

Hulu, Onyx Collective and Searchlight Pictures Present

A Questlove Jawn
Summer of Soul

(...OR, WHEN THE REVOLUTION COULD NOT BE TELEVISED)

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<http://www.searchlightpictures.com/press>

Running time: 117 minutes

Rating: PG-13

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SUMMER OF SOUL
(...OR, WHEN THE REVOLUTION COULD NOT BE TELEVISED)

In his acclaimed debut as a filmmaker, Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson presents a powerful and transporting documentary—part music film, part historical record created around an epic event that celebrated Black history, culture and fashion. Over the course of six weeks in the summer of 1969, just one hundred miles south of Woodstock, The Harlem Cultural Festival was filmed in Mount Morris Park (now Marcus Garvey Park). The footage was never seen and largely forgotten—until now. SUMMER OF SOUL shines a light on the importance of history to our spiritual well-being and stands as a testament to the healing power of music during times of unrest, both past and present. The feature includes never-before-seen concert performances by Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Sly & the Family Stone, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Mahalia Jackson, B.B. King, The 5th Dimension and more.

“Summer of Soul (...or, When the Revolution Could Not be Televised),” is the first official project under the recently announced Onyx Collective brand. The winner of both the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at Sundance Film Festival will be released theatrically by Searchlight Pictures and will begin streaming on Hulu in the U.S. on July 2, 2021. The film will also stream internationally through the Star offering on Disney+ on a date to be confirmed.

Summer of Soul: (...Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised), A Vulcan Productions Inc. Production, In Association With Concordia Studio, Play/Action Pictures, LarryBilly Productions, Produced by Mass Distraction Media and RadicalMedia, is directed by Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, and produced by Joseph Patel p.g.a., Robert Fyvolent p.g.a., and David Dinerstein p.g.a. Executive producers are Jen Isaacson, Jon Kamen, Dave Sirulnick, Jody Allen, Ruth Johnston, Rocky Collins, Jannat Gargi, Beth Hubbard, Davis Guggenheim, Laurene Powell Jobs, Jeffrey Lurie, Marie Therese Guirgis, David Barse, Ron Eisenberg, Sheila C. Johnson and Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson.

THE BIRTH OF THE HARLEM CULTURAL FESTIVAL

“A song isn’t just a song. It can capture a moment in time. It will tell you a story, if you look close enough. The story of “Summer of Soul” is my voice.”

-Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson

Stevie Wonder. Sly and the Family Stone. Nina Simone. B.B. King. The Staple Singers. The 5th Dimension. David Ruffin. Mahalia Jackson. Gladys Knight and the Pips. Nearly overlapping with the 1969 Woodstock festival 100 miles away, these seminal Black artists and many more performed for over 300,000 people at a once-in-a-lifetime event. From June 29th to August 24th, The Harlem Cultural Festival played for six Sundays in Harlem’s Mount Morris Park. Unlike that other music festival upstate, the footage from the Harlem Cultural Festival could not find a home that summer of 1969, and instead sat in a basement for over 50 years, keeping this momentous celebration hidden until now.

In his directorial debut, Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson seeks to recover the meaningful spirit of the past – when the biggest names in African-American music, culture, and politics came together for six consecutive weeks for a landmark, transformational Black cultural event.

By way of intimate, newly restored footage, and recent interviews with attendees and the artists who performed, SUMMER OF SOUL documents the moment when the old school of the Civil Rights movement and new school of the Black Power movement shared the same stage, highlighted by an array of genres including soul, R&B, gospel, blues, jazz, and Latin.

The initial directive for the festival was laid out by the City of New York and emcee Tony Lawrence, a charismatic lounge singer and performer himself, to commemorate the one-year anniversary of Martin Luther King’s assassination under the banner of Black unity. New York City had thrown smaller versions of The Harlem Cultural Festival in ’67 and ’68, though the smaller events felt more like casual, block parties. But the festival in 1969 was supersized – some thought the expanded version was intended to divert the local population from additional rioting brought on by the anniversary of King’s death. New York City Mayor John Lindsay walked the streets of Harlem in a bid to

quell the unrest, and became a key backer of the festival. Television veteran Hal Tulchin was brought on to shoot six concerts that summer, inking a sponsorship deal with Maxwell House Coffee to finance the giant production. Tulchin decided to face the stage westward to take advantage of the sun's natural light, ultimately, so he could tape the entire festival from start to finish. Though NYPD officers were present at each concert, Lawrence enlisted the help of the Black Panthers to act as security – to protect citizens of Harlem from the police.

