

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (film)

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom is a 2020 American drama film directed by George C. Wolfe and written by Ruben Santiago-Hudson, based on the 1982 play of the same name by August Wilson. The film stars Viola Davis, Chadwick Boseman, Glynn Turman, Colman Domingo, and Michael Potts. Inspired by the career of Ma Rainey, an influential blues singer and the title character, the film dramatizes a turbulent recording session in 1920s Chicago.

Produced by Denzel Washington, Todd Black, and Dany Wolf, the project was originally announced alongside Washington's *Fences* in 2013 as part of his ten-picture deal with HBO. The adaptation eventually moved to Netflix and filming began in Pittsburgh in 2019. Boseman died during post-production in August 2020, making *Black Bottom* his final film appearance. The film is dedicated to his memory.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom began a limited theatrical release on November 25, 2020, before beginning to stream on Netflix on December 18. The film received universal acclaim, with critics lauding the performances of Davis, Boseman, and Turman as well as the costume design and production values. It was named as one of the ten best films of 2020 by the American Film Institute.^[4] The film received five nominations at the 93rd Academy Awards, including Best Actor (for Boseman), Best Actress (for Davis), and won two awards: Makeup and Hairstyling and Costume Design.^[5] Additionally, the film received eight Critics' Choice Movie Award nominations and nine NAACP Image Award nominations, including Outstanding Motion Picture,^[6] with Davis and Boseman both winning lead acting awards. Davis and Boseman also won lead acting awards for their performances at the Screen Actors Guild Awards, making them the first African-American actors in history to win in leading categories in the same year;^[7] both received nominations at the Golden Globes, with Boseman posthumously winning Best Actor – Motion Picture Drama.

Plot

Ma Rainey is a highly regarded, strong-willed blues singer who has recently been contracted by white producers. The story takes place on July 2, 1927, when a recording session is

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom



Official release poster

Directed by	<u>George C. Wolfe</u>
Screenplay by	<u>Ruben Santiago-Hudson</u>
Based on	<i><u>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</u></i> by <u>August Wilson</u>
Produced by	<u>Denzel Washington</u> <u>Todd Black</u> <u>Dany Wolf</u>
Starring	<u>Viola Davis</u> <u>Chadwick Boseman</u> <u>Glynn Turman</u> <u>Colman Domingo</u> <u>Michael Potts</u>
Cinematography	<u>Tobias A. Schliessler</u>
Edited by	<u>Andrew Mondschein</u>
Music by	<u>Branford Marsalis</u>
Production companies	<u>Escape Artists</u>

scheduled for Ma by her manager Irvin to take place at Paramount's Recording Studios in Chicago. Seasoned Georgia Jazz Band members Toledo, Cutler, and Slow Drag arrive on time without Ma which frustrates her producer, Mel Sturdyvant. They are soon joined by Levee Green, the band's overconfident trumpeter, who has shown Sturdyvant his original compositions in the hopes of breaking away from Ma and getting his own record deal. The rest of the band disapproves of this. Teased by the rest of the band about his ability to deal with white men, Levee relates how his mother was gang-raped by white men. His father exacted revenge on the assailants, killing four of them before being lynched and then burned.

	Mundy Lane Entertainment
Distributed by	<u>Netflix</u>
Release date	November 25, 2020
Running time	94 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$20–22.5 million ^{[2][3]}

Ma arrives an hour late with her girlfriend, Dussie Mae, and her nephew, Sylvester. Immediately, she clashes with Sturdyvant and her manager Irvin, making numerous demands. Insulted that the Coca-Cola she requested has not been provided, Ma refuses to begin the recording session; assigning Slow Drag and Sylvester to get her one. Later, she insists to Sturdyvant that the opening words of the album be spoken by Sylvester, who has a pronounced stutter. As a result, the group has to do multiple takes of the song "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," much to everyone's frustration.

Ma confides to Cutler that her white bosses are only interested in her voice, and would otherwise regard her as "just a dog in the alley" which he understands and sympathizes with. Meanwhile, Levee and Dussie Mae have sex in the practice room before being interrupted by Slow Drag.

