

2018 TCM Film Festival Review: Sounder (Ritt, 1972): USA

Description

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HOLLYWOOD, CA â?? APRIL 27: Actor Cicely Tyson attends the Hand and Footprint Ceremony honoring Cicely Tyson during the 2018 TCM Classic Film Festival at TCL Chinese Theatre on April 2 2018 in Hollywood, California. 350620. (Photo by Emma McIntyre/Getty Images for TCM)

Viewed at the TCL Chinese Theatre during the 2018 TCM Classic Film Festival as part of Cicely Tysonâ??s Hand and Footprint Ceremony. The screening was proceeded by a conversation between Tyson and TCM host, Ben Mankiewicz.

Sounder was produced in 1972 and was adapted from a 1969 Newberry Award-winning juvenile novel by William H. Armstrong. The story follows a young boy and a family of black sharecroppers during the Great Depression era. The father, Nathan Lee, played by Paul Winfield, steals food to provide for his

small family. When He is caught he is charged with illegal trespassing and robbery and sentenced to one year of hard labor in a Louisiana Parish prison camp. John A.Alonzo provided the filmâ??s cinematography and contributed significantly to the filmâ??s exquisite mise-en-scene while Taj Mahal created an authentic, highly original musical score.

Director Ritt marketed the film to ministers and educators allowing the film to make a nice profit. Lead actors Cicely Tyson, as Rebecca Lee, and Paul Winfield were both nominated for Oscars. The 2017 film, *Mudbound,* also nominated for four Oscars, shows a powerful, tour-de-force performance from American singer-songwriter, Mary J. Blige. I felt Bligeâ??s performance shared a remarkable resemblance to Tysonâ??s performance.

The narrative strikes at the heart emotionally. After, the father is sent to prison, the family manages to get the seed in the ground and to harvest the grown crop. Along, the way, the eldest child, David, played by Kevin Hooks in his first big-screen role, goes to find his father at the prison camp. When the family goes to get the location at the courthouse, a confederate monument is clearly visible in the frame as the family is about nto go into the sheriffâ??s office. The sheriff tells the family he canâ??t tell them where Nathan is. Eventually through a family friend, Mrs. Boatright, played by Carmen Matthews, David ascertains the location after Mrs. Boatright finds the location by peeking into the sheriffs files when he is momentarily called away. The sheriff threatens her with social ostracization if she tells where Nathan is.

David goes on a seven-day walkabout sleeping under the stars with the familyâ??s hunting dog, Sounder. David comes across an all-black school where blacks in history are studied and celebrated by a black teacher. David is invited to attend the school bu tmust leave home to do so and he is reluctant when his father returns home. In one of the filmâ??s most intimate moments. David runs away after his father tells him he must go. Nathan chases after David and in an exquisite moment by a wooded stream, Nathan tells David, sometimes you lose when you go after something. But you always lose the ones you donâ??t go after. The driving undercurrent is Nathan wants David to break the chain of being a sharecropper. The 2016 Oscar-nominated *Fences* (2016), based on August Wilsonâ??s 1985 play, tells a similar story with a much harsher narrative.

Sounder, nominated for four Academy Awards including Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress and Best Adapted Screenplay, was a breath of fresh air for me. Having written an essay on Blaxpolitation and having watched films like *Sweet Sweetbackâ??s Baaadasssss Song, SuperFly*, *Shaft*, *Foxy Brown* and *Coffy* (all films from the same time, the early 1970â??s), with tales of the black experience in urban decay with the seedier aspects of life including drug use, gratuitous violence, pimping and prostitution. *Sounder*, in juxtaposition, provided an elegant and emotionally moving narrative of a black family coming to terms with the difficulties of life and successfully dealing with them on lifeâ??s terms. Highly recommended â?? an historical treasure.



Category

1. TCM Classic Film Festival

Tags

1. #Sounder #CicelyTyson

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