New York City's affiliate television station WNEW Metromedia Channel 5 (now FOX) broadcast two hour-long specials of the footage, but after that summer, Tulchin was told there was little interest in a "Black Woodstock." "It was a peanuts operation because nobody really cared about Black shows," Tulchin told Smithsonian in 2007, "but I knew it was going to be like real estate, and sooner or later someone would have interest in it." His little-seen footage has remained in storage for the past 50 years, keeping this singular event in American history hidden – until now.

A RESURRECTION OF A REVOLUTION

From the outset, capturing this important event required great dedication on the part of multiple creators. To record the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival, Tulchin used four cameras loaded up with 2-inch videotape, a decision which would later prove to be fortuitous due to the format's preservational qualities. Robert Fyvolent, writer (UNTRACEABLE) and producer (FRANCESCO), originally heard about the footage from a friend in 2016.

Says Fyvolent, "a college classmate told me about the existence of footage, about an iconic concert series that took place in Harlem around the same time as Woodstock. Intrigued, I tracked down the original owner of the footage, Hal Tulchin, and developed a relationship that lasted many years." After sharing the footage with producer David Dinerstein, (A PRIVATE WAR, Academy Award nominated WINTER ON FIRE: UKRAINE'S RIGHT FOR FREEDOM), Fyvolent and Dinerstein began a dialogue with

Tulchin about producing a feature documentary. After Tulchin's passing in August 2017, Fyvolent and Dinerstein were informed by Tulchin's widow that Tulchin had signed their contract for the rights to the footage just before his death, in the hopes the film would serve as his legacy. Says Dinerstein, "The footage had been sitting in Tulchin's basement in Bronxville, New York. Once we had the rights, we began to develop a pitch book and sizzle reel."

The producers put together an ideal list of directors and Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson was at the very top. Says Fyvolent, "we'd followed Ahmir's career for the last 25 years, and knew he was an extraordinary storyteller with his finger on the cultural pulse. Not only did he have an encyclopedic knowledge of film, his voice in particular delivers an immersive quality that puts viewers in the moment of this historical event." Continues Dinerstein, "It was crucial to find a director who understood music and its history. Someone who could put the footage and its relevance in context. Ahmir embodied all of those things."

For Thompson, putting this story into the proper context was paramount. He describes the unwanted footage as an example of Black erasure, and could not believe there was no record or documentation of this incredible historical, cultural event. "The fact that 40 hours of footage was kept from the public is living proof that revisionist history exists – it was incredibly important to me to get that history right," says Thompson. "Blacks have always been a creative force of our culture. But sometimes those efforts are easily dismissed. I want to make sure that Black erasure doesn't happen during my lifetime anymore, and the film was an opportunity to work towards that cause."

Thompson continues, "there's no way you're going to tell me that all these artists did these performances back in the day and there's no documentation of it whatsoever. It goes to show that revisionist history and Black erasure - be it mean-spirited or on purpose or by accident - is very real."

Once Thompson was officially on board, Fyvolent and Dinerstein greenlit the project and proceeded to round out the creative team: Joseph Patel, a long-time friend of Ahmir's and former Head

of Content at Vevo, The Fader, Vice Media and MTV was hired as a third producer, Radical Media was hired as a creative partner and was responsible for production services and music licensing, and all of the key department heads were hired including editor Joshua L. Pearson (WHAT HAPPENED, MISS SIMONE?, KEITH RICHARDS: UNDER THE INFLUENCE), music supervisor Randall Poster (THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL, WOLF OF WALL STREET, THE VELVET UNDERGROUND), co-producer Cora Atkinson, and archivist Lizzy McGlynn.

