemployment, police harassment, the very individual and idiosyncratic relationship that the people I worked with had with the British state and with society, in a way.
So me and Franco started researching the whole sound-system scene, and I took Franco with me to sound systems—he wasn't going before, but, funnily enough, he knew about them because this church where he lived, in Lewisham, had a blues every Friday, and it used to drive him mad because of the bass, yeah? [Legendary sound-system owner] Jah Shaka used to play there as well; it was literally at the back of his garden.
Don't get me wrong: Franco also made a documentary about dub poet LKJ (Linton Kwesi Johnson), so he was very simpatico to the subject. He only hated the noise because he had kids!

Were you guys tempted to do a documentary, and not a feature film?
No, we always wanted to do drama, tell a story. And it was really important—you have to remember that we're talking about the 70s—we started around 1975, 76, I would say. There was absolutely nothing that was about the life of young Londoners. Absolutely nothing. We were operating in a complete vacuum. Obviously, Franco talked to a lot of people, listened to a lot of stories, went to a lot of sounds, talked to people like Shaka and LKJ. LKJ knew Shaka, so the connection was there already.

How did you get to have the main role of Blue played by Aswad singer Brinsley Forde?
We casted very carefully from day one, really. Brinsley was actually a child actor before; he played in that series *Double Deckers* [ABC/BBC1] when he was a teenager! We did see other people for Blue, but Brinsley was so authentic and right for the script, it took us five minutes to decide. And then Brinsley brought some people from Aswad to play minor roles. Mikey Campbell was their manager at the time [and plays the promoter], King Sounds [runs the sound clashes].
It never was too difficult to convince people. The proof in the pudding was in the story, in the script. Whatever suspicion they might have had towards us, hopefully they'd see that we've done our work with the screenplay. People might have one or two objections, but we were very open to changing things. For instance, we needed to get the patois right, so we'd show the draft to the sound system guys. This guy Trevor Currie, who was the producer's bodyguard and a boxing champion, was also part of an actual sound system; we would check with these guys for scenes that we felt could be pure invention and unauthentic.

Didn't you have a bunch of alternative names for it?
I think we called it *Dread* one time, then *Dread Inna Babylon*, and then we just called it *Babylon*. Half of the original script was happening in prison, but we had to chop this whole section for budgetary reasons. At the end of the original script, Blue escapes from this prison that's right by the sea. He walks down to the beach and finds a wooden boat, and starts to row with the idea of trying to get to Ethiopia. It's a long way but it doesn't matter, 'cause the film ends. You would have had some tune play, like "Fisherman" by the Congos.

How did you even find people to finance this film?
The predecessor of what is now the Film Council, a government-funded organization supposed to patronize and encourage filmmaking, was called the National Film Finance Corporation (N.F.F.C.). The guy running it at the time, Mamoun Hassan, read the script and absolutely loved it. He always wanted to absolutely see it made. It was more due to him than anybody else that the film happened. He's not British, he's an outsider too, so I think he had sympathy for the material.
If you look at the key people in the making of *Babylon*, you have Franco Rosso, son of an Italian immigrant; me, son of a Jewish immigrant from Vienna; Gavrik Losey, son of blacklisted Hollywood director Joseph Losey; and

then you have Mamoun Hassan, the son of a Saudi immigrant. We all had that sense of being outsiders in a time in Britain that was very much still the Empire. We are not Jamaican immigrants per se, but the idea of *Babylon* definitely talked to each one of us.

Prelude to a Siege

Mamoun Hassan—September 2008

Babylon was the first film that I backed as managing director of the N.F.F.C. Prior to that there had been two other features on black life: Horace Ové's *Pressure* (1975) and Anthony Simmons's *Black Joy* (1977). I backed *Pressure* when I was Head of Production at the British Film Institute; the N.F.F.C. was one of the investors in *Black Joy*. *Pressure* is a fine, hard-hitting polemical film made for next to nothing whose scale and approach perhaps limited it for a general audience. *Black Joy* is not as soft as the title suggests. Simmons was no slouch and its American producer, Elliot Kastner, went on to make some of Hollywood's best. But *Black Joy* has its omissions. Hate, violence, rage, stupidity, and defiance are missing. *Babylon*, in contrast, has all this and humor—and joy too, real joy. The joy of being alive despite living in a "country that's always been a fucking tip."

When the script came in, there was neither producer nor director attached. The two writers, Franco Rosso and Martin Stellman, had been hocking it around for a while. The BFI had pronounced it "too conventional"; the industry saw it as problematic. Here was a combustible and vigorous work—by, about, and for the young. The characters are blood brothers to Albert Finney's character in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*: "What I'm after is a good time. All the rest is propaganda." A good time was making and playing music, buying and selling ganja, smoking spliffs, and generally exploiting girlfriends. Had they been alienated young whites, the industry might have listened. For me, the fact that they were black was a bonus. British cinema was tired and dying—yet again. One major, EMI, was looking to Hollywood; the other, Rank, was slowly fading. British cinema desperately needed new stories and new characters. Stories about and by the new Brits would enrich the blood.

The first draft of *Babylon* was in two parts: the first in the streets, the second in prison. I suggested to Franco and Martin that they make it consistently one or the other. I preferred the streets but I would back them regardless. They chose the streets. When it came to proposing a director, they tentatively suggested Stephen Frears. I admired Stephen as much as they did, but I thought Stephen would be a foreign correspondent flying in. Who then, they asked? One of you two, I said. I could sense both shock and excitement. They chose Franco. It would be his first feature.

The choice of cinematographer was crucial. They got Chris Menges. It was before his two Oscars, but Chris had already shot *Kes* and worked with Stephen Frears, Lindsay Anderson, Roland Joffe, and so on. Chris can do just about anything with a camera and he can create magic with natural light, a pup, or banks of lamps. He can shoot news, sponsored documentary (I did a couple with him), verité, low-budget films, and large Hollywood extravaganzas. He was a big catch. With Chris on board and, later, Tom Schwalm as editor, I knew we would get a very good film, and I thought we stood a chance of getting our money back. At worst, the film would be, in the words of Samuel Beckett, "a pregnant failure." There would be issue; it would lead to something.

I would have preferred it if the director of *Babylon* had been black. He or she would have brought some insight that would be new and unexpected. But I have never believed in positive prejudice. Every commission, every gig would be suspect. Getting rid of negative prejudice is enough to be going on with. I backed Franco because I thought he could bring that script to life. Franco and Martin knew the estates; they lived the life. The film's authenticity runs deep. From a marketing view it was sometimes troubling: the dialogue between the black characters is often hardly understandable. The first understandable lines more than 10 minutes into the film are from a black parent. This was not just a detail; it was part of the drama. The older generation wanted to fit in. These youngsters want to stand apart, speak their own lingo, play their own music, and get into their own kind

of trouble. Of course they pay the price. (After *Babylon*, I backed *Gregory's Girl* and my chairman, Geoffrey Williams, who was a merchant banker, asked me with a wry smile if I was ever going to back a film that did not need subtitles in the U.K.)

There is a particular zest and freshness to the characters and not a whiff of sentimentality. They may charm us but they are all to some degree delinquent. The central character, Blue, played by Brinsley Forde of Aswad, is breathlessly running to and from trouble. The well-named Beefy (not so much played as embodied by Trevor Laird), is only a step away from violence throughout. At one point he turns on Blue's white friend, played by Karl Howman, and nuts him in the face saying, "Don't talk black!". The racism they are subjected to provokes not so much a retaliation in kind as an over-awareness of one's own race.

Gavrik Losey joined as producer and he found two interested parties. But despite his efforts, no major investor materialized. It was decision time. I had first, however, to confront the history and practices of the N.F.F.C., which was established in 1951 by Harold Wilson when he was at the Board of Trade as a film bank to take on the hegemony of Hollywood. It invested 30% of the budget with 70% coming from distributors. In the early years, it invested in some 50 films a year and was making a profit. By the time I joined, in January 1979, the number had trickled to less than a handful, but the investment was still around 30%. It was also still operating with a commercial brief. It was patently absurd. No bank can survive on making two or three loans a year. (Although, at the time of writing, it seems that no bank can survive without government funding). My predecessor, Sir John Terry, increased the N.F.F.C.'s share but not by very much and not very often. For a start, it was too risky and, secondly, he had very little money. In the extreme situation that I found myself, when co-investors were thin on the ground or nonexistent for the films I wanted to back (this was before Film Four) I decided early on that we would invest whatever was necessary to get a film made. I kicked off by persuading my Board to invest 83% of the budget for *Babylon*. I was breaking all the rules at one go. I backed a first-time director to film a subject that was considered a no-goer, and took nearly all the financial risk. They backed me. I have learnt one thing about management. Boards will let you have your way at the beginning and end of your tenure. At the start, they think it is just possible that you may be right, but if you're wrong then you'll have shot yourself in the head and that's that. In the end, they just want see the back of you and will agree out of weariness. It's the middle period that's sticky.

