

Poor Boy's Game

Bottom Line:

A black trainer and a white fighter team against racial hatred in this wise, stirring film.

By Duane Byrge

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Chicago International Film Festival

CHICAGO -- Better than an avenging angel, Danny Glover plays a transcending angel in this inspiring and harrowing story about racial tensions in Halifax, Nova Scotia. A stirring entrant in the Black Perspectives section at this year's Chicago International Film Festival, "Poor Boy's Game" is a refreshing volley against racial hate-mongering, from all sides. The film could gain traction beyond the festival circuit.

His son brain-damaged in a racially charged beating, black Canadian George (Glover) confronts the day when the boy's assailant is released. A hard-nosed white kid, Donnie (Rossif Sutherland) is out because he was underage at the time of the crime. The black community in town is outraged by the release.

George fights to control the rage within him as his son endures life as a mute vegetable. Despite his personal hurt and wrath, George struggles to maintain his Christian heart: He does not seek the revenge that his neighbors, wife and fellow churchgoers advocate in their Old Testament, eye-for-an-eye anger.

Filmmaker Clement Virgo does not draw his characters in simplistic good/evil terms: Donnie is a tough, macho brute who is nonetheless disgusted by the hero's welcome he receives. The racist braggadocio of his brothers and cohorts sickens him. With a self-destructive acceptance, he is suckered into a boxing match with Ossie (Flex Anderson), a talented, unbeatable black fighter.

With the respective communities lined up in us-vs.-them furor, George believes that he must do the right thing for his son's honor and dignity. Alone, he crosses the racial line and coaches Donnie, realizing that the boxing match is, in basic intent, a lynching. For this, George endures the wrath of his god-fearing wife (Tonya Lee Williams), while across the racial line, Donnie similarly is castigated by his racist family and cohorts.

Glover is remarkable as a decimated father struggling to overcome his own angry demons. It's a towering portrayal, tightly forged and powerfully delivered. As the white-trash brawler, Sutherland flexes uncanny moves of redemption.

Supporting players resonate: Alexander oozes strength and racist bile as the charismatic boxer, while Greg Bryk is frightening as Donnie's racist, wife-beating brother. Laura Regan shows fire as an abused woman who regains herself, while Stephen McHattie is fearsome as a cretin club owner.

In this hard and inspiring feature, Virgo shows that people on both sides of this frightening white-black divide use injustice as an excuse to vent their rage. Luc Montpellier's lighting and framing evoke the dignity and horror of the situation, while composer Byron Kent Wong's score reverberates thematically with aptly brash and fearful tones.

POOR BOY'S GAME

Conquering Lion Pictures, Decker Films, Standing 8 Prods.

Credits:

Director: Clement Virgo

Screenwriters: Clement Virgo, Chaz Thorne

Director of photography: Luc Montpellier

Production designer: Shelley Bailey

Music: Byron Kent Wong

Costume designer: Jeanie Kimber

Editor: Susan Maggi

Cast:

Donnie: Rossif Sutherland

George: Danny Glover

Ossie Paris: Flex Alexander