



**BIG SCREEN CLASSICS**

# Daughters of the Dust

An island off the coast of Georgia, 1902: a Gullah family is gathered for a last supper before the younger generation leave for the mainland, leaving behind the matriarch Nana and the traditions of their African ancestors.

Impressionistic, imaginative and steeped in symbols, myth and history, Dash's time-bending film combines and contrasts different belief systems to highly original effect.

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As a sequel to Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* was never made, we never knew what became of the Peazant girls after they crossed over to the mainland from the Sea Islands of South Carolina. That is, until Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* dropped in 2016 and seemed to pick up the story of its gorgeously garbed black women as they struggled to find their way in the New World. Thanks to *Lemonade*'s distinct homage, Dash's pioneering movie was rediscovered by a new generation and has now been restored and rereleased in time for its 25th anniversary.

There is something wonderfully apposite about this binding together of eras, given that *Daughters of the Dust* is itself a contemplation of time's circularity. The overlaying of past, present and future is the framing device for the film, which offers a rare insight into African women's spirituality shared across lineages and throughout the diaspora. At a moment when third-wave feminism meets pop culture meets a refreshed black identity politics, *Daughters of the Dust* remains a futuristic glimpse into the past.

The film is set at the turn of the 20th century among the isolated Gullah community inhabiting the islands off the coast of South Carolina. The descendants of West African slaves, they lived in relative paradise away from the Jim Crow South, speaking their Yoruba-influenced dialect and practising their customs freely.

The tight community is threatened when the sophisticated Yellow Mary, played by Dash favourite Barbara-O, returns from the mainland to take the family with her. Grandmother Nana Peazant represents the past. Her ancient rituals shape the film's sensual poetry. The present resides in her offspring who, in various states of excitement and anxiety, prepare to leave. The future is embodied in the voice of an unborn child who narrates the last few days in the coastal idyll, highlighting the tension between what once was and what is to come. 'How you can leave this soil?' laments Nana Peazant. Watching today, as the #BlackLivesMatter refrain echoes across America's northern states, we find ourselves lamenting with her.

The marriage between director and material in *Daughters of the Dust* feels near perfect. Not only is Dash herself a descendant of the relatively small crop of Gullah people, she is also a child of the LA Rebellion, a school of pan-Africanist filmmakers based at UCLA in the 1970s, who took inspiration from post-colonial cinematic movements in Latin America and beyond as well as European neorealism. However, it was her one-time relationship with cinematographer Arthur Jafa, and with production designer Kerry James Marshall (now an internationally renowned painter), that creates the

extraordinary feel of the film: the sumptuousness of the costumes, the locations peopled by beautiful black actors, redefine the turn-of-the-century period film. Here the pale blush of Edith Wharton’s heroines become the rich tonal hues of actresses Cora Lee Day, Alva Rogers and Adisa Anderson.

*Daughters of the Dust* took more than ten years to make, having begun as a silent short. The script was rejected by most, but PBS American Playhouse finally stumped up the relatively small \$800,000 budget. Particular attention was paid to the verisimilitude of the design. The film was shot on location in the Sea Islands and only materials that the Gullah would have had access to at the time were used, including the hand-dyed indigo and white cotton of the women’s dresses.

In 1992, *Daughters of the Dust* became the first feature by an African-American woman to be theatrically distributed – helped by another black woman, promoter Michelle Materre of KJM3 Entertainment Group. Materre borrowed pioneer filmmaker Oscar Micheaux’s distribution techniques and spread the word through black churches and communities.

Like Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* today, *Daughters of the Dust* became symbolic of the alternative aesthetic that black female artists had been forging for years, an aesthetic that merged fact with metaphor, the physical with the metaphysical. While Hollywood was still treating black woman as mulattoes, mammies or maids, Dash had already made three seminal shorts – *Four Women* (1975), *Diary of an African Nun* (1977) and *Illusions* (1982) – and filmmakers such as Kathleen Collins (*Losing Ground*, 1982) and Camille Billops (*Finding Christa*, 1991) had crafted intimate, subjective features based on their experiences as complex artists.

Despite its critical and box-office success, another feature along the lines of *Daughters of the Dust* never came. Instead Dash continued her trajectory predominantly on the small screen. She made a number of TV movies over the next ten years, including one about civil rights activist Rosa Parks, and worked with leading actresses such as Angela Bassett, Alfre Woodard, Loretta Devine and C.C.H. Pounder.