The group finally manages to get through the first track after multiple takes, but discovers an equipment failure has caused it not to be recorded. The band blames Levee, who they think tripped over a wire while eyeing Dussie Mae, though it is revealed to have been damaged already. Their argument leads the religious Cutler to tell a story about a preacher he once knew who got stranded in a small town and was humiliated by a group of white men who tore up his Bible and forced him to dance. Levee brushes off the story; saying that if there was a God, he would care for black people, which He never has. Cutler attacks Levee in anger, leading Levee to pull out a knife in retaliation while still mocking Cutler and his beliefs.

The group finally finishes recording, but Ma fires Levee soon afterward; believing his reckless ambition and uncompromising attitude to be detrimental to the band. Levee meets with Sturdyvant about his original songs, but discovers that he will only purchase the songs, insisting they only have room for one black singer. Levee subsequently suffers a mental breakdown and, after Toledo accidentally steps on his new shoes, Levee fatally stabs him in the back with the knife. Cutler and Slow Drag leave in horror as Levee cradles Toledo's corpse. Later, Sturdyvant records Levee's songs with a band consisting entirely of white musicians (supposedly Paul Whiteman's Orchestra).

Cast

- Viola Davis as Ma Rainey
 - Maxayn Lewis as Ma's singing voice.
- Chadwick Boseman as Levee Green
- Glynn Turman as Toledo

- [Colman Domingo](#) as Cutler
- [Michael Potts](#) as Slow Drag
- [Jonny Coyne](#) as Mel Sturdyvant
- [Taylour Paige](#) as Dussie Mae
- [Jeremy Shamos](#) as Irvin
- [Dusan Brown](#) as Sylvester
- [Joshua Harto](#) as Policeman
- [Quinn VanAntwerp](#) as Band Singer

Production

Development

[Denzel Washington](#) initially had a deal with the television network [HBO](#) to produce nine of the playwright [August Wilson's](#) plays into films, with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* among them.^[8] By June 2019, the deal had been moved to Netflix. [Viola Davis](#), [Chadwick Boseman](#), [Glynn Turman](#), [Colman Domingo](#), and [Michael Potts](#) had been cast in the film, with [George C. Wolfe](#) set to direct.^[9] In July 2019, [Taylour Paige](#), [Jonny Coyne](#), [Jeremy Shamos](#), and [Dusan Brown](#) joined the cast of the film.^[10] [Maxayn Lewis](#) did most of Rainey's singing for Davis.^[11] [Jeffrey Wright](#) was originally expected to join the film.^[12]

Filming

Filming commenced on July 8, 2019 in Pittsburgh, with sets converted into 1927 Chicago, and wrapped on August 16, 2019.^[13]

On August 28, 2020, Boseman died of colon cancer during post-production, making *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* his final film appearance. The film is dedicated to him.^{[14][15][16]}

Release

The film was theatrically released in select theaters on November 25, 2020,^[14] before beginning to stream on December 18, on Netflix.^[17] Netflix also released a 31-minute making-of documentary *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom: A Legacy Brought to Screen* alongside the film.^[18] Upon its digital release to Netflix, the film was the most-watched item over its opening weekend.^[19]

Reception

Critical response

On [Rotten Tomatoes](#), the film holds an approval rating of 97% based on 301 reviews, with an average rating of 8.2/10. The website's critics consensus reads: "Framed by a pair of powerhouse performances, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* pays affectionate tribute to a blues legend — and Black culture at large."^[20] According to [Metacritic](#), which compiled 46 reviews and calculated a weighted average score of 87 out of 100, the film received "universal acclaim".^[21]



The performances of Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman received widespread critical acclaim, with many critics describing Boseman's final performance as the best of his career. Both earned Academy Award nominations for Best Actress and Best Actor, respectively.

For the *Los Angeles Times*, Justin Chang wrote "Boseman, evincing the same integrity he clung to his entire career, refuses to soft-pedal the destination. He imparts to this seething, shattered man the gift of a broken soul, driven by anger and trauma, and makes him all the more human for it. His final moments of screen time are among his darkest, and also his finest."^[22] Eric Kohn of IndieWire gave the film a "B" grade and praised Davis and Boseman's performances, saying: "All of this would be more concerning if *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* didn't turn on Wilson's crackling dialogue and a jazzy pace on par with the music. Above all, the movie amounts to a solid resurrection that doesn't muck up the bulk of what made the play click in the first place."^[23]

