

GUARDIANS OF THE FLAME

Directed by Daniel Wolff

PRODUCTION NOTES

Running Time: 70 minutes

Aspect Ratio: 4:3 and 16:9

Not rated

Sound: Stereo

Country of Origin: USA

Language: English

guardiansoftheflamemovie.com

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A Clinica Estetico Production

GUARDIANS OF THE FLAME

Directed by
DANIEL WOLFF

Production begun by
JONATHAN DEMME

Produced by
BONNIE ELDER YASSKY
BROOKLYN DEMME

Cinematographer
JONATHAN DEMME

Editor
MARTA RENZI

GUARDIANS OF THE FLAME

Synopsis

Undeterred by decades of prejudice, post-Katrina neglect, and ongoing appropriation of their traditions, three generations of the extraordinary, multi-talented Harrison family guard their legacy and define what Black masking culture means in New Orleans today.

Initiated and filmed by the celebrated Oscar-winning filmmaker Jonathan Demme, the film was shot over the course of 17 years documenting the artistry and activism of three generations of the Harrison family of New Orleans. In the course of this African American family's fight to recover not just from Hurricane Katrina but from a history of cultural suppression, we meet the matriarch Herreast Harrison, whose dream is to found a museum dedicated to her husband's legacy. Along the way we are also introduced to her four talented children: a renowned saxophonist, a master beader in the closely-guarded Mardi Gras tradition, a performance artist and educator, and a singer and manager of Herreast's grandson's musical career. In the decades-long struggle towards survival and healing, we're given an intimate view of the family's determination to educate and preserve culture - from a social and pleasure club parade to a brass band commemoration, culminating in the spectacular Mardi Gras unveiling of the Guardians of the Flame.

Cinematographer Jonathan Demme and writer Daniel Wolff began visiting the Harrison family a few months after Katrina. Their visits continued, 4-times-a-year,

for the next six years. After Demme's death, in 2017, Wolff, Demme's son Brooklyn, and a film crew returned to New Orleans in 2019 to bring the project up to date. The desire to finish this project and the persistence to do so comes from the Harrison family's inspirational work in what Cherice Harrison-Nelson calls "self-emancipation." Long before Katrina and in the years since, the Harrisons have forged cultural weapons to resist racism and oppression both locally and on a national scale. As this film documents, their tools include music, beading, masking, literacy, and community building. Whether handing out books to pre-schoolers, being nominated for Grammys, making films, or sewing elaborate ceremonial clothing, the Harrisons have kept their eyes on the prize. *Guardians of the Flame* offers a decade-and-a-half overview of one family's trials and eventual triumph.

GUARDIANS OF THE FLAME

Reflections from Director Daniel Wolff

17 years after filming began, a movie is finished.

Why persist?

Why might you care?

It's a movie about persistence, about an African American family that not only survives Hurricane Katrina but is determined that the New Orleans culture that sustains them will continue and grow.

Begun in collaboration with Academy-award winning director Jonathan Demme and myself, *Guardians of the Flame* lets you into the little known world of Mardi Gras masking, of world-class musicians, of street dancing, and what one family member calls "self-emancipation."

When Jonathan and I first went to New Orleans in 2006, we thought we'd make one visit. We ended up returning multiple times over six years. We made two full-length films on different New Orleans subjects; I wrote a book, *The Fight for Home: How (Parts of) New Orleans Returned*. When Jonathan died in 2017, we were talking about returning and finishing this film on the extraordinary Harrison

family. Jonathan's son, a film crew, and I went back in 2019 and documented how the matriarch, Herreast Harrison, had built a neighborhood museum honoring what came to be called a maroon society: escapees from the white over-culture, survivors.

The movie captures three generations of hope. It shows what one family can do, how tradition gets passed on and re-made, what it means to stand for something. It's a rough, raucous, captivating movie that I think you'll find was worth the 17 year wait.

GUARDIANS OF THE FLAME

About the Filmmakers

DANIEL WOLFF (Director)

Daniel Wolff was the associate producer on Jonathan Demme's documentary film, *The Agronomist*, and a producer on Mr. Demme's five-part series on New Orleans featured on Tavis Smiley's national television show in 2007, as well as Mr. Smiley's hour-length PBS special, "Been in the Storm Too Long" (2010). *I'm Carolyn Parker*, a previous Demme/Wolff collaboration, aired on PBS in 2012. He has appeared in Philadelphia, Rachel Getting Married, and Subway Stories. This is the first film he's directed.

Wolff's writing includes essays, profiles, critical pieces, scientific articles, poetry and fiction. His articles have appeared in many publications including *Connoisseur*, the *Nation*, the *Village Voice*, and *Vogue*. Nominated for a Grammy award in 2003, Wolff's other honors include the Ralph Gleason Music Book Award in 1995, two nominations for the General Electric Younger Writer's Award, and being recognized as a Michigan Notable Book author in 2018. His work has been anthologized in various publications and featured on National Public Radio, Sirius Radio, and in numerous publications from the *New York Times* to the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

His 2012 book *The Fight For Home: How (Parts of) New Orleans Came Back*, was hailed by *The Christian Science Monitor* as "a historic document ... powerful and

revelatory”, and his 2005 book *Fourth of July, Asbury Park* was a *New York Times* Editor’s Choice.

He was a contributing editor for the music newsletter, *Rock & Rap Confidential* and has received grants as Writer in Residence from the New York State Council on the Arts, from the Public Arts Fund of New York City, and from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts.