The producers worked closely with Thompson to help shape the story. Says Patel, “the thing I’ve always loved about Ahmir is that he is still a fan. It was true when I first met him and it’s true now. He has a way brandishing a fan’s curiosity about culture and wants to share that knowledge with those around him. It’s a unique combination that resonates with nerds and casual fans alike, and makes him such a genuine storyteller – you can see it in all of his work, from his albums with The Roots to his many producing credits to all four of the books he’s written. We’d spend time in his apartment and talk about the concert – the music, the performers, specific songs. Ahmir is the kind of creative who obsesses over the small, fun details first. He’s the guy who, in making The Roots albums, thinks about the artwork, album title and the liner notes before they’ve recorded a single note. So we knew very early which performers and even which songs we wanted to feature but then we also started talking about what was happening socio-politically in America at that time. His idea was part concert film, part substantive history about a specific time and place in American history.”

Music Supervisor Randall Poster had been a longtime fan of Thompson. “Ahmir brings such a depth of musical knowledge that’s just so compelling. He constructed a subtle percussive through line throughout the film, where we see Stevie playing drums, then there’s the conversation about Sly Stone’s drummer, then into Ray Barretto and Mongo Santamaría. Behind the cultural commentary and the exciting performances, the film plays as a deep-seated percussive tribute.”

THE REVOLUTION REPEATS

“When things started to unravel around April and May 2020, and especially in June, I had a casual observation: Isn't it weird? The same circumstances that brought this concert together are now happening again while we're trying to make this movie?”

-Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson

In 1969, vast socio-political headwinds swirling around the country came to Harlem's Mount Morris Park. During the 60s, Americans witnessed the Vietnam War, a rising drug epidemic, and the assassinations of John F Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Robert Kennedy. Only a year earlier, in the summer of 1968, parts of New York City went up in flames following the death of Martin Luther King Jr. While the film focuses on performances, SUMMER OF SOUL uses past footage as a catapult for real-time change and reflection.

“After 50 years, are we truly back at square one with the exact same unrest, protests, deaths, shootings, and injustices? That answer is a resounding ‘yes,’” says Thompson.

While many will describe SUMMER OF SOUL as “timely,” in actuality, it is a searing testament to the cyclical and constant nature of racial prejudice. The same urban decay inflicted upon Harlem during the 1960s exists in urban areas housing people of color across the nation today. “We knew early on in the filmmaking process that this had to be more than a concert film, says producer Patel. “There was simply too much happening off-stage, in Harlem, in New York, in America, for us to focus on just what was happening on-stage. The wider we zoomed out, the more similarities we saw with what was happening in America even today, 50 years later.”

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED: EDITING AND SOUND

The film's parenthetical title is a reference to Gil Scott-Heron's 1971 poem and song “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” on his compilation album of the same name. The song's title was

originally a popular slogan of the Black Power movement in the 1960s and was a direct response to the spoken word piece “When the Revolution Comes” by The Last Poets.

“We talked a lot as a team, how we wanted to merge the big political frame with the on-the-ground audience member’s perspective, and the turning point in Black music that this concert represented,” explains editor Joshua L. Pearson of his work with Thompson, Fyvolent, Dinerstein, and Patel. In addition to interviewing the original artists who performed at The Harlem Cultural Festival, Thompson also interviewed a number of current performers including Chris Rock, Sheila E, Lin-Manuel Miranda and Selemu Meskela to help explore the film’s vital civil rights message.

In October 2019 the production team moved the footage to a boutique lab uniquely qualified to clean and restore the 40-plus hours of videotape. Fortunately, the footage remained largely intact due to the self-preserving qualities of the 2-inch videotape medium. Pearson explains, “it seems like a miracle that the original sound mix is so great, because they only recorded it as a mono track. I think they did run a backup recording deck, but they had to get the mix right the first and only time.”

“After we cut the film, we had a music mixer, Jimmy Douglass, enhance the mono track and create a stereo sound. He did some balancing and sweetening, but the tracks don’t sound that different from the original raw recordings.” Pearson further recalls, “As for picture, that went through our colorist, Yohance Brown, who increased the resolution and colored everything, but again, the quality of the raw footage was already surprisingly great, especially considering that it was actually shot video tape, not film.”

Music festivals, concerts, gatherings, and record releases helped shape Thompson throughout his life. Thompson couldn’t stop thinking about how Woodstock shaped a generation, and wondered if The Harlem Cultural Festival had that same level of awareness, how it might have changed that whole generation of Black culture. Thompson originally considered naming the project “Black Woodstock,” but later returned to its original title, SUMMER OF SOUL, adding the nod to Gil Scott Heron. His vision: to

define the importance of this once-in-a-lifetime event through its own achievements. “The footage was definitely the butterfly wing, if you will, that told me the film needed its own name,” recalls Thompson. “Hearing Tulchin describe how heartbreaking it was that the footage was unsellable, I felt like we needed a proper title for our film, rather than continuing to connect it to the Woodstock Festival in upstate New York.”