Peter Travers, reviewing the film for ABC News, said: "Davis plays the real-life Ma Rainey, the Georgia singer dubbed the Mother of the Blues. Boseman invests body and soul into Levee, the hot-headed trumpeter who dares to lock horns with Ma in a shabby Chicago recording studio where they're paid to make music the way the white bosses want it. The time is 1927, but the bristling racial tensions feel as timely as ever."^[24]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>AACTA Awards</u>	<u>March 7, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor – International</u>	<u>Chadwick Boseman</u>	Won	^[25]
		<u>Best Actress – International</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
<u>AARP's Movies for Grownups Awards</u>	<u>March 28, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	^[26]
		<u>Best Director</u>	<u>George C. Wolfe</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Screenwriter</u>	<u>Ruben Santiago-Hudson</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Time Capsule</u>	<i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Ensemble</u>	<i>The cast of Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>	Nominated	
<u>Academy Awards</u>	<u>April 25, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	<u>Chadwick Boseman</u>	Nominated	^[27]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Costume Design</u>	<u>Ann Roth</u>	Won	
		<u>Best Makeup and Hairstyling</u>	<u>Sergio López-Rivera, Mia Neal and Jamika Wilson</u> ^[a]	Won	
		<u>Best Production Design</u>	<u>Mark Ricker, Karen O'Hara and Diana Stoughton</u>	Nominated	
<u>Alliance of Women Film Journalists</u>	<u>January 4, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	<u>Chadwick Boseman</u>	Won	^[28]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
<u>American Film Institute Awards</u>	<u>February 26, 2021</u>	<u>Top 10 Movies of the Year</u>		Won	^[29]
<u>Art Directors Guild Awards</u>	<u>April 10, 2021</u>	<u>Excellence in Production Design for a Period Film</u>	<u>Mark Ricker</u>	Nominated	^[30]
<u>BET Awards</u>	<u>June 27, 2021</u>	<u>Best Movie</u>		Nominated	^[31]
		<u>Best Actor</u>	<u>Chadwick Boseman</u> (also for <i>Da 5 Bloods</i>)	Won	
		<u>Best Actress</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Nominated	
<u>Black Reel Awards</u>	<u>April 11, 2021</u>	<u>Outstanding Motion Picture</u>	<u>Denzel Washington, Todd Black and Dany Wolf</u>	Nominated	^[32]
		<u>Outstanding Actor</u>	<u>Chadwick Boseman</u>	Won	
		<u>Outstanding Actress</u>	<u>Viola Davis</u>	Won	

		Outstanding Supporting Actor	Colman Domingo	Nominated	
		Outstanding Screenplay	Ruben Santiago-Hudson	Nominated	
		Outstanding Ensemble	Avy Kaufman	Nominated	
		Outstanding Breakthrough Performance, Male	Dusan Brown	Nominated	
		Outstanding First Screenplay	Ruben Santiago-Hudson	Nominated	
		Outstanding Costume Design	Ann Roth	Nominated	
		Outstanding Production Design	Mark Ricker	Nominated	
Boston Society of Film Critics	December 13, 2020	Best Ensemble Cast	The cast of <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>	Won	[33]
British Academy Film Awards	April 11, 2021	Best Actor in a Leading Role	Chadwick Boseman	Nominated	[34]
		Best Costume Design	Ann Roth	Won	
		Best Makeup and Hair	Matiki Anoff, Larry M. Cherry, Sergio Lopez-Rivera and Mia Neal	Won	
Casting Society of America	April 15, 2021	Feature Studio or Independent – Drama	Avy Kaufman, Nancy Mosser and Scotty Anderson	Nominated	[35]
Chicago Film Critics Association	December 21, 2020	Best Actor	Chadwick Boseman	Won	[36] [37]
		Best Actress	Viola Davis	Nominated	
		Best Original Score	Branford Marsalis	Nominated	
		Best Costume Design	Ann Roth	Nominated	
Costume Designers Guild Awards	April 13, 2021	Excellence in Period Film		Won	[38]
Critics' Choice Movie Awards	March 7, 2021	Best Picture		Nominated	[39]
		Best Actor	Chadwick Boseman	Won	
		Best Actress	Viola Davis	Nominated	
		Best Acting Ensemble	The cast of <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>	Nominated	
		Best Adapted Screenplay	Ruben Santiago-Hudson	Nominated	
		Best Production Design	Mark Ricker, Karen O'Hara and Diana Stoughton	Nominated	
		Best Hair & Makeup	Matiki Anoff, Sergio Lopez-Rivera, Mia Neal, Larry M. Cherry, Sian Richards, Deidra Dixon and Jamika Wilson	Won	
		Best Costume Design	Ann Roth	Won	
Dorian Awards	April 18, 2021	LGBTQ Film of the Year		Won	[40]

