



Big Screen Classics

Crooklyn

Crooklyn

Directed by: Spike Lee
©: Universal City Studios Inc.
Production Company:
40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks
In association with: Child Hoods Productions
Presented by: Universal Pictures
Executive Producer: Jon Kilik
Produced by: Spike Lee
Co-producer: Monty Ross
Associate Producers: Joie Susannah Lee, Cinqué Lee
Production Supervisor: Preston L. Holmes
Production Co-ordinator: Caryn Campbell
Production Comptroller: Eric Oden
Accountant: Mike Phillips
Location Managers: Nancy L. Roth, Albert E. Valentine
1st Assistant Director: Michael Ellis
Key 2nd Assistant Director: Tracey L. Hinds
2nd 2nd Assistant Directors: Sarah Gyllenstierna, Lee Davis
Script Supervisor: Shari L. Carpenter
Casting: Robi Reed
Screenplay by: Joie Susannah Lee, Cinqué Lee, Spike Lee
Story by: Joie Susannah Lee
Director of Photography: Arthur Jafa
Camera Operator: Gearey McLeod
Additional Camera Operators: Phil Oetiker, George Pattison, Jeffrey J. Tufano
Steadicam Operators: Anastas N. Michos, Rick Raphael
Louma Crane Operator: Stuart Allen
1st Assistant Camera: Floyd A.B. Rance III
2nd Assistant Camera: Robin Melhuish
Gaffer: Reginald F. Lake
Key Grip: Robert Andres
Still Photography: David Lee
Visual Effects by: Balsmeyer & Everett Inc, Syzygy Digital Cinema
Special Effects Co-ordinator: Steve Kirshoff
Editor: Barry Alexander Brown
Production Design: Wynn Thomas
Art Director: Chris Shriver
Set Decorator: Ted Glass
Leadman: Robin Koenig
Property Master: Kevin C. Ladson
Construction Co-ordinator: Thomas Costabile
Costume Design: Ruth E. Carter
Associate Costume Designer: Donna M. Berwick
Wardrobe Supervisors: Jane E. Myers, Winsome G. McKoy, Ellen Ellis Lee
Key Make-up: Alvechia Ewing
Make-up: Diane Hammond
Key Hairstylist: Larry M. Cherry
Hairstylist: Mary Cooke
Afrocentric Hair Design by: Annu Prestonia
Main/End Titles Designed by:
Balsmeyer & Everett Inc
Colour Timing: Dale Caldwell, Bob McMillian
Colour by: Du Art Laboratories
Prints by: De Luxe
Original Music: Terence Blanchard
Music Supervisor: Alex Steyermark
Sound Design: Skip Lievsay
Sound Mixer: Rolf Pardula
Re-recording Mixer: Tom Fleischman
Dialogue Supervisor: Philip Stockton
Dialogue Editors: Robert Hein, Fred Rosenberg
[Sound] Effects Editor: Eugene Gearty
Stunt Co-ordinator: Jeff Ward

In an article for *Sight and Sound*, cultural theorist bell hooks famously referred to *Crooklyn* as a failure of ‘counter-hegemonic representation’. Originally pitched to mainstream audiences as a family comedy, the film is anything but, revealing itself as a docu-realist drama with moments of humour, and a coming-of-age film that grapples with grief.

A contemporary review

For a number of years now, Spike Lee has made more of a name for himself as an ideologue and entrepreneur than as a filmmaker. Although he’s one of the busiest of directors – six features, in addition to TV commercials, music videos, a production company, a record business, retail stores – his off-screen words and deeds have often commanded as much if not more attention than his work in film. Whatever the personal gain, Lee’s extra-curricular activities have cost him dearly. Acclaimed by the Black community (at least publicly), patronised, condemned and fetishised by the white media, the artist has been swamped by his own creation, a phenomenon otherwise known as Spike Lee.

