



PRESSURE (15)

Director: Horace Ové

Starring: Herbert Norville, Oscar James, Frank Singuineau

UK, 1975, 2 hours 1 minute, English

Horace Ové's film about a young Black school leaver, Tony, and the obstacles he faces as he goes out into the world, was the first feature to be made by a Black director in the UK back in 1975. Co-scripted with Sam Selvan and shot on a tight budget, mainly with non-actors, over four to five weeks, it captures the bleakness, and ultimately the sogginess (!) of life in West London in the 1970s but also, quite shockingly, how very little has changed in terms of racism and prejudice in our society.

It's worth watching in parallel with *American Fiction*, a different culture, and a different time, but the many of the blanks and absurdities that Monk and Tony encounter are similar. And Ové reveals in a Barbican Screen Talk (linked on the film page of the Borderlines website) about how he refused to be pigeonholed as a Black filmmaker – to only make films about social and political issues.

The film is nuanced in the way that Tony relates to his Trinidadian parents, his aspirational mother and disillusioned father, first-generation emigrants, and his radicalized older brother, Colin, who is constantly trying to engage Tony in politics and the Black Power movement. Tony is the first in his family to be born in Britain and he's moved on; he wants to assimilate but is continually blocked and harassed.

Ové, who sadly died, last year, grew up in Trinidad, part of a large Bohemian family, and came over to London in the 1950s and 60s to study art. He started out as a photographer, documenting Michael X and other figures in the Black Power movement. He had always loved films. In Trinidad, crammed with post WWII with guerilla-warfare training bases for the US military, there were plenty of cinemas screening American, French and Spanish films. Later, in 1961, Ové lived for a while in Italy – he was even an extra in the big production of *Cleopatra* starring Elizabeth Taylor – and got to love the Italian neo-realist films of De Sica, as well as Antonioni, Fellini and Buñuel. He made the documentary *Reggae* and *A Hole in Babylon*, as well as pioneering British TV programmes such as *Empire Road*,

In the Barbican Screen Talk, he says, "I like making documentaries, because documentaries expose you to reality, you have to go out and you see the real world and you make films about it...."

"*Pressure* has a mixture of the documentary, the drama, the kind of surreal filmmaking. The world outside here and the world that is going on in his head, which is very frustrating for most of us. It had to be expressed, you know, sometimes we just make a film about what's happening in front of us. But we never make films about what's happening inside of here. You know, while you're talking to me and while I'm saying something and people are sitting out there - there's a whole lot of other things going on in each person's head. And I saw that on the European films and that really interests me. And it's something that I've learned growing up in Trinidad to people talk about the dream, talk about their head... And that is what came out also in *Pressure*."

Notes compiled by Jo Comino