CATCHING THE SPIRIT: MUSIC AS HEALING

“Screaming is just as therapeutic as any other form of cathartic release.”

-Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson

In participant interviews for the film, a loud refrain echoes through SUMMER OF SOUL: everyone remembers how beautiful it was to see their community gathered for The Harlem Cultural Festival. Those remembering that summer felt an overwhelming sense of pride to see so many African-Americans united together for such a triumphant event: “The ultimate Black BBQ,” shares one attendee. For those watching the Harlem Music Festival, the occasion acted as a balm for the years and decades of hurt and dehumanization.

“[Writer] Greg Tate and I were talking about gospel performances and free jazz, he said that there's really not much difference between Mahalia catching the spirit and Sonny Sharrock catching the spirit when he did that crazy guitar solo. Not to mention David Ruffin screaming,” says Thompson. “You might have to play some atonal notes. You might have to scream in unorthodox manners on the microphone to get your therapy,” says Thompson. “That's something we also wanted to explain: not having access to proper mental health care can sometimes come out in the music. It was very important for us to leave those performances uninterrupted, so that you could see that.”

PASSING THE BATON: MAHALIA JACKSON

While attendees made the event a familial affair by bringing food and picnic blankets, they also connected on a deeper level at the festival, experiencing a collective, spiritual high. In a bold move, Thompson and Pearson placed the festival's climactic gospel performances directly at the film's center. "We were basically trying to represent the evolution of Black music, not necessarily in a linear way: from its roots in gospel, to the blues and feel-good soul, to the futuristic hybrid of soul represented by Sly Stone, through to the activist music of the late 60s," explains Pearson. "But gospel ended up in the middle because it's importantly heavy, telling the story of the MLK killing for instance, but we wanted to start off on an upbeat energetic way. And the gospel in the middle becomes the pivot point or fulcrum where Black music and Black identity tip over into a new post-MLK world."

During the performances of The Edwin Hawkins Singers' "O Happy Day", The Staple Singers' "Help Me Jesus", and Mahalia Jackson's "Lord Search My Heart" — the camera peers out into the crowd to show the joy, the beaming faces, and energized dancing and self-healing convulsions showing how the music carried a mentally replenishing power to heal.

At one point, Jesse Jackson and Ben Branch's organization Operation Breadbasket comes on stage to deliver a musically accompanied sermon. Jackson recalls the tragic night of King's assassination at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, when that same evening, King had delivered his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" address at Mason Temple. That night, King had requested Mahalia to sing his favorite song — "Precious Lord" — for the banquet. Jackson's remembrance gives way to Mavis Staples and Mahalia teaming on "Precious Lord." The rapturous outpouring from the established-Gospel legend of Mahlia, and the new voice who would mix the genre with R&B and blues, Staples, marked the passing of the baton from one generation of artists to the next. From the past Civil Rights movement to the Black Power crusade.

A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM: HITSVILLE USA

Stevie Wonder and David Ruffin, products of Motown's Hitsville USA system, each had a style intended to appeal to both Black and white America, and both were in the process of remodeling their careers in the summer of '69. Ruffin had recently parted ways with The Temptations and was forging ahead as a solo artist, while Wonder was moving from the feel-good love songs of his earlier days to a politically tinged funk sound. Nowhere is the bursting of Wonder's new identity felt more than in the film's cold open, where he unleashes a drum solo whose every strike clears the way for the oncoming philosophies that would define his later career.

"It was Ahmir's vision, and we all agreed unanimously, that the drum solo should open the movie," says Pearson. "As a drummer of course he loved seeing Stevie drum, and he recognized that not many people realize Stevie is such an incredible drummer... it was just such a surprising and forceful way to introduce this film, and as time went on, we used it as a bed for introducing the themes of the film." Thompson wanted to blend visions of changing musical styles, Black political activism, and top civil rights leaders all to the rhythm of Wonder's ear-splitting, generation-defining drum beats.