Crooklyn is Lee’s most personal work since his startling debut eight years ago with *She’s Gotta Have It*, and decidedly his best to date. The semi-autobiographical film, which Lee co-wrote with his sister Joie and younger brother Cinqué, traces the emotional arc of the fictional Carmichael family over a few crucial months during the early 70s, a sentimental interlude that closes in tragedy. Amy Taubin has called the film ‘operatic’, and it’s not for nothing that in one scene the clan’s patriarch and resident tortured artist Woody proclaims that he’s writing a folk opera. Some 20 years after the fact, Lee has done just that. Woody is a purist under siege. A composer and jazz musician, he’s pressured by his wife Carolyn to compromise his art to put food on the table. Although clearly adoring, Carolyn is weary of playing the heavy for both her kids and husband. When Woody complains about her lack of support (he’s just bounced his fifth cheque of the month), she reacts with fury, storming, ‘I can’t even take a piss without six people hanging off my tits,’ and pointedly counting him into the equation.

Bristling with passion, Carolyn is by turns nurturing and punishing, a woman whose frustrations with her family are tempered by overwhelming love. She’s also Lee’s most complicated female character since his first feature, and her eventual departure goes a long way toward explaining the general failings of his other cinematic women. While Woody sneaks the kids sweets and spins out promises, Carolyn is the one who rises at dawn, conjures the meals, and does time from nine to five. Tougher than Woody, and demonstrably less sympathetic, she’s the only parent who’s keeping it together.

For all that *Crooklyn* is a family melodrama, nearly as much time is devoted to the outside action as that rolling about inside the Carmichael brownstone. Lee launches his film with one of his characteristic flourishes, the camera sweeping over a riot of sounds and images, rushing to keep pace with all the children running, jumping and hurtling through these less than mean streets. This is Brooklyn as it used to be, a place where gossiping neighbours outnumber jiving glue sniffers, and racial unease simmers but rarely burns. More to the point, this is Brooklyn as remembered by its children.

Cast:

Alfre Woodard (*Carolyn*)
Delroy Lindo (*Woody*)
David Patrick Kelly (*Tony Eyes/Jim*)
José Zuñiga (*Tommy La La*)
Isaiah Washington (*Vic*)
Ivelka Reyes (*Jessica*)
Spike Lee (*Snuffy*)
N. Jeremi Duru (*right hand man*)
Frances Foster (*Aunt Song*)
Norman Matlock (*Clem*)
Patriece Nelson (*Viola*)
Joie Susannah Lee (*Aunt Maxine*)
Vondie Curtis Hall (*Uncle Brown*)
Tse-Mach Washington (*Joseph*)
Carlton Williams (*Clinton*)
Christopher Knowings (*Nate*)
Sharif Rashed (*Wendell*)
Zelda Harris (*Troy*)
Tiasha Reyes (*Minnie*)
Raymond Reliford (*Barry*)
Harvey Williams (*Delray*)
Pee Wee Love (*Possom, Greg*)
Bokeem Woodbine (*Richard*)
Mildred Clinton (*Mrs Columbo*)
Emelise Aleandri (*Florence*)
Omar Scroggins (*Cecil*)
Danielle K. Thomas (*Kesha*)
Asia Gilyard (*Cathy*)
Carmen Tillery (*Brenda*)
Taneal Royal (*Ray-Ray*)
Kendell Freeman (*Rick*)
Kewanna Bonaparte (*Peanut*)
Gary Perez (*Juan*)
Arthur French (*West Indian store manager*)
Manny Perez (*Hector*)
RuPaul (*bodega woman*)
Yolande Morris (*Sheila*)
Dan Grimaldi (*con ed man*)
Susan Jacks (*Tammy*)
Christopher Wynkoop (*TV evangelist*)
Rene Ojeda (*Louie*)
Tracy Vilar (*Monica*)
Keith Johnson (*Cornell*)
Michele Shay (*drunk woman*)
Hector M. Ricci Jr (*Tito*)
Nadijah Abdul-Khalia (*Vicki*)
Bruce Hawkins (*funeral mourner*)
Richard Whiten, Michelle Rosario (*neighbours*)
Maurie A. Chandler (*Judy*)
Monet A. Chandler (*Jody*)
Zay Smith (*boy in street*)
Derrick Peart, Ulysses Terrero, Johnette Cook,
Desirée Murray (*supermarket customers*)
USA 1994
114 mins
Digital

