



To Be Free

written + directed by Adepero Oduye

In a tiny after-hours club
Nina Simone finds a way
for one moment
to be free

What I'm doing is getting rid of the load 'cause I have been just burdened down with all these problems. It's bad enough to be born black in America, but to be burdened down with the problems within it is too much.

- Nina Simone









I was introduced to NINA SIMONE by Susan Batson.

I had never seen a picture of her until I picked up a copy of her autobiography *I Put A Spell On You*.

I was immediately awestruck by her face...that a woman who looked like me had been out in the world, thriving as an artist and an activist.

Thus began my journey with the images, videos, words and songs of Dr. Nina Simone.

Fast forward years later, my friend, collaborator and colleague, Esther de Rothschild sent me a Ta-Nehisi Coates article titled *Nina Simone's Face*.

I instantly and completely related to his words and was compelled, at that point to, create the short film that would become "TO BE FREE."

I was inundated with intense fear and doubt. But it was something I had to do.

It felt urgent.

I was very clear that the only person to shoot it was my friend Bradford Young.

I thought about who should direct because I didn't think it was possible for me to direct, write and act.

It was Bradford who simply stated, "You should direct."

Esther and I met with Becky Morrison, founder of the awe-inspiring production company The Light.

We shared our idea and she was immediately on board to bless us with her expertise.

I stepped completely out of my comfort zone, asking for help in ways I'd never done before.

I pushed myself and trusted that there was something to the vision I had in my head and heart.

Things came together seemingly effortlessly, in the form of locations, supplies, people, and advice.

I relished all the various collaborations.

The day of the shoot was one of the most magical days of my life.

I will forever be extremely thankful to every single person involved with making "TO BE FREE" possible.

- Adepero Oduye





the team



ADEPERO ODUYE, who gave a breakout performance as the star of Dee Rees' PARIAH, hails from Brooklyn, New York by way of Nigeria and is Cornell University graduate. Her film credits include THE BIG SHORT and TWELVE YEARS A SLAVE. Theater credits include Mfoniso Udofia's "Her Portmanteau" at The New York Theater Workshop (2017), and "The Trip to Bountiful" on Broadway. In 2014, she wrote and directed her first short film, BREAKING IN. TO BE FREE, shot in 2016, is her second short film as director and writer.



ESTHER DE ROTHSCHILD teaches filmmaking in NYC public high schools. Her students make personal short films, many of which have screened at the Tribeca Film Festival. Esther has directed several music videos and short films, such as CRISALIDA and CLOSE. She produced the feature documentary HAVANA MOTOR CLUB, the web series THE FEELS, and Adepero Oduye's debut short film BREAKING IN, which explored the toll of NYC's stop & frisk policy. She also founded The Love Vote, which aims to increase voter turnout through personal connection. She studied filmmaking at Brown University and the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Television in Cuba.



BECKY MORRISON is the executive producer of The Light, a production company committed to creating an uplifting on-set experience. Her career began on the Disney animated film, THE WILD, and soon moved into the realm of live-action, on feature films such as THE BRAVE ONE, DUPLICITY and I AM LEGEND. Becky has produced over 200 commercials, the visual content for the band U2's 360 World Tour as well as the Emmy-nominated show open for NBC's Sunday Night Football. Becky is also the founder of the non-profit organization Globetops which connects people who have laptops they don't use anymore with someone around the world who can use one.



BRADFORD YOUNG is an image maker. He has been the Director of Photography for numerous feature films including PARIAH, RESTLESS CITY, MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, AIN'T THEM BODY SAINTS, MOTHER OF GEORGE, SELMA, ARRIVAL and WHITE LIES, BLACK SHEEP. Bradford has won numerous awards for his work. He won Cinematography Awards at the Sundance Film Festival twice. In 2011, he won for his work on PARIAH. Two years later, he won for his work on both MOTHER OF GEORGE and AIN'T THEM BODY SAINTS. In 2017 he was nominated for an Academy Award for his work in ARRIVAL. His work on ARRIVAL also earned him a Silver Frog award from Camerimage and nominations for awards from BAFTA and the American Society of Cinematographers. In addition to film work, Young has done cinematography for music videos for artists such as MGMT, Nora Jones, and Beck.

specs
+
contact info

Medium: Kodak 35mm film

Run Time: 0:12:18

Completed: 2017

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