HARLEM'S LATINX MUSIC HERITAGE

Harlem, then and today, is home to a bustling Latinx community. "A Nuyoricán is someone of Puerto Rican ancestry that is growing up in New York – it's influenced by both Puerto Rican culture and what's happening in New York," explains Luis A. Miranda, Jr. "And in music, it's prevalent because so much of the salsa or the pachanga or the babalu happened in New York with Puerto Rican New Yorkers."

South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, Puerto Rican percussionist Ray Barretto and Cuban percussionist Mongo Santamaria demonstrated the diasporic voices, long-present in Harlem, now finding their way into contemporary Black, Afro-Latino, and Latinx music. "What's really also interesting about Mongo [Santamaria] at this festival at this time in Harlem in the 60s is he is the nexus of the Black

and Brown communities that make up uptown New York. He is an Afro-Cuban and his first hit 'Watermelon Man' is where Cuban music meets jazz," says Lin-Manuel Miranda.

"The communal heritage between Black and Brown people in Harlem remained as strong during 2020's Black Lives Matters protests as the 1960s and before. There was a collective political pursuit for equal rights. It's something that's so exciting when you watch that footage from the Harlem festival and you see Ray and you see Mongo playing because we have a shared struggle, but we also have a shared joy," surmises Lin-Manuel.

Says Patel, "We knew that a lot of the issues that Black and Brown folks were experiencing in 1969 had not changed at all in 50 years, and that was going to be a through-line in our documentary. It was important to give context to what was happening on stage. When we spoke to the actual attendees about the Festival, so many had such cherished, specific memories.. We showed them the footage that had not been seen in 50 years thinking they'd get a kick out of it - little did we know how moving of an experience it would be for them. And that's when we started to hone in on the idea of memory and why preserving this history was so important."

A NEW KIND OF BLACK BAND: SLY & THE FAMILY STONE

Probably no artist encapsulated this period of transition more than the mix-gendered, mixed-raced race supergroup, Sly and the Family Stone, the only act to play both Woodstock and the Harlem Cultural Festival, a fitting fact for a band that seemed to straddle the two separate worlds, and gave new definition to Black artists. "Because clearly that performance was a tester. No Black artist in their right mind would have come on stage in their street clothes," observes Thompson. "You're not wearing a tuxedo, and you got a white boy playing drums in a Black band, and you have women playing with you? For the first four songs Sly played, anybody over the age of 21, their mouths were just dropped. 'Who are these space aliens?'"

HOMECOMING: THE 5TH DIMENSION

With a weekly capacity of 50,000 people, the festival provided the artists who performed with the kind of deserved stadium rock adulation usually reserved for mainstream white entertainers. While watching the footage of their euphoric 1969 performance, Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis Jr. of the 5th Dimension recall how they were often perceived as a “white group” due to their vocal style, isolating them from African-American listeners.

Their set allowed them to perform for a Black crowd in a way that felt like a sacred homecoming. “Billy Davis’ vocals were heavy on what I call the James Brown cathartic spiritual yell in a way you don't hear in any other 5th Dimension performance,” observes Thompson. “It's interesting to see what happens when Black artists are performing for Black audiences, which they rarely got a chance to do in that magnitude. You see a difference.”

Thompson personally identified with the kind of code switching Black artists often infuse into their performances. When playing at festivals, The Roots would often act as the connection between various acts, deciding what kind of sound would bridge the gap between them, and he kept this in mind while building the arc of the film. “We could be opening for Beck, and I know I gotta steer the ship this way. And then, three months later we’re with Wu-Tang or A Tribe Called Quest and we need to steer another direction. But then, next week we’re with Rage Against the Machine and we gotta steer *that* direction. So I could identify with having to change your stripes every other show.”

HARLEM ON THE MOON: BLACK AMERICA’S NEW POLITICAL FUTURE

“Progress was being made in 1969, but there was still so far to go. The war on poverty, job equality education, all those things. To the Harlem community, there were a lot more important issues than putting a man on the moon.”

-Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson

1969 represented a formative moment in Black America with regards to politics, heritage, and music. The bedrock non-violent strategy of the Civil Rights movement receded to a charged Black Power

philosophy. African-Americans transitioned from suit and ties to bell-bottom pants and dashiki shirts (Reverend Jesse Jackson, normally part of Martin Luther King's black suited inner-circle can be seen wearing a dashiki during his appearance). Chemically relaxed hair gave way to natural afros. "It smelled like Afro-Sheen and chicken," remembers an attendee of the festival. And younger African-Americans began defining themselves separate from a white lens.