Babylon was invited to Cannes to participate in the Critics Week. When the film opened in Bristol the audience, mostly young and black, slashed the seats. Martin and Franco had been prescient. The film ends with Blue singing "We can't tek no more of that" as black youngsters put up barricades, including sound systems, against the police who use a sledge hammer to break into the dance hall looking for Blue. Amazingly, an event very much like that had taken place in St Paul's in Bristol some weeks before the screening. Life was imitating art. Exhibitors became reluctant to play the film in their cinemas. There is such a thing as being too timely.

Have things changed in the nearly 30 years since *Babylon* was made? Yes and no. Black talent is expressing itself in all the media and can be seen on the big and small screens every night. Meanwhile, the Film Council has reverted to the original model of the N.F.F.C, rarely investing more than 30% and insisting on guaranteed distribution, which *Babylon* did not have. However, there are many more funding sources than in my day. In other ways, everything has got more complicated. Racism has diversified. The targets are now Afro-Carribeans, Semites (both Jews and Arabs), Muslims, Pakistanis, Indians, Central Europeans, mainly Poles and East Europeans, particularly Albanians—or is it Bulgarians or Romanians? The counter to racism has also strengthened.

When I backed *Babylon*, my Films Minister was Michael Meacher and the Prime Minister was James Callaghan. When it went into production, my Films Minister was Norman Tebbitt and the Prime Minister was Mrs. Thatcher. Within a few months, I had gone from leading a charge to being under siege. But that's another story.

Original Press

"Great Care In Filming 'Babylon' Based On London Race Tension" by Simon Perry
Variety—*March 26, 1980*

London, March 25
When Gavrik Losey undertook to produce Babylon for the state-funded National Film Finance Corp., he viewed Martin Stellman's screenplay about blacks in Britain as too near the knuckle for comfort. He even claimed the right to remove his name from the credits if the film ended by implying a "racist" bias.

He was worried. he said, because the South London streetlife plot was as unvarnished a portrayal of black youth as of the National Front, a local neo-Nazi splinter group dedicated to the "sending them home" policy for colored immigrants. Without careful handling — and his director, Franco Rosso, hadn't made a feature before — Losey initially felt the realism could backfire and the film condemned as "an ad for discredited extremists."

Now, with all footage in the can, he's more relaxed. But during the six-week, all-location shooting schedule, in an area of the capital where race dashes are common, both whites and blacks had to be kept sweet. Production went ahead with none of the usual press "announcements" and all progress inquiries were firmly deflected.

"I couldn't afford a single line or photo in print," Losey explained. "One unfortunate phrase, or wrong inference, and we could have lost all cooperation from one side or the other."

One sequence caused him particular headaches. The hero goes on the town with a group of other young West Indians whose idea of an evening out includes mugging a white for good measure. "That works fine in context," said Losey. "We precisely don't want to pretend that kind of thing can't happen. But reported out of context, it could have lost us a lot of goodwill among kids we depended on heavily."

Similarly, he said, isolated reports of other scenes could have given National Front supporters an exact reverse impression of the film — with equally disruptive results.

Tension Underlying
Although shooting apparently went off with only minor hitches and tensions, Losey's still worried about the film's eventual promotion. Distribution is open as yet: first move is to ready it for Cannes, with hopes of acceptance for either the main competition or the Directors' Fortnight section.

"Whatever happens, the publicity angle has got to be just right, or we could be in trouble," he believes. He shares British censor James Ferman's view that Paramount's "The Warriors" was dangerously misrepresented by its ad campaign, which was why it was banned by local authorities in seven areas here.

Recall 'Black Joy'
Commercially, he's undeterred by the fact that the last "black" British picture with a similar setting, "Black Joy," was not widely released. In contrast to that 1977 Elliott Kastner production, which was cautiously soft-centered, Losey reckons the much grittier "Babylon" should find the same market as two more recent, and more successful British films, "Quadrophenia" and "Scum."

Seems "Babylon" was regarded as a hot potato in its early stages, too — a number of potential financing sources turned it down. It started life in 1975 as a telefilm script commissioned by BBC-TV, but proved too sensitive for the public broadcaster to put into production, so writer Stellman and director Rosso hung onto the rights.

EMI passed, even though an early draft was submitted by a panel set up two years ago by the Assn. of Independent Producers (specifically to filter low budget projects for EMI's consideration) and headed by directors Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz. Rank also passed: and indict producer-financier Don Boyd pulled out after initially agreeing to cofund with the National Film Finance Corp.

Losey, an American-born (son of director Joseph Losey) U.K. resident with numerous credits as line producer, and recently co-producer of Warner Bros. "Agatha," took over the project when another independent producer, Mark Forstater, withdrew.

He managed to supplement an increased N.F.F.C. investment with guarantees from Lee Bros., a local facilities company, and $65,000 from Chrysalis Records Latter has a straight participation in the film, Losey said; a deal for the reggae-compilation soundtrack was made separately, though with the same diskery.
N.F.F.C.'s equity share is understood to be more than 80%, and the final script is much-changed from the original. Losey states unequivocally that N.F.F.C. managing director Mamoun Hassan "has been financially and emotionally the mainstay of this project."

Excerpt from "Britain asserts its independence" by David Robinson
The Times—*May 19, 1980*

For the first time there is no British film in competition at Cannes. The president of the festival is reported to have dismissed Britain as a "cultural desert,", and to prove his point all films submitted by the British Film Production Association were firmly rejected. Ironically, though, in the outcome the British flag is being flown a good deal more proudly than in many recent years. The British film industry at least gives an impression of a united front, with a lively information centre and a creditable publication to promote the entire current production of some sixty feature films.

Moreover, in spite of the festival snub, the British presence is still appreciable in the non-competitive events, which take place side by side with the festival proper. Significantly, however, all those films capable of attracting critical attention on an international level are shoestring, independent productions, made outside the context of the commercial film establishment.

In the market section of the Cannes event there are Derek Jarman's *The Tempest*...

...In the critics' week, devoted to debutant films, the outstanding success has also been British, Franco Rosso's *Babylon* which packed out every one of its Cannes performances. It is a film which vindicates the new direction taken by the National Film Finance Corporation. Shamefully underfinanced for its task of promoting native film production, the corporation wisely recognizes the need to gamble its meagre resources on the new and original rather than the safely conventional.

Babylon is the most fearless statement any feature film has yet made on the problems of multiracialism, in Britain—fearless in that it does not seduce its audience either with comfortable evasions or easy solutions of the problems of co-existence.

It concerns a group of young London blacks whose lives centre on their reggae music—the technology of sound systems, the virtuoso techniques of improvisational "toasting," the ferocity of contests between competing groups. Reggae and Rasta provide a philosophy, a religion, and a sense of identity. But they also focus that sense of difference which lies at the root of the basic human fears that alienate, blacks and whites, young and old, civilians and police.

The film is loud and musical and cheerful and funny, and also tragic. It is a significant indication of the social gulfs portrayed that *Babylon* is to be sub-titled, to make the dialogue of West Indian Londoners comprehensible in Britain.

"A Gleam of Hope in the Gloaming" by Derek Malcolm
The Guardian *November 6, 1980*

THE BEST film of the week is the only remotely serious one, and the only British one too. **Babylon** (Gate Two, Chelsea Classic and Brixton Ace, X) was, in fact, largely funded by the National Film Finance Corporation and deals with the West Indian community in London. It is the first British film, apart perhaps from Horace Ove's Pressure, that attempts to tell part of their story wholly their own way. And it is surely the first that has had sub-titles added to it so that the rest of us can understand.

All this could militate against its popularity. But I fancy Babylon will transcend its difficulties not so much because of its controversial nature and its courage as through sheer entertainment value. Its attempt to tell it like it isn't stodgy, depressing or over-didactic. It knows what it wants to say and does so with energy, style, wit and honesty. It is a genuinely good film in a year when we are much in need of something that isn't put together simply and solely to make a box-office killing. In short, it should be very widely seen.

Blue (Brinsley Forde) is a garage mechanic by day and a "toaster" for a reggae group by night. If he lives in a hostile environment, he is at least part of his own culture and the member of a family which, though riven by generational tension, still gives him a modicum of support. But then he loses his job, gets mixed up in a theft, a racial incident and the ensuing police over-reaction. Finally, he has had enough of being a straw in the wind and "taking licks." And his gesture of defiance leads to an act of violence that both makes and breaks him.

So much for the story. But what is more important about Babylon lies in its evocation of the street life in which Blue and his friends have somehow to exist. Shot by Franco Rosso almost entirely on location in South London, the film not only shows the tension between black and white but also the argument between two generations of black inimigrant families. And if what it says seems already dated in detail, one can only suspect not that it goes too far but that the film may not now go far enough. A lot has happened in 18 months, and little for the better.

Yet, though it presents catharsis, the film is also an affirmative vision. Blue and his mates are not looked at as better or worse than the rest of us, but simply as those on the receiving end of a dangerously uncaring society, which wastes their energy and understands little of their need for identity. If Babylon condemns, it pushes hope to its limits too, suggesting that there's time for understanding and sense. In that way, it is a good, old-fashioned, liberal film. Its hard edge, however, is undeniable.