JONATHAN DEMME (Cinematographer)

Oscar-winning director Jonathan Demme initiated what would become *Guardians of the Flame* in 2006, continuing to film the Harrison family for the next 10 years. Over his lifetime, Demme created an extraordinary body of work: documentaries, shorts and features, from *Silence of the Lambs* and *Philadelphia* to *The Agronomist* and *I’m Carolyn Parker* (both with Producer Daniel Wolff). Demme also directed numerous concert films such as *Stop Making Sense* (1984) *Neil Young, Heart of Gold* and *Justin Timberlake + the Tennessee Kids*, and worked on several television series as both a producer and director.

MARTA RENZI (Editor)

Originally trained as a choreographer, Renzi’s first half-hour video dance for PBS was *You Little Wild Heart* (1981) to music by Bruce Springsteen, In 1989, she was commissioned by KCTV’s “Alive from Off-Center” to create *Mountainview*, made in 1989 in collaboration with indie filmmaker John Sayles, and featuring Jane Alexander. Since 2005 Marta has directed and edited more than three dozen self-produced short video dances, which have been presented at over 300 festivals nationally and internationally. Her debut feature film *Her Magnum Opus* - “presented by Jonathan Demme” - was released in 2017. Retrospectives of her film work have been screened at BAAD! in the Bronx, at Rivertown Films in Nyack; at Compartimiento Cinematografico in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico; at University College Cork, Ireland and at the Rockland Center for the Arts.

Cast

HERREAST HARRISON

Among her many honors – including The New Orleans Legends Award and the Louisiana Endowment of the Humanities Light Up for Literacy Award - in 2021 Herreat Harrison was named Grand Griot in a “racial healing commemoration of the ancestors, known and unknown, from the Transatlantic Slave trade.”

BIG CHIEF DONALD HARRISON

A former Big Chief of the Creole Wild West, Cherokee Braves and White Eagles tribes before he organized the Guardians of the Flame in 1988. Mr. Harrison's interest in the Mardi Gras Indian tradition began in 1937, when he was 3, and he started beading suits at 12

CHERICE HARRISON-NELSON

A Fulbright Scholar and the recipient of the USA Artist Fellowship, Maroon Queen Cherice Harrison-Nelson continues to learn and work with children through her intergenerational community service, performances, art works, audio recordings, theatrical productions and published books.

DONALD HARRISON, JR.

Grammy nominee Big Chief Donald Harrison of the Congo Square Nation Afro-New Orleans Cultural Group received an honorary doctorate from the Berklee College of Music in 2021 and was named a 2022 National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master.

MICHELE HARRISON

Artist and Master bead worker Michele Harrison continues to use her innovative and distinct sewing techniques to create art that addresses societal ills and gives voice to marginalized and underrepresented groups.

CARA HARRISON DANIELS

Historian and entrepreneur Cara Harrison Daniels is president of both Stretch Music LLC and OmniAmerican Pictures, Inc. Her current research as a historian excavates and complicates histories of indigenous New Orleanian masking traditions.

BRIAN NELSON

With an MFA in screenwriting/directing from University of Southern California, Big Chief Brian Nelson is now an award-winning filmmaker and New Orleans Bounce hiphop artist.

CHRISTIAN SCOTT

Formerly known as Christian Scott, multi-instrumentalist, composer and producer Chief Xian Atunde Adjuah is a two-time Edison award winner and six-time Grammy nominee.

KIEL ADRIAN SCOTT

Kiel's directing projects have won him an NAACP Image Award and the Peabody Award for Entertainment.

Crew

Additional Editing & Production

SEAN GALLAGHER

ABDUL FRANKLIN

Additional Camera

ANTHONY CALYPSO

KATHLEEN CORGAN

BROOKLYN DEMME

JUSTIN DROBINSKI

SAMANTHA FELTUS

ABDUL FRANKLIN

SEAN GALLAGHER

CAROLINE GOODMAN-THOMASES

IDO HAAR

LINDSAY JAEGER

ANDRE LAMBERTSON

KERVIN MARSEILLE

ROYCE OSBORN

DECLA QUINN

Clinica Production Assistance

NEDA ARMIAN
SHANE BISSETT
HARPER DILL
ELIZABETH HAYES
JENNY MCCORMACK
BEVIN MCNAMARA
INNBO SHINN
SUSA SPANGLER
KAT SPEISS
MAUD STREEP
MIKE WALLACE
EMILY WOODBURNE

Color

JORDAN CAMPBELL

Re-Recording Mixer

CHRIS STANGROOM, MPSE

Sound Editor

DAN LAPORTA

Audio Post Facility

STJ SOUND STUDIOS

ADDITIONAL FOOTAGE FROM

Flags, Feathers and Lies

Pablo Palacios, Director; Julie Belafonte, Executive Producer

The Harrison Family

Tavis Smiley, Tavis Smiley Media

MUSIC

Candlelight

featuring Ron Carter & Billy Cobham
courtesy of Nagel Heyer Records

Salt Peanuts

composed by John Gillespie & Kenny Clarke
courtesy of Universal Music
"Salt Peanuts Live at Massey Hall"
performed by Dizzy Gillespie & Charlie Parker
courtesy of Concord Music Group

Guardians, Here They Come

Brian Nelson with Donald Harrison, Jr. and Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah

Indian Red from *Indian Blues*, Donald Harrison, Jr.

Indian Red from *Young Guardians of the Flame* (lead vocal: Cara Harrison)

Shallow Waters from *Indian Blues*, Donald Harrison, Jr.

Chong Chong from *Young Guardians of the Flame*, Donald Harrison, Sr.

Paradise Found from *Paradise Found*, Donald Harrison, Jr. introducing Christian Scott

Two Way Pockey Way from *Young Guardians of the Flame*

Flames Are Leaving from *Young Guardians of the Flame*

Shallow Waters from *Young Guardians of the Flame*

Intro Statement from *Young Guardians of the Flame*