The Apollo 11 moon landing occurred on July 20, the same day Stevie Wonder, David Ruffin, and Gladys Knight and the Pips took to the stage. But the crowd at the Harlem Cultural Festival was largely ambivalent to the news. "That was the very first eyebrow raise. It was the initial spark to say, 'hey guys. I think there's a bigger story here than just a concert going on,'" recalls Thompson. "We asked ourselves whether we'd get penalized if we showed less music performances in order to investigate the background of what was happening here. Because that's something that I don't think the world knows about. The moon landing discovery was the very first thread that put everything in perspective for us."

TO BE YOUNG GIFTED AND BLACK

"Open your heart to what I mean, we must begin to tell our young, there's a world waiting for you, yours is the quest that's just begun."

-Nina Simone, "To Be Young Gifted and Black"

Nina Simone delivered a sharp edge in her fearless set, wherein she sung her anthem "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" for one of the song's first public performances. Of great importance is how the composition articulated the tenor of Black America as it transitioned into the 1970s. "In the whole world you know there's a million boys and girls who are young, gifted and Black. And that's a fact," crooned Simone.

Simone brought the concert together with her unique combination of almost preacher-like speech, powerful quotes from a poem by David Nelson of the Last Poets, and extraordinary gifts as a musician and vocalist. It was Simone who stepped onstage and addressed the crowd, "are you ready

Black people?," solidifying the spirit of the rapturous crowd. Through her performance, she provided a further affirmation to the defiant rephrase of the era: "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud."

Of Simone's performance, Thompson says, "Black people, pre-1968, during the Civil Rights era, identified as 'Negro.' They believed in turning the other cheek. They were slightly more conservative." Continues Thompson, "then you have people slightly younger (under the age of 23) who were very impatient, very demanding. They were about bucking the system. They referred to themselves as 'Black.' They had a sharper edge to their form of protest. And Simone spoke to that."

Continues Thompson, "I think people have a tendency to lump the Civil Rights movement into one giant category. That a Malcolm X follower, or a Black Panthers follower, or Martin Luther King follower are of the same ilk." Says Thompson, "which is not true at all. But in 1969 there was a metamorphosis happening that I don't think many people were aware of. And we felt it was important to show that and make the film about that – and with what's going on now – it's even more important. While making the film, I wanted to be a witness and a viewer to this event, as a music fan and as a Black man."

DOCUMENTARY PARTICIPANTS INTERVIEWED

Roy Ayers
Ethel Beatty-Barnes
Barbara Bland-Acosta
Mike Boone
Dorinda Drake
Sheila E
Margot Edman
Greg Errico
Anthony Flood
Charlayne Hunter-Gault
Cyril "Bullwhip" Innis Jr.
Reverend Jesse Jackson
Musa Jackson
Gladys Knight
Adrienne Kryor
Alan Leeds
Darryl Lewis
Selema Masekela
Marilyn McCoo & Billy Davis
Jim McFarland
Lin-Manuel & Luis Miranda
Denise Oliver-Velez
Roger Parris
Raoul Roach
Chris Rock
Reverend Al Sharpton
Mavis Staples
Sylvester Stone
Greg Tate
Stevie Wonder
Sue Yellin
Allen Zerkin

FILMMAKER BIOS

Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, Director and Executive Producer

Drummer, DJ, producer, culinary entrepreneur, New York Times best-selling author, and member of The Roots – Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, is the unmistakable heartbeat of Philadelphia’s most influential hip-hop group. He is the Musical Director for The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, where his beloved Roots crew serves as house band. Beyond that, this 5-time GRAMMY Award winning musician’s indisputable reputation has landed him musical directing positions with everyone from D’Angelo to Eminem to Jay-Z. Questlove has also released multiple books including the New York Times bestsellers *Mo’ Meta Blues* and *Creative Quest*, GRAMMY nominated audio book *Creative Quest*, *Soul Train: The Music, Dance and Style of a Generation*, James Beard Award nominated *somethingtofoodabout* and most recently *Mixtape Potluck*. Questlove and Black Thought of The Roots have Executive Produced the acclaimed documentary series, *Hip-Hop: The Songs That Shook America* on AMC under their production company, Two One Five Entertainment which recently announced a first-look deal with Universal Television to develop scripted and non-scripted programming. Questlove will serve as executive producer for upcoming documentary, *The League*, centered on the tumultuous journey of Negro league baseball. He also made his directorial debut with the acclaimed feature documentary *Summer of Soul*, which explores the legendary 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival. The film premiered on the opening night of the 2021 Sundance Film Festival in January, where it was awarded the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award for Best U.S. Documentary. The film most recently broke the record for the highest selling documentary to come out of Sundance when it was acquired by Searchlight/Hulu. Questlove is also set to direct the upcoming Sly Stone feature documentary.