Lively performances from Forde, Karl Howman, Trevor Laird, Brian Bovell, David Haynes and many others match a remarkable script from Rosso and Martin Stellman, and direction that never lets go for a moment. The music too, though patchy, is enlivening.

BABYLON

The New Standard—*November 6, 1980*

Please note: contains spoilers—Do not read until you have seen the film.

ALEXANDER WALKER has written about films for the Standard for 20 years. He has been Critic of the Year three times and served on the Cannes Film Festival jury in 1974. He has written numerous books on the film industry and also lectures on the subject, once on television, he was hit over the head with a rolled-up newspaper by the director, Ken Russell.

ALEXANDER WALKER sees the powerful film about ghetto London –and questions its X-certificate

HIS deadlocks flop about on his head like octopus tentacles. Blue is his name — and blue is his song.

Against a wall of fearsomely amplified reggae music, he "toasts" the bleak lot of himself and his black mates with words of sorrow and defiance.

The smokey haze of ganja weed quivers like Caribbean heat as dozens of jam-packed black kids take up the refrain: "Four hundred years/ Pain and misery/All that Babylon is giving./I can't take no more of that./No, I can't take no more of that."

But this isn't Jamaica.

"Babylon" is West Indian argot for England. This is London. And the boys, many of them, gaudy with the red, gold and green hues of the Rasta faith, are English-born blacks.

BABYLON (96 mins: selected cinemas) is their film. The best one yet produced about a ghetto people whom our media usually interpret from the outside and at a safe distance.

But this Babylon gets under the skin in every sense. And what we witness of the growing turbulence and hopelessness of young lives caught in dead-ends should thoroughly alarm us.

Although little actual violence erupts—and that briefly —in the film directed by Franco Rosso, written by him and Martin Stellman photographed by Chris Menges, and produced by Gavrik Losey, the thoughts, words and lifestyles of Blue and his Brixton street gang (all played by realistic unknowns) have the premonitory explosiveness of distant thunder.

Warning

Babylon is not a movie that mediates between the races. It gives a lot of warning — positively no comfort.

The whites in it are either threats, or victims of their own prejudices.

Like the woman whose justifiable anger at Blue splitting the night with hideous sound spirals off into a racial tirade; like the council-flat yobs, natural fodder for fascism; like the car that prowls provocatively a few feet behind Blue, coercing him into panicky flight that ends in an alley-way punch-up and the sickening revelation that these are no yobs.

These are cops whose "sus" tactics mean putting the boot in before they get their notebooks out.

Part of Babylon's budget came from the National Film Finance Corporation, part from a record company that should do well from the jumping-jack soundtrack.

It's greatly to the NFFC's credit that it's lent its backing to a far from reassuring view of State race policies. For no compromises are allowed to tone down the hue of black.

Blue and his mates Lover Spark, the trigger-tempered Beefy, Dreadlocks looking like a chic scarecrow, all lapse into a Jamaican patois so thick that sub-titles are called in.

We see how piteously difficult it is for a white to enter this world. The white misfit who tags along in the undertow of the gang's exoticism draws on himself a recoil of anti-white prejudice that is horrible to witness.

We see the fractured nature of what's officially called "the black community." Orthodox

engagement ceremonies, as awash with black gentility as any white folk's petit-bourgeois rites, contrast with the Rasta priest with gown and prophet's wand who evokes a messianic message and in a back street loft offers communicants a puff from a pipe of "herbs" to "calm the mind."

Always we reurn to the music, vibrant and powerful, which gives the boys their sense of identity. It is a marvellous touch that the police hammers breaking down the door at the end, as the Law comes to claim Blue for his impulsive attack on a white racist, collide with the beat of the black band.

Confrontation

The movie ends abruptly, before we can see the confrontation. But we can imagine it. It rings in our ears.

The edgy concern this powerful film engenders in me is sharpened, however, by another kind of concern—namely that it has been placed out of bounds to great numbers of the black community who will want to see it.

Even though its actual violence is less, much less than many films certificated "AA," and open to 14-year-olds and up, Babylon has been given an "X" Certificate excluding anyone not yet 18.

It is the old, shameful story of censors who claim a paternalistic wisdom and a condescending right to "protect" anyone they think stupid or immature enough to misread the message.

"Confused and troubled" was how our film censor, James Ferman, saw young blacks who might go to Babylon and come away thinking that hitting back at whites was their only means of protest. I suppose at the age of 18 they'll no longer think that.

(Continues below left)

. . . AND GUY PIERCE HEARS THE VERDICT ON BABYLON FROM THREE BLACK LONDONERS

Fair reflection

JAMES FERMAN, the film censor, is right when he says young blacks might leave a showing of Babylon "troubled and confused." I accompanied three black youths at a preview of the film. They were younger than 18 so prohibited from seeing the film on the public circuit. They were all bewildered and scornful that it should have been given an X certificate. Peter and Darnley from Tooting Bec and Brian from Camberwell praised its authenticity.

"It's very true to life. That's exactly the way it happens," said Peter. If anything, they thought the film was a little toned down. Of the scene in which the leading character Blue is picked up on "sus" and given a beating by plain-clothes police, Peter merely shrugged saying, "He was lucky they didn't plant anything on him. If you run from a policeman you've got to make sure you're not caught." Guilty or not.

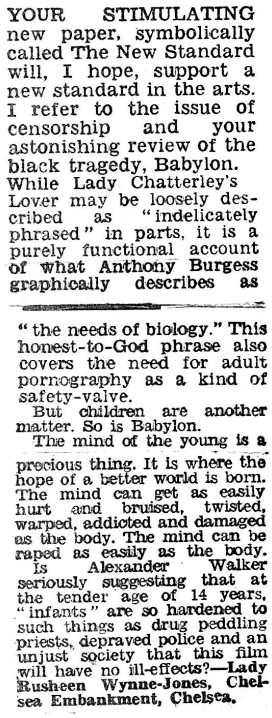
"There was nothing there to corrupt anyone," said Darnley, and the trio were impressed by the director's responsibility when scenes of violence occurred. Those of a prurient nature would be well-advised to seek their entertainment elsewhere. All three assumed it was the swearing that had lead to the censor's decision to impose an X rating on Babylon, that and the "political content." Not that they saw anything seditious in the film.

Scoffing

"It's a very fair reflection on the way things are," said Brian. "It should go down well in Brixton and Tooting," laughed Peter, scoffing at suggestions that young blacks might be troubled by the film. So many of the West Indian youngsters are living the life of the characters in Babylon anyway. "They'll go and see it no matter what," said Darnley. "I just wish it was a little longer that's all." "I'd pay to see it again," added Peter.

And they agreed that it would help to ease strained relations between black and white. The verdict of the three was that Babylon was a "wicked" film—and praise doesn't come much higher than that.

The New Standard—*November 11, 1980*
(A letter from a reader)



YOUR STIMULATING new paper, symbolically called The New Standard will, I hope, support a new standard in the arts. I refer to the issue of censorship and your astonishing review of the black tragedy, Babylon. While Lady Chatterley's Lover may be loosely described as "indelicately phrased" in parts, it is a purely functional account of what Anthony Burgess graphically describes as

"the needs of biology." This honest-to-God phrase also covers the need for adult pornography as a kind of safety-valve.

But children are another matter. So is Babylon.

The mind of the young is a precious thing. It is where the hope of a better world is born. The mind can get as easily hurt and bruised, twisted, warped, addicted and damaged as the body. The mind can be raped as easily as the body.

Is Alexander Walker seriously suggesting that at the tender age of 14 years, "infants" are so hardened to such things as drug peddling priests, depraved police and an unjust society that this film will have no ill-effects?—Lady Rusheen Wynne-Jones, Chelsea Embankment, Chelsea.

The Music

The reggae music in *Babylon* centers around Dennis Bovell's score, which is both playful and atmospheric. The soundtrack, released by Chrysalis Records in the U.K. and continental Europe (and released by Takoma in the U.S.), unfortunately did not feature all of Bovell's score. Nor did it contain Johnny Clarke's "Babylon," the powerful title track featured at the climax of the film. (Although Chrysalis did release the track as a 12" and 7" single, with the lovers rock tune by Cassandra on the flip side.) Here is all of the music in the film, followed by the original sequence of the soundtrack. *YouTube hyperlinks provided to many of the songs below.*

Aswad "Hey Jah Children" opens the film and is the tune which Blue toasts over in the first scene. Aswad are one of the great UK reggae groups fronted by Brinsley Forde.

Dennis Bovell "Carlton's Tune" plays when Blue's little brother plays hooky.

Generation X "Valley of the Dolls" is playing on the radio at Blue's garage.

Dennis Bovell "Market Tune" plays as Dreadhead, Errol, and Beefy park their van.

I-Roy "Whap'n Bap'n" is the tune playing at Fat Larry's record shop. The great reggae DJ I-Roy (Roy Reid) had a successful period in the U.K. in the late 70s and the song is featured on an album produced by Bovell. He's considered one of the top DJs of the era—palaverous and prolific.

Dennis Bovell "Old Vocal Tune" is the tune that Fat Larry originally wants to sell to Dreadhead.

