

in which the non-union cast was paid \$350 a week and the five-person crew \$100 a week, *Nothing But a Man* didn't bring Roemer a profit until twenty-eight years after it opened. Revenues from television broadcasts eventually helped him recoup his own \$7,000 outlay and repay his investors fifty cents on the dollar.

The soundtrack, featuring Martha and the Vandellas, Stevie Wonder, The Miracles, The Marvelettes, and Mary Wells, was acquired by a college friend of Roemer's who passed him a stack of 45s from a burgeoning Detroit record company he represented. That company was Motown, and Roemer's friend secured the rights from president Berry Gordy for a \$5,000 stake in the film. "Much of life is luck," says Roemer, "and this was pure luck."

The original theatrical release in 1964 suffered because, as Roemer explains, white audiences weren't interested in what they viewed as a depressing story about blacks in the South. And distributors were reluctant to show it to black audiences because they figured whites would then stop coming to their theaters. It was not shown to its obvious audience until a 16mm release the following year, allowing it to play in black churches and schools. "African American audiences didn't find it depressing at all," Roemer says. "In Detroit they were laughing all the way through—laughter of recognition."

It's a testament to Roemer and Young's direction and writing that the characters ring so true as they face the dehumanizing superiority of white characters, exhibit pride in ownership, endure the shame of alcoholism, abandonment, and the simple struggle to find work. The remainder of the credit goes to the brilliant acting by actors almost ideally cast for their roles.

Ivan Dixon, seventy-four, says, "Duff was the perfect character for me to play—moments of my life, really. They didn't know me, but what they wrote was me." Dixon, who was sent

to boarding school in the South as a juvenile delinquent, had lived enough to inhabit his rough and weary character while imbuing him with the requisite humor and pride.

Abbey Lincoln, seventy-three, also admits a strong kinship with her character. "It's my character," she says. "I felt that way. My mother raised me to be somebody—how to treat somebody right. It's no secret how to get along under pressure." Lincoln's ability to coax a grimace of suppressed dread out of a natural grin is just one of those facial expressions that exude from within. Along with every other incandescent moment of hers in the film, it must be felt rather than manufactured.

Roemer, a film professor at Yale since 1966, credits his childhood as a Jew in Nazi Germany as the source of his empathy. Speaking of himself and Young, also Jewish, Roemer says, "Jews and blacks have this 'we're all on the same side' feeling—a shared experience of being outsiders."

As far as filmmaking, other than Young who continues to work in Hollywood, that feeling persists for the principals of *Nothing But a Man*. Dixon's greatest success came on the television show *Hogan's Heroes*, which he understandably refers to as "a piece of junk," and after which he mostly worked directing television. Lincoln continues to enjoy a vibrant composing and singing career but only performed a handful of other acting roles.

Roemer made a total of four feature films including 1989's *The Plot Against Harry* with Young, and he continues to write scripts although he doesn't send them out. "I don't need some twenty-two-year-old in a studio to write a synopsis and send it upstairs with a note that says 'This is very well written, but it's not for us.' I'm much too vulnerable, and in this business you have to have asbestos skin."

Forty years after helming a masterpiece, in a dangerous world still more divided than united, with the value of human dignity never more vital or

precarious, Roemer can rest assured his legacy lives.

Rick Harrison is an editorial intern at The Independent.

## Public-Access Network Offers Alternative Distribution

By Julie Jacobs

Indieville, the self-proclaimed voice of independent film in New York, understands the ongoing struggle faced by independent moviemakers worldwide: how to get their projects seen by the masses. The Brooklyn-based media outlet, which airs indie news and entertainment on Brooklyn Cable Access TV and Manhattan Neighborhood Network, has found a solution to the problem right in its own "backyard." It has founded the National Film Network (NFN), a unique merger of film and television that seeks to broaden independent-movie access to small- and medium-sized towns through public-access TV.

Described as an aggressive community-level distribution project for independent film, NFN intends to create a new public-access circuit to complement the film-festival and microcinema circuits. Now in its development phase, with plans to launch this fall, NFN has garnered interest from public-access stations in major cities across the country, including New York, Chicago, San Francisco, West Hollywood, Boston, Atlanta, Seattle, and Austin.

"We're open to films of all genres and ratings for this network. What is broadcast on each public-access station ultimately will be up to the individual station managers," says Shane Snipes, executive producer of Indieville, which will serve as a primary source of movies as well as a centralized archive. "Our goal is to have films in our system that make them want to keep coming back and see what else we have to offer."

"One of our community access outreach initiatives is to incorporate more locally-produced programs on the arts,