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**SIGHT
AND
SOUND**

One of the remarkable things about this remarkable film is that much of it is seen through the eyes of a nine-year-old African American girl. Troy is both the film's conduit and its wellspring, the one for whom the world either slows down to a sensuous crawl, or squeezes together for a surreal kink. Devoted to her mother, enamoured with her daddy, Troy's gender makes her an outsider within the litter as well as, the script suggests, a keener witness to the family romance. For all that the boys of the Carmichael Five struggle to rock their world, it's Troy who signifies the loudest.

Shaped more by sensation than by narrative thrust, *Crooklyn* unfolds through a succession of shifting scenes, some little more than snapshots. With one striking exception (Troy's trip south, a sequence lasting roughly 20 minutes and related entirely through the use of an anamorphic lens), the mood is familiar, intimate, soulful. Arthur Jafa's camera keeps close to characters but doesn't crowd them, while the extraordinary soundtrack, as lush as that in *Goodfellas*, eases everyone on their way.

The original definition of melodrama is drama with music, and there's scarcely a moment in *Crooklyn* that isn't punctuated by either Terence Blanchard's plangent score or the wild style of over three dozen hot licks, pop hits, ballads, lamentations and sundry witless ditties. As much as the dialogue or lighting, it's music that shapes the film, filling in texture and building density. From Curtis Mayfield to the Partridge Family, the Carmichaels are awash in music, a fact that has as much to do with Woody's calling as with the cultural moment in which the director himself came of age. Long before he found his voice in film, Lee had discovered the pulse and pleasures of Brooklyn, New York.

Manohla Dargis, *Sight and Sound*, December 1994

Big Screen Classics

One Way or Another

De cierta manera
Mon 20 Oct 18:20; Sun 2 Nov 18:20;
Tue 4 Nov 20:30

Black Girl

La noire de...
Mon 20 Oct 20:45; Thu 30 Oct 18:30;
Fri 28 Nov 12:30

Touki Bouki

Tue 21 Oct 18:30; Tue 11 Nov 20:50

Medicine for Melancholy

Wed 22 Oct 18:20 (+ intro by film curator and writer
Jonathan Ali); Thu 6 Nov 18:15

Crooklyn

Wed 22 Oct 20:30; Sat 1 Nov 20:40;
Sat 8 Nov 20:45; Fri 21 Nov 18:10

Killer of Sheep

Thu 23 Oct 20:50; Tue 28 Oct 21:00;
Sun 16 Nov 18:30; Thu 20 Nov 12:20

A Different Image + Perfect Image

Fri 24 Oct 18:20; Wed 5 Nov 18:10

Pressure

Sat 25 Oct 20:30; Fri 7 Nov 18:10;
Fri 14 Nov 14:40; Sun 23 Nov 18:15

Soleil Ô

Sun 26 Oct 14:30; Sat 15 Nov 20:35;
Mon 24 Nov 20:30

Mangrove

Mon 27 Oct 20:30; Sat 22 Nov 17:30

The Passion of Remembrance

+ Step Forward Youth

Wed 29 Oct 18:00 (+ intro); Tue 25 Nov 20:45

Atlantics

Atlantique
Fri 31 Oct 20:40; Sun 9 Nov 18:30;
Tue 18 Nov 14:40; Sat 29 Nov 12:00

Daughters of the Dust

Mon 3 Nov 18:15; Sun 30 Nov 12:20

Ethnic Notions + Looking for Langston

Mon 10 Nov 20:45; Wed 19 Nov 18:10 (+ intro)

Saint Omer

Wed 12 Nov 17:45 (+ intro by Xavier Alexandre
Pillai, BFI TV Programmer); Mon 17 Nov 14:30;
Thu 27 Nov 20:35

Haitian Corner

Thu 13 Nov 20:55; Wed 26 Nov 18:10 (+ intro)