Aswad "Warrior Charge" is Ital Lion's de facto theme. Lead by the horns of the great Jamaican trombone player Vin Gordon and saxophonist Michael "Bami" Rose, it's the dub plate that Dreadhead purchases from Fat Larry for Ital Lion to win the finals against Jah Shaka.

Yabby You[6] "Free Africa" is playing in Fat Larry's store. Yabby You (Vivian Jackson) produced some of the most sublime, spiritual, and uncompromising music in any genre. This, and especially "Deliver Me from My Enemies," also used in the film, anchor the soundtrack release.

Michael Prophet "Turn Me Loose" is the 45 that Carlton puts on the record player in the living room. A Yabby You protégé, the late Michael Prophet is another great roots and lovers rock singer.

Dennis Bovell "Beefy's Tune" is the comic ska-inflected theme to the character played by Trevor Laird.

Dennis Bovell "School Skanking" a.k.a. "Ska Tune" is the first shuffling tune that Dreadhead plays at Sandra and Lover's engagement party.

Cassandra's "Thank You For The Many Things You've Done" is arguably the centerpiece of the film, a tender cover of a song by soul singer Betty Wright from that same year.

Dennis Bovell "Manhunter" a.k.a. "Blue's Theme" is the shuffling, jazzy theme while Blue wanders the street at night.

Dennis Bovell "Jazterpiece" a.k.a. "West End Music," arguably Bovell's *coup de grace* in the film, plays while Blue gets in the car with William and Rupert, who are up to no good in the West End.

Janet Kay "Can't Give It Up," another great lovers rock tune produced and arranged by Dennis Bovell, is playing in the car that Elaine is in when home.

Johnny Clarke "Babylon" provides the urgent tense climax of the film, specifically the dub of the tune as performed by sound system master Jah Shaka. Clarke is one of the great roots reggae singers of the 70s, rivaling Bob Marley in popularity back in Jamaica.

Babylon—The Original Soundtrack

This is the original sequence of the soundtrack LP release from 1980, far different than the sequence of the music in the film

Side A

Yabby U—"Deliver Me From My Enemies"
Michael Prophet—"Turn Me Loose"
Yabby U—"Free Africa"
I-Roy—"Whap'n Bap'n"
Cassandra—"Thank You For The Many Things You've Done"

Side B

Aswad—"Hey Jah Children"
Aswad ft Vin Gordon & Michael Rose—"Warrior Charge"
Dennis Bovell—"Beefy's Tune"
Dennis Bovell—"Manhunter"
Dennis Bovell—"Jazterpiece"

[6] Yabby You (Vivian Jackson) is sometimes spelled "Yabby U," as in the soundtrack and the film. For our release, we opted to use his preferred (and much more common) spelling, Yabby You. There are two different stories behind the spelling, both cited by reggae historian David Katz. From Jackson's obituary in 2010: "In 1969, following an argument with his peers about Haile Selassie's alleged divinity, a thunderstorm started, during which Jackson said he heard angels singing, 'Be you, yabby yabby you.'" And from Katz's "Beginner's Guide to Yabby You" (2015): "The Yabby You moniker came from King Tubby, who told people active on the music fraternity that the group making the music was an American harmony act called the Yabby Yous." (!)

Background

excerpt from Bass Culture: When Reggae Was King *by Lloyd Bradley—2000 Viking books*

Bradley interviewed Dennis Bovell at length about the police raid on a sound clash he participated in, as well as his subsequent arrest and trial. The chapter, appropriately titled "Warrior Charge," focuses on this experience, as well as Britain's "Sus" law, a precursor to New York's "stop-and-frisk"

18

Warrior Charge

'It was Friday 13th, October 1974. The Carib Club was above Burton's in Cricklewood Broadway, and there were three sound systems in the place. Mine, Sufferer, was nearest to the toilets; there's another one, Count Nick's, on the stage; and there's Lord Koos down the other end of the hall. This was a *serious* sound clash.'

A regular end of the week in north-west London, with Dennis Bovell at his secondary occupation, operating Sufferer HiFi and seeing off the opposition. Much like he did in the Metro days. He continues:

'That day Lee Perry has come in from Jamaica, I've met him at the airport and he's brought me some *spanking* dubs. While Bunny Lee, who has been in England for some time, he's in there in Lord Koos' corner. Lord Koos is his bredren from time so he's given him lots and lots of dub plates, but because my group Matumbi has been backing Johnnie Clarke, one of his singers who's on tour here, Bunny Lee's also given them to me. The same tunes. He didn't know I double as a sound man and that me and Koos were bound to meet in competition sometime soon, he just knew me as the leader of the band that's backing Johnnie Clarke. So while the crowd was really hyped up, we've all got lots of support there, there's a kind of stand-off between me and Koos because all the songs he's got I've got. It's just a question of who's going to play first. If I play one first as an exclusive then Koos going to play it back on me; and if he plays it first then I'm going to play it back on him. So

we're going through without touching that selection, because I know he's got it and he knows I've got it and the first one to touch it *dead*; it's gonna come straight back in your face. And these are tunes that people will love, "Move Outta Babylon", new versions and now nobody can hear them in the dance.

'But I've got more than that – remember, I met Lee Perry that morning. I reach out and I slam on a tune by the trombone player Vin Gordon called "Vix", which starts off with a kind of easy jazz thing *dum da da da dum . . . da da daa . . .* then it drops, *boom*, into a rub-a-dub style, and when I spin this track the crowd go wild, "*Yaaaaaaah!*" I've won the dance now. Lord Koos can't touch this tune and he knows it and Nick's not in it because Nick's is only the house sound. So I'm playing against two sound systems that night and I'm battering them both. 'Cause even without the Bunny Lee dubs I have music *like dirt*.

'Then at the same time as that big roar goes up from the crowd, the police are coming out of the toilets with a prisoner. And the guy's friends pick that exact moment to free him from the police. Which they do; and after the police lose their prisoner they run. They're shitting themselves, and in their panic they run the wrong way and are trapped in the toilets and there's people hammering on the door to beat the shit out of them – one policeman actually got stabbed down there.

'But I don't know too much about any of this because in the commotion my sound gets broken, a wire got pulled out and something got shorted out. I'm trying to fix my sound system, but Lord Koos and Nick's are still playing because all the commotion's been in my corner of the hall and when I've got dislodged the other two are taking their opportunity. Lord Koos puts on "*I and I a-go beat down Babylon . . .*".

'Eventually, more police arrive and it all seems to be over, with them saying "Right, can you all leave in twos and threes, please; we've got the people who we wanted." *Lies*. They've got a load of other police in from surrounding areas, all wearing coats so you couldn't see their numbers, and there was two on each step all the way down from this top-floor club, and they

beat the shit out of the clientele as they were going down. They arrested forty-two people, and all those who didn't have visible bruises they let them go.'

Under the headline 'The Battle of Burtons' and a photo of a thoroughly trashed section of the club, this incident made the front page of a London newspaper. Although Dennis escaped police attention as he stayed to pack up Sufferer HiFi, his involvement was just beginning.

'The next day, all I'm hearing is how the police are looking for me. It's like I'm Most Wanted, to the degree it's like some great big elaborate joke. But I haven't got a clue what it's about so, muggins, I go to the police station and ask, "I hear you're looking for me. Is that true? What have I done?" They take me in the back and tell me they've got information that I was on the microphone last night stirring up this thing, and that I was saying beat the police, get them, kill them and all that.

'I denied it. Told them my amplifier was busted. So they asked me if I'd said *anything* and I told them I'd said "*Babylon 'bout ya, any man who have weed, dash it 'way now.*" Which I did say, when the police first came into the club. They jumped on that, like "Aha! So you did say something on the microphone." But I told them that any sound man would have said that, told man to guard dem ganja because police in the area. The club owner would tell you the police was in the building so you'd make an announcement for the man who smoke weed to pull dem spliff right now. Then two police officers came and said I said "Get the boys in blue." Like a hardcore cockney kind of accent . . . as if I would be speaking like that in the dance. Which black man you know going to refer to the police as the boys in blue? *Never*.

'I was charged with causing an affray. Twelve other people were charged with crimes against policemen and, according to the prosecution, they were my *gang*, of which I was supposed to be the ringleader. I didn't know any of them. I'd never knowingly seen any of them before in my life . . . I didn't even know their names until the trial, when we became friendly, because nine months at the Old Bailey every day, ten 'til four,

you get to know the defendant next to you at least. Then at the end of that trial nine people were acquitted. It was obviously a sham, because although some people did beat the police and the police did beat some people nobody knew with any certainty who had actually done what. It was bedlam in there that night. But somebody had to pay and they've attributed it to me.

