

An Insider/Outsider View of Perry Henzell's *No Place Like Home*

Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) is a multi-arts center located in Brooklyn, New York. BAM's Rose Cinemas theater was abuzz with the chatter of family, friends, and fans of Perry Henzell--this was the U.S. Premiere of his second film, *No Place Like Home*, which he had begun a year after his 1972 film, *The Harder They Come*.

This was my first visit to Brooklyn since my relocation to Northern Virginia in the early eighties, therefore, my first visit to BAM as a new member was thrilling.

Applause greeted the first images, especially when “Henzell” appeared on the screen, whether preceded by Perry or Justine, his daughter, who was instrumental in completing this film for her father. Yes, it was definitely fan night and I was a fan!

Initially, the grainy images on screen gave me pause, then I recalled this was a lovingly restored film that had been lost for many years, so I looked beyond that ready for the story to unfold. The audio was outstanding.

So much has been written already about Perry’s films, books, and other creative endeavors that there is no need to repeat the reviews and tributes; as a fellow creative soul, *je comprends*.

My impressions of this film: it was languorous, reminiscent of Quentin Tarantino’s, *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood*, where the images seep into your bones; then you get it. Notably, the bar scene with the dancer onstage knocked Kim Basinger's striptease in *9 1/2 Weeks* off the map—same rhythms, but no comparison to the sexy, body heat generated in Perry’s version!

Elsewhere, I found Grace Jones' debut refreshing and visually stunning, while the main characters, Susan O'Meara, Carl Bradshaw, and Countryman gave standout performances; Countryman was magnificent. The Rastas' philosophical outlook and commentaries spoken then are as relevant today and they serve as reminders to us that what goes around comes around. Personally, I can attest to their generous spirit from being rescued by them on a hillside near Kingston, with a shredded tire and a dead battery brought back to life with ingenuity and determination, to being introduced by a fellow Rasta to Floyd Forbes, the owner of the Pelican Bar in Parottee Bay.

When I expressed my desire to Floyd to meet the Henzells to convey my admiration of Perry’s work and to seek a copy of *No Place Like Home*, which could not be found anywhere on the internet, except for its trailer, he immediately and generously gave me Jason Henzell’s phone number in support and said he had a “good spirit.” I got his phone number too, but I don’t think Floyd is into texting from his spot, *One Step Short of Heaven*, the title of a poem tacked on the wooden wall of Pelican Bar, with the engraved names of visitors behind it and a simple attribution: “*To my soul mate from Tina.*”

I was staying at Jakes, the Henzell's family-owned hotel in Treasure Beach, where I was determined to continue my exploration of fading childhood memories to gain a deeper appreciation of this island's beauty that Perry had captured in the film's stunning images. I met members of the Henzell family: Jason, Justine, and the effervescent matriarch Sally, a creative soul in her own right; all generous spirits. Sally had told me that the U.S. Premiere would be at BAM on August 23, 2019, as I limped out of Jakes balancing on a makeshift broomstick cane on my way home (a tale for another day!). I wasn't going to miss seeing this film, which is why I was at BAM's screening, after which Justine responded to questions giving context to the film and what it represented to her father.

Now, the outsiders' views of this film are generally favorable and stated in terms, such as, "wonderful" and "interesting." There are numerous reviews written about Perry's works and this film, but when I read the New York Times review, dated August 22nd, that stated the film "is concerned with the interactions between Jamaicans and white visitors," I agreed there was this aspect, but I felt it lacked a Jamaican perspective and I wanted to express mine.

My insider's view, as an expat Jamaican who left the island in the late sixties, with fond memories of family excursions from town to country, gatherings on the beach, and hot, spicy patties on the way home, the movie was a warm home-coming. And when the reggae beats hit as the soundtrack to the film, toe-tapping and hip-swaying in seat was unstoppable; for me, Desmond Dekker's, *Israelites*, made the memories flood back!

So, thank you Perry Henzell, I wish I had met you back in the day. I feel your spirit and celebrate your creativity. It lives on. I've read your books, *Power Game* and *Cane*, and your essay to accompany the photographs in *Yes Rasta*. So, let me end with Yellowman's musical assessment: *Jamaica nice, Jamaica nice, Jamaica nice, Jamaica nice...take me home country roads....*

CTaBois,
Artist, Curator,
TABOIS GALERIE
McLean, Virginia
September 5, 2019