



AFRICAN ODYSSEYS

Sambizanga

Anti-colonial struggle is vividly captured in this realistic adaptation of José Luandino Vieira's 1961 novella 'A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier' ('The Real Life of Domingos Xavier'). Unfolding in the weeks leading up to the inception of the guerrilla war for independence (it was actually shot in neighbouring Congo while the liberation struggle still raged), *Sambizanga* charts the desperate search of a young mother for her husband following his arrest. This passionate drama illustrates the cruelty of the Portuguese administration alongside the courage and sacrifice of ordinary Angolans during colonial rule. Following in the footsteps of the great Ousmane Sembène, Sarah Maldoror began working in theatre and later studied with the Moscow Film Academy under renowned director Mark Donskoi.

Restored by Cineteca di Bologna and The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project at L'Image Retrouvée (Paris) from the 35mm original negatives, in association with Éditions René Chateau and the family of Sarah Maldoror. Funding provided by Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation. This restoration is part of the African Film Heritage Project, an initiative created by The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project, the FEPACI and UNESCO – in collaboration with Cineteca di Bologna – to help locate, restore and disseminate African cinema.

Presented as part of Cinema Rediscovered on Tour, a Watershed project in collaboration with Black Cinema Project, Ajabu Ajabu and Hyde Park Picturehouse with support from BFI awarding funds from The National Lottery and MUBI.

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Sambizanga is as beautiful as a Caravaggio painting. Maldoror was born in France to parents from Guadeloupe, studied film in Moscow with Ousmane Sembène, and assisted Gillo Pontecorvo on *The Battle of Algiers* (1966).

Shot in Congo, which stands in for Angola, *Sambizanga* follows a woman, Maria, searching for her husband, who's been arrested for his activism in the Angolan liberation struggle in the early 1960s. The woman is defiant and untiring. She carries her child on her back. Like Rosetta in the Dardennes' film, or Imamura's *Insect Woman*, she seems to have an engine within her. She never stops.

If some of the anti-colonial Third Cinema films of the 70s feel preachy now, Maldoror's does not. She said, 'I have no use for preachy militant films.' Maybe that's why *Sambizanga* still feels open, and tender.

Like Caravaggio, the director seems to love touch, and flickering light. Tenderness mixed with politics. It's a weird comparison, but the songs in the film are like those in John Ford's work: golden and about togetherness. Because of its visual beauty, variety of textures and affecting humanity, *Sambizanga* is a masterpiece.

Mark Cousins, *Sight & Sound*, bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound

SAMBIZANGA

Director: Sarah Maldoror
Production Company: Isabelle Films
Production Manager: Jean Velter
Screenplay: Sarah Maldoror, Maurice Pons, Claude Agostini
Based on the novel A vida verdadeira de Domingos Xavier by:
Luandino Vieira
Director of Photography: Claude Agostini
Editor: Georges Klotz

Cast:
Domingos Oliveira (Domingos)
Elisa Andrade (Maria)
Dino Abelino (Zito)
Jean M'vondo (Petelo)
Benoit Moutsila (Chico)
Tala Ngongo (Miguel)
Lopes Rodrigues (Mussunda)
Henriette Meya (Babiana)
Manuel Videira (PIDE agent)
Ana Wilson

Angola/France 1972
97 mins



WORLD CINEMA PROJECT

REGULAR PROGRAMME

Silent Cinema: The Primrose Path + The Kid Reporter + intro by BFI curator Bryony Dixon
Sun 4 Sep 15:30
Course: Celebrating 15 Years of African Odysseys
Wed 7 Sep 18:30; Wed 14 Sep 18:30; Wed 21 Sep 18:30; Wed 28 Sep 18:30
Art in the Making: Graham Sutherland and John Piper + intro by John Wyver
Thu 8 Sep 18:20
Seniors’ Free Talk: African Film on Channel 4
Tue 13 Sep 11:00
Seniors’ Free Archive Matinee: Wend Kuuni + intro by Rod Stoneman
Tue 13 Sep 14:00
Projecting the Archive: All In! + intro by film historian Mark Newell + Claude Deputises
Tue 13 Sep 18:20
Experimenta: Journeys from Berlin/1971 + introduction by Michelle Pierson, Senior Lecturer in Film at Kings College
Wed 14 Sep 18:00

Woman with a Movie Camera: Preview: Silent Land (Cicha ziemia)
Mon 19 Sep 18:00
Film Wallahs: Malam + discussion hosted by Anuj Radia from Film Wallahs
Thu 22 Sep 18:10
Relaxed Screening: The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (Les Parapluies de Cherbourg) + intro and discussion
Mon 26 Sep 18:20
BFI Flare: Bent 25th Anniversary + Q&A with director Sean Matthias, actor Sir Ian McKellen and writer Martin Sherman
Tue 27 Sep 18:10
Terror Vision: The Sender
Thu 29 Sep 18:10
Madly, Deeply: A Celebration of Alan Rickman, hosted by Mark Kermode
Sun 2 Oct 16:00
Truly Madly Deeply
Sun 2 Oct 18:20

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