'When my case was heard, I was so determined to defend myself that I was completely wrong in my handling of giving evidence. In court I was so at pains to make sure they knew I could speak English, that I wasn't some sort of ruffian, that I spoke with a perfect English accent. It was only natural, because that's the way black kids of my generation, whose parents came over from the West Indies, were brought up in this country – when you're dealing with authority, i.e., the white man, it's been drummed into you to speak properly and show him you're not as ignorant as he might assume. At the very least, your parents knew it showed you'd been well brought up. So, unlike my co-defendants, I spoke in perfect English and they attributed those remarks to me because the jury was left thinking, "Well he does speak like that, he's so much more English than all the others." If I'd have spoken pure roots and acted ragga then the jury never would have believed that I'd made those remarks, but, stupidly, I didn't see this was what was happening.

'The trial was a farce at some points. When I was asked about what was said over the speakers about fighting the police, I said that for all I knew that could have been a toasting record. The judge said, "A *toasting record*? What's that?" I explained it was a record where people speak over music or a song. He looked at me with complete contempt and said, "Do you expect me to believe that people *talk* over records?" and completely dismissed the idea.

'There was a hung jury on the first trial, and he ordered a retrial. There were only three others on trial the second time so it only lasted three months, and at the end of it the jury went out and came back with a "Guilty, Dennis Bovell". "Is that the verdict of you all?" the judge asked. And it wasn't, it was ten

to two, but they took a majority verdict and the judge sentenced me to three years in prison.

'I was in prison for six months before my case was heard on appeal. I'd appealed against conviction and sentence, because if you appeal against sentence that's like you think you're guilty but you got too long, but if you think you're innocent then you appeal against conviction, and you have the conviction quashed. Within two days the Appeal Court judges are saying it was a shambles, that I shouldn't even have been charged, let alone convicted . . . "Get him out *now*." My conviction was quashed and I was let out of jail, but they carefully worded it so it read that it was nobody's fault that I got sent to prison other than the jury misunderstanding the case – it claimed the judge had actually directed the jury to acquit me, but they hadn't followed his summing up. So I had no case for compensation.

'Up until then, I was sceptical about it when friends had said the police had fitted them up. Really and truly, I thought they must have done *something*. Then it happened to me.'

It happened to an enormous number of young black men from the 1960s onwards. It's prevalent still – the very morning this sentence was written an official report on London's Metropolitan Police (the investigation into the handling of the Stephen Lawrence case) accused the force of pernicious and institutionalized racism – but the maltreatment of black people at the hands of Britain's police reached its apex in the second half of the 1970s. Exempted then from Race Relations legislation, the police forces in the UK's major cities appeared to have taken it upon themselves to declare black youth as undesirables in, usually, the country of their birth, and adopted a policy of attrition. Cases such as Dennis's were by no means isolated, usually arising out of the routine harassment and brutality that was meted out on the inner-city streets – a couple of black kids would be stopped for no reason; any form of objection would count as 'resisting arrest'; *actually* resisting arrest would constitute 'assault on a police officer'; which in itself was enough to earn the 'prisoner' a bit of a kicking under the guise of 'self-defence'. And guilty verdicts in subsequent trials were the

norm, as this was long before a string of very high-profile police-corruption cases meant that the judiciary no longer automatically believed the police in a his-word-against-ours scenario.

Arbitrary intimidation ranged from the verbal to the physical to the decidedly irritating stop-and-searches, and such overbearing interaction between the police and the youth was usually accounted for under what were called the Sus Laws. 'Sus' was a feature of the 1824 Vagrancy Act, a piece of Georgian legislation passed in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, designed to keep beggars and vagrants off the streets of London and rediscovered some 150 years later as a licence to vex. It involved those considered to be 'suspected persons', and it allowed the officer who suspected you – of just about anything he fancied – to stop you, pick you up, take you down the station or even arrest you on no grounds other than his or her utterly intangible suspicions. And even if nothing came of it, which most of the time it didn't, arrest on Sus was officially condoned in the name of crime prevention.

If further proof were needed of the rancorousness of the modern-day application of Sus, consider that it was never a national statute but could only be applied in certain regions, yet at the same time as it was being revived in London, areas where it wasn't valid were finding their own archaic vagrancy laws to implement in much the same way. Then there were the Special Patrol Groups, non-local, deliberately aggressive police units whose sole purpose seemed to be to cruise inner-city streets implementing the Sus Laws – they seemed to fancy themselves as American SWAT squads but, thankfully, nobody gave them guns. As a result of the Sus campaign, it's extremely rare to meet a black man who was a teenager in Britain during the 1970s who has never had a brush with the law – at one point in the 1970s a survey showed that black guys in London were five times more likely to get stopped by the police, yet three times *less* likely to be charged with anything. SPG figures for one London borough in 1975 showed a 35:1 stop:arrest ratio. This is easily understood when the term

'overtly suspicious behaviour' had been stretched to include being out with your girlfriend, carrying a bag, waiting at a bus stop or, to quote Steel Pulse, '*walking along just kicking stones*'. Comedians and pundits have wrung much mileage out of the idea that any black man driving a nice car could expect to be stopped by the police, but for those who were actually getting stopped the reality was that the car didn't need to be nice and you didn't even have to be driving it.

Underneath the obvious issues of rank unfairness or just wanting to get on with your law-abiding life without fear of persecution or prosecution, what many police victims found so shocking about this state of affairs was its absolute pointlessness other than as an act of supreme malice. It was like a sport, but the best one side could hope for was that the match would get called off, as there was no way they were ever going to win. Indeed, the absolute absence of logic had much to do with the situation being allowed to exist for so long unchallenged by wider society: if you didn't live through it, it was difficult to believe that the if-you-want-to-know-the-time-ask-a-policeman police more or less waged war on a large section of the citizens of the country they had pledged to serve. But it happened. In areas like Handsworth, Brixton, Chapel Town, Toxteth and Moss Side the police, cruising the streets in cars and vans, were perceived as an army of occupation, to be avoided at all costs.

Of course, sound-system dances, blues parties, discos and Caribbean-type festivals were easy and frequent targets – the very notion of reggae had become police shorthand for 'dangerous individuals smoking illegal substances' and the busting-up of gatherings was usually done on the pretext of a drugs raid. When, in this chapter's second paragraph, the words 'regular end of the week in north-west London' were used, it wasn't in any way frivolously. The Metro Youth Club in Ladbroke Grove was frequently raided; the black-owned, much-raided Mangrove restaurant in the same area became something of a *cause célèbre* when a demonstration against local policing methods was organized there and the resulting arrests on highly dubious,

but very serious, violent disorder charges led to the high-profile Mangrove Nine trial at the Old Bailey; other reggae clubs and regular blues dances in the area accepted having their doors kicked in almost as an overhead. And this went on all over the country.

Understandably, it informed the embryonic British reggae bands, giving the unique voice the music had found something singularly relevant to discuss. Something other than Rastafari, repatriation, ganja, girls and reggae itself.

Full Synopsis

Please note: contains spoilers

South London, 1980. To the opening track of Aswad's "Hey Jah Children," reggae sound system Ital Lion rush to get to their sound clash, where they win and go to the finals. Their competitors will be the long-established outfit of Jah Shaka. The Ital Lion crew includes the sound system's DJ Blue; roadie and muscle *manqué* Beefy; electronics wiz Scientist, a.k.a. Spark; ladies' man Lover; hustler and fixer Errol; leader—and father figure for all—Dreadhead; and Blue's friend Ronnie, a white Londoner who accompanies the crew to their "dances" or clashes.

Blue lives in a council estate in South London with his mother, his school-dodging/Rasta-to-be younger brother, Carlton, and his mum's live-in boyfriend, Wesley. This morning, having failed to persuade Carlton to go to school, he arrives late at the garage where his pal Ronnie also works. But Ronnie, hung over from the previous night's strong "Lamb's Bread"[7] spliff, goes home. Meanwhile, their boss Alan is unsympathetic to Blue's complaints of overwork and fires him, amidst a volley of racist insults.

Dreadhead visits Jamaican entrepreneur Fat Larry in pursuit of an exclusive Jamaican import dubplate[8] with which he hopes Ital Lion can beat Jah Shaka. After much negotiation, Fat Larry sells him a tune ("Warrior Charge" by Aswad) for some cash, a bag of ganja, and the necklace around his neck. Meanwhile, Beefy is humiliated by Wolf and Spooky of Jah Shaka's crew. In retaliation, he smashes the tail lights of their van.

Beefy and Scientist break into a secondary school and steal two speakers (or "tannoys"[9]) to replace the ones that broke after their previous sound clash. Back at the lock-up garage where the crew stores their equipment, Spark fixes the tannoy to the rest of their sound system. They put on "Warrior Charge" and are ecstatic and dance in celebration. Suddenly, a furious banging cuts through the noise and Dreadhead sends Ronnie to investigate. An angry neighbor is furious about the noise, but mostly because she knows it's coming from Jamaican Brits. When Ronnie winds her up, she sees the whole crew and unleashes racist abuse at them all.

After spending the night at Elaine's, Blue heads home to find Carlton emulating his big brother—he's dancing to a reggae 45 (Michael Prophet's "Turn Me Loose") while sporting Blue's Rastafarian tam. They fight, playfully. Wesley comes in and starts berating Carlton and beating on him. Blue fights back. Frustrated, Blue leaves and runs into Errol and Lover at the pool hall. After the trio see a proud Beefy walking down the street with a large dog as "itection" against Shaka's crew, Errol meets a fence to unload some illegally obtained equipment. The crew then sees a regal, stately Rastafarian walking down the street with a staff. Blue is in awe.

