



S.O.U.L. FEST 2021: EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

Candyman

+ Pre-recorded cast intro

Delayed for well over a year, Nia DaCosta's film finally arrives as an exclusive preview at S.O.U.L Film Fest! This contemporary incarnation of the cult classic unleashes a fresh take on the blood-chilling urban legend that your friend's older sibling probably told you about at a sleepover: Candyman.

Urban Legend, American Truth – The History of Candyman

Released in the fall of 1992, Bernard Rose's *Candyman* was a pivotal moment in the history of the horror genre. For the first time, a major American horror film cast a Black man as its titular character and main antagonist. He was a movie 'monster' unlike any that had existed in Western pop culture before. Jordan Peele was 13 at the time. 'I was a horror fan as a kid, but we didn't have a Black Freddy Krueger or a Black Jason Voorhees,' Jordan Peele says. 'So, when *Candyman* came along, it felt very daring and cathartic. And it was terrifying. Even though there are many examples of Black people in horror movies, this one felt particularly badass for me.'

Based on the short story 'The Forbidden' by Clive Barker, the 1992 film follows a white graduate student, Helen Lyle (Virginia Madsen), who is researching her thesis on urban legends. She's interested in a myth that has endured in Chicago's infamous Cabrini-Green housing development.

Around Cabrini-Green, people believe, if you say Candyman's name into a mirror five times, he will appear, armed with a hook for a hand, and kill you. As Helen's research continues, gruesome deaths follow in her wake and she uncovers the origin story behind the legend: that a Black 19th century artist, Daniel Robitaille (Tony Todd), fell in love with a young white woman whom he was painting. For this crime, a white mob lynched him. They cut off his hand, smeared him with honey and unleashed a swarm of bees on him before burning him alive. His ashes were spread in what was then the site of the Cabrini-Green development. His spectre had terrorised the residents ever since.

At the time the film was enjoying its cult popularity, Peele and his close friend (and now producing partner) Ian Cooper, were growing up together on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Over the years, they would return to it again and again.

'By the time he was a sophomore in high school, Jordan had amassed a sizable VHS collection (alphabetised and organised by genre) that consumed all bookshelf space in his bedroom,' Ian Cooper says. 'We would save and pool our money, buying films as we could afford them. Nearly every formative film of significant influence for me I watched, often for the first time, while sitting on Jordan's bed.'

They watched *Candyman* a lot. 'We adored that film,' Cooper says. 'In Tony Todd's portrayal of Candyman, we were witness to a commanding, alluring, complex, romantic, dynamic and terrifying villain gleefully embodied by a performer of colour. We would recite lines verbatim, obsess over minor characters, and generally scrutinise every detail. This kind of close-textual analysis became the bedrock of our friendship and it remains the common ground on which we play and create every day we work together.'

For all its admirable qualities, though, the 1992 film was also problematic, even for its time. Chief among its shortcomings were the unanswered question of why a

Black man who had been the victim of white violence was now terrorizing a Black community, and why a white woman was at the centre of this story. ‘The original film explored the legend of Candyman through Helen’s perspective,’ Peele says. ‘But that movie struck me like a Black film. A movie for me. So, I wanted to make a movie that looked at this ghost story from a Black perspective.’

The Resurrection of Candyman – New Vision, New Director

Early in the process of resurrecting Candyman for a new generation, Jordan Peele and his fellow Monkeypaw producers Win Rosenfeld and Ian Cooper decided that they would bring in a fresh new voice to direct the film. They found their filmmaker in Nia DaCosta, whose first feature film, *Little Woods*, had impressed them with its seamless melding of character-driven narrative and complex, real-world issues.

‘When we were looking for a director, we wanted to find someone who could really sink into this world that we were building and work with what was ultimately becoming a character piece,’ Win Rosenfeld says. ‘Nia’s work on *Little Woods* managed to play with the ideas of serious trenchant social issues in a non-didactic way, and at the same time, allowed the audience to get very close to characters who are in desperate situations. She became the perfect choice for *Candyman*. The amount of life that she breathed into it and how much she shaped the film can’t be overstated.’

For DaCosta, the connection with Peele was organic and immediate. ‘Jordan is so good about bringing social issues to the fore in the horror genre,’ Nia DaCosta says. ‘We connected on the way we view horror, and our love of horror: breaking down what horror is, how it’s represented, what it means, and why it’s important. That’s what a lot of what our conversations were about.’

Peele and Rosenfeld had already begun work on the screenplay and knew the film would dive into deep waters, confronting America’s long history of white violence against Black people and exploring themes of gentrification, art, and both the destructive and transformative power of storytelling. ‘Jordan’s work, and everything we do at Monkeypaw, is based on the idea that audiences are smart,’ Rosenfeld says. ‘Audiences want to be challenged and to engage. They’re okay with having the bar raised and leaving the theatre with something to think about and discuss. They can have fun at a movie while also being intellectually stimulated. Hollywood can sometimes lower the bar in a desperate attempt to make more people watch their movies, but Jordan’s philosophy is the opposite. If we keep challenging people with meaningful art that’s also a good time, they’ll keep coming back.’