		Best Film Performance – Actor	Chadwick Boseman	Won	
		Best Film Performance – Actress	Viola Davis	Nominated	
<u>Florida Film Critics Circle</u>	<u>December 21, 2020</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Nominated	[41]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Viola Davis	Runner-up	
		<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Ruben Santiago-Hudson	Runner-up	
		<u>Best Ensemble</u>	The cast of <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>	Nominated	
<u>GLAAD Media Awards</u>	<u>April 2021</u>	<u>Outstanding Film – Wide Release</u>		Nominated	[42][43]
<u>Gold Derby Awards</u>	<u>April 2021</u>	Best Actor	Chadwick Boseman	Won	[44][45]
		Best Actress	Viola Davis	Nominated	
		Best Adapted Screenplay	Ruben Santiago-Hudson	Nominated	
		Best Ensemble	The cast of <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>	Nominated	
		Best Production Design	Mark Ricker	Nominated	
		Best Costume Design	Ann Roth	Won	
		Best Hair & Makeup	Matiki Anoff, Larry M. Cherry, Sergio Lopez-Rivera and Mia Neal	Won	
		Best Sound	Skip Lievsay, Paul Urmson and Dane Lonsdale	Nominated	
<u>Golden Globe Awards</u>	<u>February 28, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Drama</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Won	[46]
		<u>Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Drama</u>	Viola Davis	Nominated	
<u>Gotham Awards</u>	<u>January 11, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Nominated	[47]
<u>Hollywood Critics Association</u>	<u>March 5, 2021</u>	Best Actor		Nominated	[48]
		Best Actress	Viola Davis	Nominated	
		Best Adapted Screenplay	Ruben Santiago-Hudson	Nominated	
		Best Production Design	Mark Ricker	Nominated	
		Best Costume Design	Ann Roth	Nominated	
		Best Ensemble Cast	<i>The cast of Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>	Nominated	
		Best Hair & Makeup	Matiki Anoff, Sergio Lopez-Rivera, Mia Neal, Larry M. Cherry, Sian Richards, Deidra Dixon and Jamika Wilson	Won	

<u>Hollywood Music in Media Awards</u>	<u>January 27, 2021</u>	<u>Best Original Score in a Feature Film</u>	Branford Marsalis	Nominated	[49]
<u>Independent Spirit Awards</u>	<u>April 22, 2021</u>	<u>Best Feature</u>		Nominated	[3]
		<u>Best Male Lead</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Nominated	
		<u>Best Female Lead</u>	Viola Davis	Nominated	
		<u>Best Supporting Male</u>	Colman Domingo	Nominated	
			Glynn Turman	Nominated	
<u>London Film Critics' Circle</u>	<u>February 7, 2021</u>	<u>Actor of the Year</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Won	[50][51]
		<u>Actress of the Year</u>	Viola Davis	Nominated	
<u>Los Angeles Film Critics Association</u>	<u>December 20, 2020</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Won	[52]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Viola Davis	Runner-up	
		<u>Best Supporting Actor</u>	Glynn Turman	Won	
<u>Make-Up Artists and Hair Stylists Guild Awards</u>	<u>April 3, 2021</u>	<u>Best Period and/or Character Make-Up in a Feature-Length Motion Picture</u>	Matiki Anoff, Sergio Lopez-Rivera, Carl Fullerton and Debi Young	Won	[53]
		<u>Best Period and/or Character Hair Styling in a Feature-Length Motion Picture</u>	Mia Neal, Larry Cherry, Leah Loukas and Tywan Williams	Won	
<u>Motion Picture Sound Editors Awards</u>	<u>April 16, 2021</u>	<u>Outstanding Achievement in Sound Editing – Dialogue and ADR for Feature Film</u>	Skip Lievsay, Paul Urmson, Lidia Tamplenizza and Michael Feuser	Nominated	[54]
		<u>Outstanding Achievement in Sound Editing – Musical for Feature Film</u>	Todd Kasow and Tim Marchiafava	Nominated	
<u>MTV Movie & TV Awards</u>	<u>May 16, 2021</u>	<u>Best Performance in a Movie</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Won	[55]
<u>NAACP Image Awards</u>	<u>March 21, 2021</u>	<u>Outstanding Motion Picture</u>		Nominated	[56][57]
		<u>Outstanding Actor in a Motion Picture</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Won	
		<u>Outstanding Actress in a Motion Picture</u>	Viola Davis	Won	
		<u>Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture</u>	Glynn Turman	Nominated	
			Colman Domingo	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Motion Picture</u>	Taylor Paige	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Directing in a Motion Picture</u>	George C. Wolfe	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Soundtrack/Compilation Album</u>	Branford Marsalis	Nominated	
		<u>Outstanding Ensemble Cast in a Motion Picture</u>	The cast of <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>	Won	