Lover is getting cold feet about his engagement to his girlfriend, Sandra, and has locked himself in the bathroom. After much convincing by Scientist, he and the crew head to the engagement party, arriving late. After a toast by Sandra's dad, who announces the wedding date, everyone starts dancing. Blue is distressed to find his girlfriend dancing with someone else, though they eventually dance together, and eventually everyone finds a partner. Dreadhead is the night's selector[10] and he puts on a tender lovers rock song, "Thank You For The Many Things You've Done" by Cassandra. After a great night of revelry, Ital Lion return to the lock-up to offload their equipment, but their celebration is interrupted by the racist woman on the balcony, along with with her husband and son, who throw bottles and taunt them with slurs. Beefy, who can't take it anymore, pulls out a switchblade and runs up the stairs before being restrained by Ronnie and Blue.

---

[7] A term for marijuana in Rasta parlance, also called Iyaric, "Lamb's Bread" is of course a biblical reference, as the Rastafarians consider marijuana to be a holy. ("Lamb's Bread," sung by Sylford Walker by producer Glen Brown, is one of the great "ganja tunes" in reggae.)

[8] A dubplate is an exclusive piece of acetate vinyl: "Producers would cut unreleased music to one-off 10-inch acetate vinyl dubplates and sharing their tunes among very select peers, testing them out and building the hype before the track would finally see wider release" (Dave Jenkins).

[9] Tannoy is a British speaker company, but is also used as a generic term (e.g. Kleenex or Xerox) for a tweeter or treble speaker.

[10] While DJ is the MC, in reggae, the "selector" is the equivalent of the DJ.

Blue then wanders the streets alone. After a car filled with a group of white men begins to tail him, he realizes the danger and begins to run. The men leap out of the car and a chase ensues. Blue eventually escapes but ends up running all night. In the early morning, Blue is exhausted as he walks through railway arches. He stumbles onto the path of a car that looks similar to the one chasing him earlier in the night, and realizes that they're policemen. The police catch Blue and beat him and arrest him, simply for walking the streets at night.

Blue's mother puts up the bail for her son, much to the disgust of Wesley. Blue decides to pack up and leave. He wanders with Ronnie on the banks of the Thames, reminiscing about old times. He then goes to his girlfriend Elaine's house, but she's not there.

Still wandering the streets, Blue runs into Elaine's brother William, who is cruising in a car with his dodgy friend Rupert. Unbeknownst to Blue, William is cruising a gay establishment to mug someone. William meets a man, lures him to a back alley and he and Rupert beat him and steal his money. Blue is shocked and disgusted. At Elaine's flat, he's furious when he sees her returning early in the morning in a car he doesn't recognize. Rejected by Elaine, he leaves and stumbles upon a Rastafarian ceremony gathering in a nearby warehouse with a nyabinghi drumming circle[11] led by the Rasta he had seen on the street. Noticing his distress, the Rasta approaches Blue and tries to enlighten him with a sermon.

Blue then heads back to the Ital Lion lock-up to find that the place has been deliberately trashed, the sound system destroyed, and racist graffiti and National Front[12] logos spray painted all over their walls and speaker cabinets. When the rest of the crew arrive, the gloom deepens and tempers rise. Ronnie is the last one to get there and Beefy accuses him of being just like the other white racists. He headbutts him and breaks his nose. The rest of the crew leave to try to find a sound system. Blue is torn. He sympathizes with his white friend but doesn't know how to be around him after the incident. Ronnie leaves, dejected. Meanwhile, Dreadhead heads to a church to find another sound system operator, Sir Watts. Dreadhead pulls him out of the congregation and convinces him to lend him his sound system.

At the sound clash, over a heavy dub plate of Johnny Clarke's "Babylon," Jah Shaka performs, passionately "chanting down Babylon." Meanwhile, tension is rising and the crowd is on edge. Two members of Shaka's crew, Wolf and Spooky, start taunting Beefy. In retaliation, Beefy pulls out a machete. Before the crowd is about to erupt into violence, Compere tells them to calm down and Shaka stops and scolds them. While all this is happening, Blue leaves the lock-up, climbs up the stairs to the racist man's apartment to confront him. He bangs on the door, yelling, "Me know you in deh! Fire 'pon you!" The man comes out and starts taunting him with racist insults, and Blue stabs him with a screwdriver in a fit of rage. He then runs away, taking the tube to get to the sound clash.

Jah Shaka finishes his set, and Ital Lion step up, although Blue still hasn't arrived. Dreadhead orders Lover to "take over the controls." Lover begrudgingly begins to toast. Blue finally shows up and starts performing—chanting passionately, as if it's his last appearance. Outside the dance, two detectives arrive. When the word gets out that the police are coming, both Shaka and Ital Lion start dismantling their equipment. Scores of police pile out of vans and up the stairs of the concert hall to hammer on the doors that are barricaded against them. Eventually, the police break through the door. Blue defiantly sings on: *"We can't tek no more of that! Can't tek no more of that! Can't tek no more of that..."*

[11] "Nyabinghi drumming takes its name from a form or 'mansion' of Rastafari and created the rhythmic bedrock for ska, rocksteady and reggae, and therefore the myriad music that followed Jamaica's golden era of dub. ... The rhythms... have a comparable influence to gospel, which famously also moved from sacred to secular; they are a percussive counterpart to gospel's voice-led divinations" (Emma Warren, Red Bull Music Academy).
[12] U.K.'s far-right fascist party.

Biographies

Franco Rosso (1942-2016)

"Franco Rosso... always felt like an outsider, which may well account for the extraordinary empathy with the disaffected and marginalised that characterised his work. Beginning his career as an assistant editor on Ken Loach's Kes *(1969), he went on to create a series of hard-hitting documentaries and dramas, but it was arguably his first fiction film,* Babylon*, that marked him out as a fearless chronicler of the dispossessed."*
From Rosso's obituary by Martin Stellman in *The Guardian*

Born in Turin, Italy, Franco Rosso moved to the U.K. at eight years old. He grew up and attended college in London, finishing at the Royal College of Art, where he met future punk icon and friend Ian Dury, about whom he directed a film in 1983. After working with Ken Loach, he partnered with John Lennon and Yoko Ono, editing the early film for "Give Peace A Chance," as well as shooting and editing *Bed Peace* (1969), their documentary on the "Bed-Ins for Peace" protests. He also shot the film accompanying Lennon's 1971 *Imagine* album.

Rosso worked closely with legendary auteur Horace Ové, editing *Reggae* (1970), the first-ever film about the genre, and *King Carnival* (1973), considered the finest film on the Trinidadian carnival. Rosso's directorial debut was *The Mangrove Nine* (1973), a short documentary on the infamous racist show trial of the unjustly arrested eponymous black activists. *Dread Beat and Blood* (1978), his portrait of seminal "dub poet" Linton Kwesi Johnson, gained national press attention when its TV premiere was delayed until after the general election that returned Thatcher to power—as it would sway viewers to vote against her. When the film finally aired, it received high praise.

With *Babylon*, Rosso brought to the screen a story he waited five years to film, and was awarded the *Evening Standard* British Film Awards Most Promising Filmmaker prize. Yet after the film's release and unanimous press attention, Rosso couldn't find work as a director. His follow-up, *64 Day Hero: A Boxer's Tale* (1985), was a whole five years later. It centered on the life of Randolph Turpin, who defeated world middleweight boxing champion Sugar Ray Robinson. Rosso's other features include *The Nature of the Beast* (1988) and *Lucha Libre* (1991).

Martin Stellman

Martin Stellman, a graduate of the U.K.'s leading film school, the National Film and Television School, is a screenwriter. A passionate believer in the original screenplay, Stellman has seen a number of his screenplays reach the screen, the very first being the youth cult classic *Quadrophenia* (1977), featuring music by The Who from the album of the same name.

Martin was born in London's West End in 1948. His father, Israel David Stellman, who arrived in the U.K. from Vienna in 1934, was a diamond setter in Hatton Garden, London's diamond district. His mother, Lily Nabarro, belonged to a Sephardic Jewish family from Amsterdam. Both of Martin's parents were profoundly deaf from birth and Martin became proficient in deaf sign language from a very early age.

After dropping out of Drama and English at Bristol University, Martin signed to DJ John Peel's record label and joined the multimedia rock group Principal Edwards Magic Theatre. He soon abandoned the rock scene to work as a freelance journalist, contributing features for *International Times*, *Ink*, and *Time Out*, covering subjects ranging from the business of rock music to the American Indian movement. As writer-in-residence, Martin joined the Common Stock Theatre company, founded by breakaway teaching staff from LAMDA, where he penned angry plays about inner-city schools and the jailing of young people.

In 1972, inspired by the ideas of Paulo Freire, Martin co-founded a "free school" in the Lewisham area of South London for school-refusers. In parallel with his work in alternative education, he ran drama workshops and created several musicals with youth-orientated themes at the Albany Empire. Martin's experiences working in South London inspired the screenplay for *Babylon*, co-written with director Franco Rosso.

