

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### ***The Cry of Jazz* Is Officially Re-Released in High Definition Digital Format**

*New York, NY - May 01, 2018* - "When the film came out, the response was hideous," Ed Bland once said, when asked about his seminal 1959 short, *The Cry of Jazz*. "Very few liked it. The Marxists hated it 'cause it was independent of how they thought Blacks should think. But aside from me being called a Black fascist or whatever, a few people thought it quite unique."

*The Cry of Jazz* is the only movie composer and musician Ed Bland ever helmed. It fuses Chicago street grit and ivory tower intellect into a thirty-four minute, black-and-white celluloid whirlwind unlike any films before or since, all the while scored by a then unknown Le Sun Ra & his Arkestra. While deemed radical, alarmist, and amateurish by many upon its initial release, this 16mm gem was eventually deemed unique and worthy enough by the Library of Congress for preservation in the United States National Film Registry in 2010 (along with *Airplane!*).

Though Mr. Bland was equally adept in classical, jazz, and rhythm & blues, and spent most of his life invested in all facets of the music business, he could never shake the shadow cast by his lone foray into filmmaking. Spurred by late night conversations held in various taverns near the University of Chicago, Bland, along with three friends—a mathematician, an urban planner, and a novelist—formed an all-Black production company, KHTB, and embarked in 1956 on what would become *The Cry of Jazz*. "We'd...get in these arguments with all these jazz-critics-to-be," Bland said in a 2006 interview. "They were mostly white, and I felt there was a racial angle too; I felt they were trying to...wipe the Blackness out of jazz."

Completely self-financed and volunteer-propelled, the resulting DIY effort caused a stir at screenings in Chicago and in New York City with its controversial thesis that "jazz was dead," and its claims of cultural banditry. The press duly took note. *Esquire* called it "a wretched little hymn of racial snobbery," whereas the London *Observer's* Kenneth Tynan wrote, "it is the first film in which the American Negro has issued a direct challenge to the white, claiming not merely equality but superiority." This "direct challenge" spilled into heated panel discussions following screenings at New York City's Cinema 16 featuring Mr. Bland, Mark Kennedy, Marshall Stearns, Nat Hentoff, and Ralph Ellison, reportedly drawing the attention of New York's finest. After the film's debut, noted filmmaker and critic Jonas Mekas recruited Mr. Bland for his nascent New American Cinema Group, which included the likes of Shirley Clarke and Peter Bogdanovich. The film would also be shown throughout Europe and Australia. In 1971, noted filmmaker Willard Van Dyke credited *The Cry of Jazz* with foreshadowing the race riots of the 1960s.

In an 1960 article for *Film Culture*, Mr. Bland wrote, "If Negro creators can transcend their present-day American demon thru the legacy left by dead jazz—if they can transcend their American experience with a total response instead of a minimal one, they will have executed a truly heroic act. And if white America can accept the Negro as the American hero, white America will have come of age."

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## **ABOUT THE CAST & CREW**

*The Cry of Jazz* wouldn't have been possible without every participant volunteering their time. Approximately 65 people essentially worked for free. Experience and exposure is what everyone was offered instead of a wage. The crew was made up of friends and acquaintances who assisted in everything from driving actors and crew around town, to providing the apartment set and props used in the film. The actors consisted of untrained university students, local amateurs from Chicago's Black community theater scene, and nascent Second City stragglers. A few of the performers would go on to have notable careers. Laroy Inman became an established folk singer and recording artist; Gavin MacFadyen became a renowned investigative journalist; Andrew Duncan performed at The Second City and in Hollywood; and probably the most known, Linda (Melinda) Dillon, would become a Tony- and Oscar-nominated actress, starring in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *A Christmas Story*.

The musicians performing in the film in various guises are Le Sun Ra & his Arkestra, featuring the likes of John Gilmour, Julian Priester, and Marshall Allen. Paid a nominal fee, Sun Ra was looking to promote his own label El Saturn Records, and hoped the exposure would garner future live gigs. After setting up shop in NYC as an arranger, Ed Bland would use Sun Ra on a number of recordings throughout the 1960s.

Two cinematographers shot the film: Hank Starr and Howard Alk. Alk—who Ed Bland knew from the Gate of Horn music club where *The Cry's* music scenes were shot—was also a film editor, and was hired to edit *The Cry*. With his close friend Paul Sills, Alk would help co-found (and name) the now legendary The Second City, and would also later go on to make a number of acclaimed documentary films on Fred Hampton, Janis Joplin, and Bob Dylan.

**“Edward O. Bland’s documentary-based insights into the art and politics of jazz are profound.”**

– *The New Yorker*

**“Scarcely less abrasive now than when it first appeared.”**

– J. Hoberman, *Village Voice*

## **ABOUT RELEASE AND DISTRIBUTION**

This is the first time *The Cry of Jazz* is available in high definition. The HD digital master was derived from the pristine 35mm print created when *The Cry of Jazz's* original 16mm print was restored, re-shot, and re-mastered as a 35mm film negative. Funding came from Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation and was shepherded by the Jonas Mekas-founded Anthology Film Archives.

This new HD version also includes two in-depth commentary tracks with Ed Bland.

To download or stream, please visit: [thecryofjazz.com](http://thecryofjazz.com)

For additional info, press materials, or to screen *The Cry of Jazz* in either its digital format or as a 35mm print, please visit [thecryofjazz.com](http://thecryofjazz.com).

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