Additionally, Questlove served as the Executive Music Producer and Composer on the A&E Miniseries *Roots*. He also scored Chris Rock’s film, *Top Five* and co-produced the GRAMMY Award winning Original Broadway Cast Recording of *Hamilton*. Questlove also hosts his own acclaimed podcast *Questlove Supreme* on iHeart. Questlove co-starred in Disney Pixar’s Golden Globe-winning animated feature *Soul*, which landed him an NAACP Image Award nomination for Outstanding Character Voice-Over Performance.

Joseph Patel, Producer and Second-Unit Director

Joseph Patel is an award-winning Producer, Director, and Writer on documentaries and short films. Patel began his career as a music/culture journalist, later transitioning into film and video work with MTV News & Docs, Vice Media, and Vevo. He is Producer & Director of the upcoming documentary, “Contact High: A Visual History of Hip-Hop.” Patel lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Kari, and dog, Gucci.

Robert Fyvolent, Producer

Robert Fyvolent is a producer and entertainment executive with both creative and business experience. As a lawyer, he’s worked as in-house counsel for The Walt Disney Company and Sony Pictures Entertainment. As Head of Business and Legal Affairs for Newmarket Films, he worked on such films as, “Whale Rider,” “Donnie Darko,” “Memento,” “Monster,” “Downfall” “Trumbo” “Captain Fantastic,” and the Sundance Audience Award Winning documentary, “God Grew Tired of Us”. He is a member of the Writers Guild of America and was a writer on the narrative feature film “Untraceable” starring Diane Lane.

David Dinerstein, Producer

David Dinerstein is an award-winning producer and has been involved in the production, marketing or distribution on over 200 movies including "Pulp Fiction," "American Hustle," "Her," "The Illusionist," "The Full Monty," and "Hustle & Flow." Recent documentary productions include the Academy Award nominated "Winter On Fire," and Emmy nominated "Cries From Syria." Dinerstein's previous work includes "Paris Is Burning," "Madonna: Truth Or Dare," "Mad Hot Ballroom," "Neil Young: Heart Of Gold," and Al Pacino's "Looking For Richard". He co-founded Paramount Vantage, and was one the original architects of Fox Searchlight.

Randall Poster, Music Supervisor

Randall Poster is among the most highly regarded music supervisors working in film and TV. Poster continues to work with many of the world's premier filmmakers, including Wes Anderson, Martin Scorsese, Richard Linklater, Todd Phillips, Todd Haynes and Christine Vachon. His work consistently moves across pop-culture defining projects from 'Zoolander' to 'Tiger King,' from 'School of Rock' to 'The Queen's Gambit,' from 'The Grand Budapest Hotel' to 'Kids.' Poster is a two time GRAMMY award winner.

In 2020 Poster produced the acclaimed film THE DEVIL ALL THE TIME, directed by Antonio Campos and starring Tom Holland, Riley Keough, Robert Pattinson, Jason Clarke and Haley Bennett.

Joshua L. Pearson, Editor

Joshua Pearson is an award-winning editor whose work straddles documentary films and series. Pearson was nominated for an Emmy on the Academy Award nominated and Emmy-winning "What Happened, Miss Simone"? Pearson's other feature documentary work includes "Under African Skies: Paul Simon's Graceland Journey," nominated for an Emmy, "Keith Richards: Under The Influence," directed by Morgan Neville, for which Pearson was nominated for an Eddie, and "Whitey: The United States of America v. James J. Bulger," winner of a Silver Telly for editing. Some of his docu-series work includes "Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes," "Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich" "Bobby Kennedy For President," "Grant," "Mars," and "The Fourth Estate."