He went on to write the David Puttnam-produced *Defence of the Realm* (1984), starring Gabriel Byrne, Denholm Elliott, and Greta Scacchi, regarded by many as the "benchmark" in British political thrillers, as well as writing and directing the urban drama *For Queen and Country* (1989), with Denzel Washington in the lead role.

Other writing credits include *Ricochet* (1986), an almost-forgotten diary documentary with David Bowie. Together with his NFTS colleague Brian Ward, he has developed a number of larger-budget projects for the Universal Pictures company Working Title, of which *The Interpreter* (2005) starring Nicole Kidman and Sean Penn, was the only project not to go into "turnaround." Stellman and Ward also wrote *Tabloid* (2002), an indie satire about celebrity starring John Hurt and Matthew Rhys.

Stellman has written a sequel to *Quadrophenia* for The Who and has recently completed work on *Yardie***,** the directorial debut of Idris Elba, released in 2018.

As series creator, Martin is currently developing *King of Diamonds,* a timely Jewish family saga, starring *Poldark*'s Aidan Turner, which draws heavily on his experiences growing up in 1960s London. He is also writing the pilot for the international thriller *The Strait* for UK's Big Talk and Spain's Media Pro.

Brinsley Forde, M.B.E.

Now a solo artist after a successful career as the founding member, lead vocalist, and songwriter of Aswad, Brinsely Forde, M.B.E. (born 1953) recently released his long-awaited debut album *Urban Jungle*, with three further works in progress. He is so lauded as a performer that both The Wailers band and I-Threes (Bob Marley's backup singers) have had him step in in place of the legendary Marley for recent live shows.

Born in London to Guyanese parents, Forde gained his first professional role in the British children's show *The Magnificent 6 ½*. His acting career took off and he never looked back. Other roles followed, including the James Bond film *Diamonds Are Forever* and the British sitcom *Please Sir* and its feature film adaptation. He also appeared in John Boorman's *Leo the Last* alongside Marcello Mastroianni, Billie Whitelaw, and Calvin Lockhart, and was one of the leads in the popular children's TV series *Here Come the Double Deckers*.

After leaving school, his other love began to play a greater role in his life. Brinsley started writing his own reggae songs feeling he had to hell his own story and not just copy reggae from Jamaica which had little relevance to his own life here in Britain. This was the template for Aswad. Their first album was released in 1976. "The trouble was," says Brinsley, "that no-one knew quite how to place us. British reggae was entirely new, so how to promote it was a key question. For a while they tried to align us with the punks, but that wasn't what we're about at all."

As the lead singer of Aswad, Brinsley scored a British number one chart hit with "Don't Turn Around," followed by another top 20 chart hit, "Give a Little Love" The band continued to feature in top 20 in the British charts with the *Distant Thunder* album and tracks "On and On," "Next to You" and others. They also have been Grammy nominees three times: for the albums *Rise and Shine*, *Big Up*, and *Roots Revival*.

As a network television host, Brinsley presented VH1 *Soul Vibrations*, BBC's *Ebony & Ebony* on the road, BBC 6 Music radio shows *Lively Up Yourself* and *Dub Bashment*. Brinsley can be heard presenting the acclaimed radio documentaries "Behind the Smile: The Real Life of Bob Marley" and the Island Rock eight-part series marking the 40th anniversary of Jamaica's independence.

In 2015, he became a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire by the Duke of Cambridge for his 40-year contribution to music and arts.

2018 had Brinsley playing some of the UK and Europe's largest festivals and also saw Brinsley form a UK "reggae super group," 3 The Hard Way, with David Hinds of Steel Pulse and Dennis Bovell. After playing Royal Albert Hall in support of Teenage Cancer Trust they are currently working on new music to be released erly autumn 2019. Brinsley himself, is also working on new music due for release spring 2019 with a revisit to Urban Jungle Tuff Gong Sessions with the first release slated to be "Chillin" with David Hinds. His energy, stage presence, voice and passion has never waned and continues to delight crowds across the globe.

Gavrik Losey
Gavrik Losey (born 1938) is an American born film producer and production manager. Losey was born in New York, the son of film director Joseph Losey and fashion designer Elizabeth Hawes. He attended the Little Red School House in Manhattan, Poughkeepsie Day School, and high school in New Jersey. After graduating, he travelled with his blacklisted father to England, where he attended University College London.

In 1966, he served as first assistant director on his father's *Modesty Blaise*. A year later he produced The Beatles' television movie *Magical Mystery Tour* and, in 1968, worked as production manager on Lindsay Anderson's *If....*

In 1970, Losey was production supervisor on Tony Richardson's *Ned Kelly*, starring Mick Jagger, a task he revisited the following year in Waris Hussein's *Melody*, featuring former *Oliver!* child actors Mark Lester and Jack Wild, and Michael Tuchner's *Villain,* starring Richard Burton and Ian McShane. In 1972, he produced Jacques Demy's Brothers' Grimm musical adaptation *The Pied Piper,* starring Donovan. His associate producer work includes *That'll Be The Day,* directed by Claude Whatham, along with its 1974 sequel, *Stardust*, directed by Michael Apted, and the Alistair Maclean adaptation *Fear Is the Key*, which featured a young Ben Kingsley. In 1975, he produced the glam-rock band Slade's music film, *Slade in Flame.* In 1979, he produced *Agatha,* starring Vanessa Redgrave, also directed by Apted. In 1980, he took on production duties for *Babylon* and, the following year, *Dance Craze*, the Two-tone ska concert roadshow film also released by Chrysalis Records. Later that decade, he served as executive producer on *Taffin*.

Since 1999, Losey has been involved in teaching at Bristol University as a part-time lecturer on film production and theory, and is an honorary fellow of Exeter University.

Chris Menges *(adapted from 2015's Camerimage Lifetime Achievement Award notes)*
Chris Menges (born 1940) grew up in postwar England and, like many great filmmakers of his generation, he learned his craft in British television. He started this adventure thanks to Alan Forbes, the American documentary filmmaker who was one of his first role models. Menges worked his way up the ladder as an assistant editor, soundman, and camera assistant, honing his skills with each and every job. His life was changed forever when he joined, as cameraman, the crew of the TV program *World in Action*. During the next couple of years he traveled the world, going to places of social and political upheavals and shooting in dangerous conditions. On one of such trips, Menges went to Apartheid-torn South Africa and came back with illegally obtained behind-the-scenes footage. On another, he left with director Adrian Cowell to Burma to shoot *The Opium Warlords*. They became isolated from the outside world and were forced to live guerilla life for over a year. Rest assured, these were the times and places that shaped him as an artist and as a human being.

But not all of Menges' adventures were connected to shooting documentaries. He started working on features in 1967 as a camera operator on Ken Loach's debut, *Poor Cow*, and Lindsay Anderson's *If....* The former helped him

in being promoted to the rank of cinematographer—on Loach's *Kes*—and began one of the most important artistic collaborations in his career, which lasts to this day. In the 70s and 80s, Menges worked with a number of rising British directors—Stephen Frears, Bill Forsyth, Neil Jordan—integrating his love for authenticity with a wonderful eye for detail and artistic sensitivity shaped while shooting documentaries. Then, he tried working on bigger projects (he supported Peter Suschitzky on Irvin Kershner's *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*) and started looking for new challenges and different means of describing the surrounding reality. That led him to Roland Joffé, with whom he made *The Killing Fields* and *The Mission*, both awarded with Oscars for cinematography.

The challenges were enormous with *The Killing Fields*, which was made with a strong sense of authenticity in each and every shot, as well as *The Mission*, the look of which was inspired by classical Spanish paintings. Being a great humanist and a filmmaker who preferred shooting from a distance to create "a freedom space" for actors or non-fiction protagonists in front of the camera, Menges helped the director shape his poignant tales about the different sides of human nature. Having such rich experience in film, and knowing how to handle difficult projects, Menges decided to shoot his own movies. His directing debut, *A World Apart*, was a powerful statement about South Africa in the 1960s, which he came to know personally during his documentary days. It won awards at Cannes and was respected by critics and viewers alike. Nevertheless, the subsequent directorial outings did not bring Menges what he hoped for. Thus, after almost a decade-long absence, he reignited the old flame with a film camera and shot Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* and Jim Sheridan's *The Boxer*.