Twenty-five years on, *Daughters of the Dust* still feels remarkable. Its rich cinematic language breaks open formal storytelling, allowing a distinct, possibly ancient, voice to emerge that changes the possibilities of cinema for black female filmmakers and viewers.

**Gaylene Gould, *Sight & Sound*, June 2017**

**DAUGHTERS OF THE DUST**

*Directed by:* Julie Dash  
*©/Production Company:* Geechee Girls Productions  
*In association with:* American Playhouse, WMG Pictures  
*With financial assistance from:* Public Broadcasting Service, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, National Endowment for the Arts, Chubb Group of Insurance Companies  
*Presented by:* American Playhouse  
*A Kino International release*  
*Executive Producer:* Lindsay Law  
*Producers:* Julie Dash, Arthur Jafa  
*Line Producer:* Steven Jones  
*Associate Producers:* Pamm R. Jackson, Floyd Webb, Bernard Nicholas  
*Production Co-ordinator:* Teresa Yarbrough  
*Production Controller:* Kathy Richter  
*Location Manager:* Eric Mofford  
*Post-production Supervisor:* Amy Carey  
*1st Assistant Directors:* C.C. Barnes, Nandi Bowe  
*2nd Assistant Director:* Miller Tobin  
*Casting:* Len Hunt  
*Written by:* Julie Dash

**Cast**

Adisa Anderson (*Eli Peasant*)  
Barbara-O (*Yellow Mary Peasant*)  
Cheryl Lynn Bruce (*Viola Peasant*)  
Cora Lee Day (*Nana Peasant*)  
Geraldine Dunston (*Viola’s mother*)  
Vertamae Grosvenor (*hairbraider*)  
Tommy Hicks (*Mr Snead*)  
Kaycee Moore (*Haagar Peasant*)  
Eartha D. Robinson (*Myown Peasant*)  
Alva Rogers (*Eula Peasant*)  
Cornell Royal (*Daddy Mac Peasant*)  
Catherine Tarver (*woman with baby*)  
Bahni Turpin (*Iona Peasant*)  
Kai-Lynn Warren (*the unborn child*)  
Trula Hoosier (*Trula*)  
Umar Abdurrahamn (*Bilal Muhammed*)  
Malik Farrakhan (*newlywed man*)  
Sherry Jackson (*older cousin*)  
Rev Ervin Green (*baptist minister*)  
Marcus Humphrey, Bernard Wilson (*boatmen*)

*Director of Photography:* Arthur Jafa  
*Camera Operators:* Arthur Jafa, N’jia Kai  
*1st Assistant Camera:* William Hudson  
*Additional 1st Assistant Camera:* Robin Melhuish  
*2nd Assistant Camera:* Tommy Burns  
*Gaffer:* Alex Vlacos  
*Key Grip:* Kevin Hamm  
*Special Effects:* Willard Stephens  
*Editors:* Amy Carey, Joseph Burton  
*Production Designer:* Kerry Marshall  
*Art Director:* Michael Kelly Williams  
*Set Dresser:* Ricardo Butler  
*Prop Master:* Peter Knowlton  
*Construction Foreman:* Umar Abdurrahamn  
*Costume Designer:* Arline Burks  
*Set Costumer:* Tiffany Taylor  
*Make-up Supervisor:* Rose Chatterton  
*Assistant Make-up:* Bryan A. Seabrook  
*Hairstylist:* Pamela Ferrell  
*Titles/Opticals:* Atlanta Films Effects, John E. Allen  
*Dailies:* DuArt Film Laboratories  
*Negative Conforming:* J.G. Films Inc  
*Laboratory:* John E. Allen  
*Original Music by:* John Barnes  
*African Percussions/Vocals:* Jesus Pedro Orta, Menge Hernandez, Francis Awe, Bill Summers, Elo  
*Eastern Percussionists:* Manoocheher Sadeghi, Ashhad Khan  
*Vocalists:* Rosa Parrilla, Valentina Soares, Abiola, Dianne Richburg, Felicidad, Yvette Bostic, Radhaz, Hanif Noor Mohammed, Allen Fovary III, Micki Butler  
*African Percussions/Vocals Co-ordinated by:* Bill Summers  
*Music Recorded at:* Off Melrose Studio  
*Music Mixer/Engineer:* Jack Rouben  
*Sound Recordist:* Veda Campbell  
*Boom Operator:* Chris Sibert  
*Re-recording Mixers:* Jeremy Hoenack, Robert Manahan, Melissa Sherwood Hofmann  
*Re-recorded by:* Sound Trax  
*Supervising Sound Editor:* Michael Payne  
*Dialogue Editors:* Ingeborg Larson, Melissa Peabody  
*Sound Effects Editors:* Doug Blush, Ray Greene, Sabrina Stephenson, Jeff Schiro, Joseph Zappala  
*Walla Group:* Holiday Marble, Sparkle Duncan, Teddy Gross, Guadalupe Jones, Rudy Costa, Agusta Stone, Charles Burnett, Geraldine Dunston  
*ADR Voices:* Afemo Omiliani, Taira Miller  
*ADR Editor:* Kris Campbell  
*Gullah Language Consultant:* Ronald Daise