With DaCosta on board, the script entered a new phase as Peele, Rosenfeld and she began to work together to complete it. ‘Win, Nia and I developed a real synergy on the film and each of us brought something different to the table,’ Peele says. ‘I wanted to make myself available as a resource for Nia, but it was easy to support her ownership and decisions as a director.’

The ideas behind the film are both timely and timeless. ‘*Candyman* is an exciting story to tell at any time period because it’s so perennial,’ DaCosta says. ‘The history of violence repeats itself in cycles, and we collectively process trauma and grieve through stories, so it felt like any time could really be the right time to tell the story of *Candyman*. But it’s also a film that speaks directly to this moment in Black life and culture. On one level, the character of Candyman is a myth and a monster, but as we know, America creates monsters out of Black men all the time. It isn’t necessarily who they truly are ... or *why* they are. I was interested in telling the truth about the pain at the center of Black life in America but also to shine a light on the hope and power of Black creativity and community, too.’

Production notes

CANDYMAN

Director: Nia DaCosta
Production Company: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc, Monkeypaw Productions
In association with: Bron Creative
Presented by: Universal Pictures
Executive Producers: David Kern, Aaron L. Gilbert, Jason Cloth
Producers: Ian Cooper, Win Rosenfeld, Jordan Peele
Unit Production Manager: David Kern, Christina Varotsis
1st Assistant Directors: Adam Druzman
Casting: Claire Simon
Screenplay: Jordan Peele, Win Rosenfeld, Nia DaCosta
Based on the film Candyman, written by: Bernard Rose
Based on the short-story ‘The Forbidden’ by: Clive Barker
Director of Photography: John Guleserian
Editor: Catrin Hedström
Production Designer: Cara Brower
Costume Designer: Lizzie Cook
Department Head Make-up: Aimee Lippert-Bastian
Department Head Hair: Jessi Dean
Music: Robert AA Lowe
Sound Designer: Michael Babcock
Production Sound Mixer: Nick Ray Harris
Re-recording Mixer: Michael Babcock
Supervising Sound Editor: Michael Babcock
Stunt Co-ordinators: Mike Fierro, James Fierro

Cast

Yahya Abdul-Mateen II (Anthony McCoy)
Teyonah Parris (Brianna Cartwright)
Nathan Stewart-Jarrett (Troy Cartwright)
Colman Domingo (William Burke)
Kyle Kaminsky (Grady Greenberg)
Vanessa Williams (Anne-Marie McCoy)
Rebecca Spence (Finley Stephens)

Brian King (Clive Privler)
Miriam Moss (Jerrica Cooper)
Carl Clemons-Hopkins (Jameson)
Christiana Clark (Danielle Harrington)
Michael Hargrove (Sherman Fields)
Rodney L. Jones III (Billy)
Heidi Grace Engerman (Haley)
Ireon Roach (Trina)
Breanna Lind (Annika)
Malic White (Boof)
Sarah Wisterman (Celine)
Sarah Lo (Samantha)
Mark Montgomery (Detective Lipez)
Torrey Hanson (Jack Hyde)
Cassie Kramer (librarian)
Cedric Mays Gil (Cartwright)
Hannah Love Jones (young Brianna)
Genesis Denise Hale (Sabrina)
J. Nicole Brooks (Dr Collins)
Pamela Jones (reporter Devlin Sharpe)
Tien Tran (Jane Ji)
Katherine Purdy (Haley’s mom)
Mike Geraghty (Police Officer Jones)
Aaron Crippen (Police Officer Smith)
Dan Fierro (Police Officer Rooney)
Nancy Pender (TV news anchor)
Johnny Westmoreland (Samuel Evans)
Guy Spencer (John Crawley)
Daejon Staeker (‘The Kid’)
Graham Carlson, Teagan Crostreet (video installation children)

USA 2021
90 mins

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

S.O.U.L. Fest 2021

Fri 20-Sun 22 Aug
BFI & Radio Times Television Festival presents:
TV Preview: Vigil + Q&A with cast and creatives
Mon 23 Aug 18:10
UK Premiere: I’ve Been Trying to Tell You
+ Q&A with Alasdair McLellan and Bob Stanley
Fri 3 Sep 18:30, 21:00
Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI
Mon 6 Sep 18:00
Black to Front + Q&A with special guests TBA
Tue 7 Sep 18:00

Doctor Who: The Evil of the Daleks (animated)

Sun 12 Sep 12:00
Preview: Sweetheart + Q&A with director Marley Morrison
Mon 13 Sep 17:50
Prime Suspect: 30th Anniversary (First Series Complete Screening)
Sun 19 Sep 14:00
Lynda La Plante in Conversation
Sun 19 Sep 18:45
60th Anniversary: Whistle Down the Wind +
actor Hayley Mills in Conversation
Sun 3 Oct 12:00



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