Both IRA-themed films became another proof of Menges' mastery in using light and camera movement to show human emotions, obsessions, and traumas. The new millennium brought him a few opportunities to work with his longtime friends and collaborators (with Stephen Frears on *Dirty Pretty Things* and Ken Loach on *Route Irish*), but also a number of new artistic challenges. He immersed himself in the imagery of Westerns in Tommy Lee Jones's *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*. He helped William Monahan create an alluring vision of England's capital in *London Boulevard*. He supported Stephen Daldry on the set of *The Reader* (Menges shared the credit for cinematography with Roger Deakins; both were nominated for Oscars on the film) and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. And it was Deakins, widely regarded as one of the best cinematographers of our time, who said later that he considers Menges' use of natural light second to none, and that he was one of his first inspirations after film school. Most recently this year, Menges finished shooting Colombian auteur Ciro Guerra's J.M. Coetzee adaptation *Waiting for the Barbarians.*

Dennis Bovell

Dennis Bovell (born 1953) has earned the reputation of being Britain's reggae maestro, having produced several classic hits and pioneered early developments in the genre over 20 years ago. He is renowned as an accomplished multi-instrumentalist (guitar, bass, keyboards), sound engineer, composer, bandleader, and producer. Born in Barbados in 1953, Dennis Bovell joined his parents in London when he was 12. Whilst still at school, Bovell joined his first band. Influenced by rock steady, this band gave birth to the three-part harmony section that was later to become the trademark of Bovell's next group, Matumbi, formed in 1970.

Matumbi (meaning "reborn" in Yoruba) were to become Britain's premier reggae band at a time when the genre was spreading from Jamaica to a wider international audience. After a period backing visiting Jamaican artists such as Pat Kelly and Ken Boothe, the band enhanced their reputation further with a string of successful singles. "After Tonight," the band's first hit, is to this day played in heavy rotation. Another single, "The Man In Me," is regarded as a British reggae classic. In 1979, Matumbi reached the UK Top Ten charts with "Point of View." Altogether the band made four albums for EMI.

At the same time, Bovell was building his formidable reputation as a musician, producer, and sound engineer, collaborating with great artists including Jamaican DJ extraordinaire I-Roy, British reggae band Steel Pulse,

Jamaican ska singer Errol Dunkley, and Jamaican roots vocal legend Johnny Clarke. After leaving Matumbi, Bovell continued to diversify his musical talents, producing Janet Kay's huge hit "Silly Games" (played in the background in *Babylon*), which reached number two in the UK charts in 1979. He also opened his own recording facility. Around this time, Bovell began an enduring partnership with reggae poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, which has resulted in classic albums like *Forces of Victory* (1979), *Bass Culture* (1980), *Tings An' Times* (1991), and *LKJ in Dub: Volumes One and Two* (1981, 1992). The 1980s saw Bovell in great demand as a producer, working with bands as diverse as The Slits, Thompson Twins, and Bananarama. He remixed albums for the great Marvin Gaye, as well as Wet Wet Wet and The Boomtown Rats, and worked closely with legend Fela Anikulapo Kuti. Other artists he's worked with include Alpha Blondy, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Dexy's Midnight Runners, Edwyn Collins, and Pablo Moses.

Bovell has also carved a niche out for himself in the world of television and film. Along with serving as musical director on *Babylon,* he has worked on the TV series *The Boy Who Won the Pools*. He wrote the theme music for the Channel 4 documentary series *The Bandung File* and for the BBC2 program *Rhythms of the World.* Throughout this period, Bovell continued his career as a solo artist, releasing a number of albums: *A Who Seh Go Deh, I Wah Dub, Higher Ranking Scientific Dub, Strictly Dubwize, Brain Damage, Audio Active,* and others. The 10 inspired tracks of Bovell's 1997 album *Dub of Ages* continued the dub excursions that began over 25 years ago, back when Bovell began making exclusive cuts for his sound system Sufferers Hi-Fi. This year marks the release of Bovell's latest studio album, *Akoustic*, featuring beautiful stripped-down renditions of some of the most popular tunes composed by Bovell, originally performed by Matumbi, LKJ, Janet Kay, and many more.

Mamoun Hassan

Mamoun Hassan is a screenwriter, producer, director, editor, and critic, as well as an international film teacher. He has written, directed, and edited a number of award-winning films in the course of his career while holding a number of influential positions in British film production organizations. He is guest lecturer of choice at several of the world's top national and international film schools. Based in the U.K., Hassan has a string of directing, producing, editing, and screenwriting credits on films made in Britain and Latin America. He produced the prize-winning feature *No Surrender* and co-produced *Machuca*, Chile's most successful film, which won numerous Latin American and European awards. He also wrote the screenplay for *La Buena Vida*, winner of a Spanish Goya and the premier prize at Huelva in 2008. He's also been a regular writer in the British press.

As a fiercely independent freelance professional with a global outlook, Hassan has always stood apart from show business limelight in the U.K. As a result, he has often been better recognized abroad than at home. The French cinema dictionary, the *Larousse Dictionnaire du Cinéma*, has listed his name alongside those of Alexander Korda, René Clair, Cavalcanti, Truffaut, Polanski, Losey, and Kubrick as great "non-English" contributors to the world of British film.

From 1971 to 1974, as Head of Production at the British Film Institute , he backed some of Britain's most distinctive and original films, including Bill Douglas's Childhood Trilogy, Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo's *Winstanley*, Peter Smith's *A Private Enterprise*, David Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village*, Horace Ové's *Pressure*, Chuck Despins's musical *Moon Over the Alley*, and Terence Davies's first film, *Children*. In 1974, he was appointed Head of Film Branch for a United Nations Agency in Beirut. The Lebanese civil war started soon after his arrival and, over the following 18 months, he directed and edited a documentary, *Some of the Palestinians*, which was completed in 1976. The film was invited to the London Film Festival and the Teheran Film Festival. A copy is held by U.K.'s National Film Archive. On returning to the U.K. in 1976, Hassan moved into film education and was head of directing for at the National Film and Television School.

In 1979, Hassan took another game-changing role in the U.K. film-funding scene when he took over the top post at the National Film Finance Corporation from Sir John Terry. During his tenure as the managing director of the

U.K.'s government arm for investing in feature production and development, he championed the films of new and established directors, including Lindsay Anderson's *Britannia Hospital*, Bill Forsyth's *Gregory's Girl*, Bill Douglas's *Comrades*, Franco Rosso and Martin Stellman's *Babylon*, Mike Newell's *Dance with a Stranger*, Marek Kanievska's *Another Country*, James Ivory's *A Room with a View*, and Jimmy Murakami's animated feature *When the Wind Blows*. Hassan left the N.F.F.C. in 1984, prior to its dissolution by the Conservative government in 1985. He did not return to public life in the U.K., preferring to concentrate on production. In 1984, he produced screenwriter Alan Bleasdale's feature film *No Surrender,* set in Liverpool and directed by Peter Smith.

In 1988, Hassan created the *Movie Masterclass* series for television, in collaboration with leading filmmakers of the period, including Lindsay Anderson, Terence Davies, and Bill Forsyth. The series was shown on Channel 4. Kurosawa Productions acquired the rights for a well-received transmission on NHK in Japan and Satyajit Ray was nan admirer. During the 1990s, Hassan returned to the National Film and Television School as a governor and to take responsibility for the editing department. Between 1991 and 1993, he was senior UNESCO consultant for the UNESCO-Zimbabwe Film Training Project in Harare, which aimed to establish film training for southern Africa during the Apartheid era. In 1997, he became Head and Dean of editing at the International Film School in Cuba (EICTV), a position he retained for seven years. While working in Cuba, Hassan became interested in the work of the leading Chilean director Andres Wood. This led to one of the most fruitful artistic collaborations of his career. With Wood he co-wrote and produced two acclaimed Latin American films.

In 2012, Hassan acted as consultant editor on the British feature *My Brother the Devil,* directed by Sally Hossaini. He's still energetically pursuing production opportunities with new filmmakers, while his expertise and insight continues to be in demand for student film assessments, lectures, film competition juries, and masterclasses worldwide.

Kino Lorber
With a library of over 2,000 titles, Kino Lorber Inc. has been a leader in independent art house distribution for 35 years, releasing 30 films per year theatrically under its Kino Lorber, Kino Lorber Repertory, Kino Classics, and Alive Mind Cinema banners, garnering seven Academy Award® nominations in ten years, including *Fire at Sea* and this year's *Of Fathers & Sons*. Current and upcoming releases include the Golden Bear winner *Touch Me Not* and Jean-Luc Godard's *The Image Book*. In addition, the company brings over 300 titles yearly to the home entertainment and educational markets through physical and digital media releases. With an expanding family of distributed labels, Kino Lorber handles releases in ancillary media for Zeitgeist Films, Carlotta USA, Adopt Films, Raro Video, and others, placing physical titles through all wholesale, retail, and direct to consumer channels, as well as direct digital distribution through over 40 OTT services including all major TVOD and SVOD platforms.

Seventy-Seven
Started by Gabriele Caroti, Seventy-Seven is a boutique film label focusing on vintage, underseen, and underappreciated repertory work, with a special emphasis on music, as well as Italian films. Caroti has nearly two decades of experience in film publicity, marketing, and programming. From 2012 to 2017, he was the Director of BAMcinématek, the Brooklyn Academy of Music's film program, overseeing record growth in revenue and audience. He's worked at (or with) every major film institution in New York City, including the Film Society of Lincoln Center, Film Forum, Anthology Film Archives, the Museum of the Moving Image, and Metrograph. A lifelong reggae aficionado, Caroti's "side hustle" is curating reggae and dancehall for TIDAL, the high-fidelity music streaming service.