Althea Lang (*newlywed woman*)  
Jasmine Lee, Dalisia Robinson (*Peazant babies*)  
Willie Faulkner, Joe Taylor, Frank Brown, Rueben Fripp (*Peazant men*)  
Derrick Coaxum, Neil Howard (*Peazant boys*)  
Jared Warren, Zenovia Green, Taira Miller, Tiffanye Hills (*Peazant children*)  
Jamar Freeman (*Pete*)  
Detrell Freeman (*re-Pete*)  
Vivian Dawson, Inez Griffin (*rice huskers*)  
M. Cochise Anderson (*St Julien Lastchild*)  
Darrel Cook, Julius Cook (*moss gatherers*)  
Benjamin Gillens (*minister’s assistant*)  
Ronald Daise (*processional man*)  
Marie Smalls (*woman being baptised*)  
Lonnie Moon, DeWitt Parker, Emma Robinson, Taylor Thompson, Virginia Green, Maceo Griffin, Archie Thomas, Raymond Paige, Ervena Faulkner, J.R. Wilson, Wilhemina Wilson (*baptismal processional*)  
Tarell Brown, Shanna Parker, Belle White, Stanley White, Maxine Royale, Georgia Wiggins, Carolyn Garris, Ella Powell, Bernice Jenkins, Lillian Johnson, Jackie Parker (*indigo plantation*)  
Shanna Johnson (*young Nana Peazant*)  
Leroy Simmons Jr (*young Daddy Mac Peazant*)  
Leroy Simmons (*Shad Peazant*)

USA 1991©  
112 mins

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**A Farewell to Arms**  
Sun 1 May 12:00; Mon 16 May 18:15; Tue 24 May 20:50  
**Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans**  
Mon 2 May 12:20; Mon 30 May 18:20  
**Tokyo Story (Tokyo Monogatari)**  
Tue 3 May 14:30; Sat 7 May 15:00; Sat 21 May 11:10; Wed 25 May 18:00  
**The River**  
Wed 4 May 18:10 + intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large; Sun 15 May 15:10  
**El Sur (The South)**  
Thu 5 May 14:30; Mon 16 May 18:10  
**Daughters of the Dust**  
Fri 6 May 20:50; Fri 20 May 14:40; Thu 26 May 20:40  
**Syndromes and a Century (Sang sattawaat)**  
Sat 7 May 18:10; Thu 12 May 20:50

**Still Walking (Aruitemo aruitemo)**  
Sun 8 May 15:15; Wed 11 May 17:50 + intro by Dr Alexander Jacoby, Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies; Mon 23 May 20:45  
**The Long Day Closes**  
Mon 9 May 18:30; Sun 22 May 12:30; Thu 26 May 20:50  
**Journey to Italy (Viaggio in Italia)**  
Tue 10 May 20:50; Thu 19 May 18:10; Wed 25 May 20:50; Fri 27 May 18:20  
**The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (Les Parapluies de Cherbourg)**  
Fri 13 May 20:45; Tue 17 May 20:50; Sat 28 May 18:15  
**Cleo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7)**  
Sat 14 May 14:45; Wed 18 May 18:10 + intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large  
**The Miracle Worker**  
Tue 17 May 14:30; Sun 29 May 11:20  
**The Incredible Shrinking Man**  
Thu 19 May 14:30; Tue 31 May 18:20

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