

Film Reviews

Stephen Williams, director. *Chevalier*. Searchlight Pictures, 2023.

Directed by Stephen Williams and released in April 2023, *Chevalier* takes place in late eighteenth-century France during the French Revolution. It brilliantly displays both great drama and history by offering a perspective on the long-forgotten, hidden artistic mind of violinist and conductor Joseph Bologne. Born to a French Plantation owner and an enslaved woman, the film addresses the racial struggle of trying to fit in with the elites, as he forgets his roots as a black French man.

The film portrays Joseph Bologne's life experiences as a black man and how he was able to sharpen and harness his great gifts at such a young age, as well as his resilience. He was challenged at a young age because of his complexion at a very prestigious school in France, where only white elites attended. Joseph's thirst for excellence was his only hope of being accepted into the elite. At the same time, he was oblivious to the social unrest starting around him. In his eyes, he was seen as equal to the elites, even though he was a black Frenchman. The film highlights Joseph's aspirations and challenges in attempting to become the lead of Paris's Opera, and his ultimately failed quest for love with his white French lover. Eventually his world turned upside down as he realized the life he lived was just a facade, that he really was never accepted. His mother helps him rediscover the long-lost identity he left behind him during his attempt to be seen as an equal with the elites of France. This allows Joseph Bologne to accept his true self and begin to align with the revolution as he sees the changes that must be made in French society. He uses the gifts and talents he always had to be a prominent figure in standing up against the *Ancien Régime* in the way he was famous for. Joseph decides to create an opera play to help the uprising, which leads him to make an important choice: whether to stand for change or to continue to be a pawn.

The film's plot does a tremendous job of highlighting the racial ideologies during the French Revolution, and how blacks were never seen as equals amongst whites. Africans in France had con-

straints placed on them that mingled in their everyday lives. They could not get married to whites and also did not have the same opportunities as whites. It highlighted why Africans in France were aligned with the French Revolution to overthrow the *Ancien Régime* due to racial discrimination.

This movie shows the importance of using art and culture to dismantle oppressors as this is one of the most used and effective tactics in history. It was what ultimately led France to be successful in its revolution in 1789, as it was used as propaganda for the masses. The movie could not have used a better historical figure to display the French elite's true ideology of only caring for themselves. Instead Joseph Bologne eventually realizes he was a mere puppet to the elite. This film should be of interest to anyone who enjoys learning about art, music, history and especially the role of race in the French Revolution.

Sebastian Arzola

Ryan Coogler, director. *Sinners*. Proximity Media, 2025.

Black excellence means celebrating or achieving Black success in any field, to affirm Black identity. *Sinners* embodies the term as in just one year, it has won countless awards, most notably four Oscars and two Golden Globe Awards. The action horror film directed by Ryan Coogler follows identical twins Smoke and Stack in 1932, as they return to their hometown of Clarksdale, Mississippi only to encounter a supernatural threat. The central plot is driven by the Smokestack twins' dream of opening a juke joint (a bar with music and dancing) in their hometown. The plot is divided into three acts; the first revolves around the twins' search for talent and other necessities for the grand opening of the juke joint. The second act follows the grand opening, while the third act features the battle between the twins and main villain Remmick and his vampires.

Race plays a prominent role in the film due to the setting of the Jim Crow era South, with both subtle and overt reminders. The film has an overall theme of Black excellence and autonomy, using Blues music as the vehicle for these themes. It highlights music as an