<u>National Society of Film Critics</u>	<u>January 9, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	Chadwick Boseman	2nd Place	[58]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Viola Davis	2nd Place	
		<u>Best Supporting Actor</u>	Glynn Turman	2nd Place	
<u>Online Film Critics Society</u>	<u>January 25, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Nominated	[59]
		<u>Best Actress</u>		Nominated	
<u>Palm Springs International Film Festival</u>	<u>February 11, 2021</u>	<u>Desert Palm Achievement Award, Actress</u>	Viola Davis	Won	[60]
<u>Producers Guild of America Awards</u>	<u>March 24, 2021</u>	<u>Best Theatrical Motion Picture</u>	Denzel Washington and Todd Black	Nominated	[61]
<u>San Diego Film Critics Society</u>	<u>January 11, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Nominated	[62]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Viola Davis	Nominated	
		<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Ruben Santiago-Hudson	Nominated	
		<u>Best Costume Design</u>	Ann Roth	Nominated	
<u>Satellite Awards</u>	<u>February 15, 2021</u>	<u>Best Motion Picture – Drama</u>		Nominated	[63]
		<u>Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Drama</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Nominated	
		<u>Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Drama</u>	Viola Davis	Nominated	
		<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Ruben Santiago-Hudson	Nominated	
		<u>Best Costume Design</u>	Ann Roth	Nominated	
<u>Screen Actors Guild Awards</u>	<u>April 4, 2021</u>	<u>Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Leading Role</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Won	
		<u>Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Leading Role</u>	Viola Davis	Won	
		<u>Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture</u>	Chadwick Boseman, Jonny Coyne, Viola Davis, Colman Domingo, Michael Potts and Glynn Turman	Nominated	[64]
<u>Seattle Film Critics Society</u>	<u>February 15, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Nominated	[65]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Viola Davis	Nominated	
		<u>Best Ensemble Cast</u>	Avy Kaufman	Nominated	
		<u>Best Costume Design</u>	Ann Roth	Won	
<u>Set Decorators Society of America Awards</u>	<u>March 31, 2021</u>	<u>Best Achievement in Décor/Design of a Period Feature Film</u>	Karen O'Hara, Diana Stoughton, and Mark Ricker	Nominated	[66]
<u>St. Louis Film Critics Association</u>	<u>January 17, 2021</u>	<u>Best Actor</u>	Chadwick Boseman	Won	[67]
		<u>Best Actress</u>	Viola Davis	Nominated	
		<u>Best Adapted Screenplay</u>	Ruben Santiago-	Nominated	

			Hudson		
		Best Production Design	Mark Ricker	Nominated	
Toronto Film Critics Association	February 7, 2021	Best Actor	Chadwick Boseman	Runner-up	[68]
		Best Actress	Viola Davis	Runner-up	
Vancouver Film Critics Circle	February 22, 2021	Best Actor	Chadwick Boseman	Won	[69][70]
		Best Actress	Viola Davis	Nominated	
Writers Guild of America Awards	March 21, 2021	Best Adapted Screenplay	Ruben Santiago-Hudson	Nominated	[71]

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a. First African-American women to ever win the award.

External links

- *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10514222/>) at IMDb
- *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/ma_raineys_black_bottom) at Rotten Tomatoes
- *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (<https://www.netflix.com/title/81100780>) on Netflix
- "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" - lyrics (<https://www.themusicallyrics.com/m/560-ma-raineys-black-bottom-lyrics/8372-ma-raineys-black-bottom-lyrics.html>)

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