



SOUL POWER

USA | 2008 | 93m | 12A

Director: Jeffrey Levy-Hinte

Producers: Jeffrey Levy-Hinte, Leon Gast, David Sonenberg

Cinematography: Paul Goldsmith, Kevin Keating, Albert Maysles, Roderick Young

Editor: David A. Smith

Additional music: Noah Warner

Leading Players: Muhammad Ali, James Brown, Celia Cruz, BB King, Don King, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekala, The Spinners, Bill Withers

filmnote

In 1974, Harold Wilson returned to power, President Nixon resigned and Lord Lucan disappeared. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* took its last televised flight, Leonardo DiCaprio, Tim Henman and two Spice Girls were born and Nick Drake, Duke Ellington and 26 people in pubs in Guildford and Birmingham died. You could watch *Towering Inferno* or *Blazing Saddles* in the cinema, get a slap-up meal and a taxi home and still have change from sixpence, and I had a full head of hair. In Zaire, President Mobutu was giving corrupt dictators a bad name and the Rumble In The Jungle took place, a world heavyweight championship boxing match between George Foreman and Muhammad Ali.

Hundreds of reels of film were edited down to make the Oscar-winning *When We Were Kings* about the bout. Now more of that archive has been used to produce the present film, showing what happened when South African-born jazz trumpeter Hugh Masekela and music producer Stewart Levine invited some of the top black musicians of the day along to Kinshasa to make it, to quote Levine, "three days of music and fighting" (neatly distancing it from the Woodstock ethos).

Many of the American performers (both musical and pugilistic) saw this as a chance to get back to their roots, in the context of political and cultural movements in which black Americans had started thinking of themselves as Afro- or African-Americans. They wanted to understand more of what the prefix meant by seeing the "motherland" for themselves. James Brown had graduated to telling his audiences that the words black and proud were compatible, whereas a year or two previously he had been content if they left his concerts with only the information that he felt like a sex machine. Other musicians such as Sly Stone and Curtis Mayfield were similarly challenging oppression.

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Ali and boxing promoter Don King are again very visible in this film, and Ali – still healthy, handsome and heroic – always attracts the eyes. And some of the background detail of contemporary Zaire is undeniably interesting. But what makes this film special in its own right is of course the music.

If I say you probably won't want to sit through this film, it's not a criticism; it's a testament to the dance-ability of the music. Stars appearing include James (The Godfather Of Soul) Brown, BB (King Of The Blues) King, Miriam (Mama Africa) Makeba, Celia (Queen Of Salsa) Cruz, Bill (not everybody had titles) Withers and the Spinners (known in Britain as the Detroit Spinners, to distinguish them from the sweater-wearing folk-singing Liverpoolians who would possibly not have fitted in here). All were at their peak. For instance, Brown and his ultra-tight band were still at the vanguard of soul-funk, before he descended into repetitive music and drugs. BB King's hit *The Thrill Is Gone* and endorsement by celebrities like Eric Clapton meant that he was finally accepted by white audiences, financially secure and highly respected for many years before he settled for doing duets with any old Tom, Dick or Bono. Celia Cruz had enjoyed unprecedented success since joining forces with the Fania Allstars, who contribute hugely to the jam sessions here.

The most frustrating aspect of the film for me is that two of Africa's greatest musicians and bandleaders, Franco and Tabu Ley Rochereau, both native Zaireans, appear for only a couple of minutes, compared with James Brown's three complete songs. Is this because it's designed to appeal to the American market or are they holding back footage for another film? If the latter, those of us who remember 1974 will hope it doesn't take us another 35 years to see it.

BFF filmnote by Steve Mainwaring

Bath Film Festival 2009 at Komedia

Sunday 15 November, 8.00pm (doors open 6.30pm for live breakdance performance at 7.00pm) | £7 / £5

Turn It Loose

Alastair Siddons | UK | 2008 | 96m | 12A | turnitloosemovie.com

Turn it Loose showcases the pulsating b-boy culture which has evolved over the last 30 years into a truly global phenomenon. Six competitors from all corners of the globe battle one on one for the chance to be crowned World Champion 2007. From backstage at BC One (a cavernous former Soweto power station) to the backstreets of Senegal, Japan, America, France and Brazil, Siddons finds beauty in the b-boys' individual stories, their relentless drive and respect for each other and their art. A genuinely uplifting film and one of the best dance documentary films in recent years.

Meet filmmaker Alastair Siddons at the post-screening q and a – and experience live breakdancing performance from BREAK at 7.00pm before the screening.



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