

The Mic Drop - Season One, Episode Ten: Queen & Slim review

Larry Achiampong [00:00:00] Hello and good afternoon. My name's Larry Achiampong and you're listening to The Mic Drop, a special podcast project created in collaboration with Many Hands One Hearts and Heart of Glass in St. Helens. Today joining me where we'll be discussing a recent film released in cinemas titled Queen & Slim, directed by Milena Matsoukas is Adrian..

Adrian Mejia [00:00:26] Hello!

Larry Achiampong [00:00:27] Emily.

Emily [00:00:28] Hi!

Larry Achiampong [00:00:29] And Sam.

Sam [00:00:30] Hi, I'm here!

Larry Achiampong [00:00:32] I love that voice. So, yeah, just to give a breakdown of the of of the film, for those of you who haven't seen and also a warning for those of you who are looking to see the film, you probably don't want to listen to this now. You might want to listen to it afterwards. But the the plot focuses around two characters whose names actually you don't really find out until later, but Queen and Slim who have a have a date following a Tinder match, which kind of goes tragically wrong. Following an altercation with a police officer.

[00:01:14] I guess I wanted to start off the conversation by asking you all individually what your thoughts were of of the film that you experience, for me sitting in to watch the film with yourselves was was my second time. In fact, I watched a special advance screening in London. So coming to watch it again in Liverpool, it gave me a bit more kind of time to digest some of the things that happened in the film because there's quite a lot that's going on. Adrian, would you perhaps like to begin with how you or what you thought of the film?

Adrian Mejia [00:01:49] Oh, yes thank you. It was quite moving the film because I also able in communication an, stuff like that. So I think the most remarkable thing for me, it was how they put the media stuffs, you know, when they put the news and all the sensationalists were around the news and everything and how they lied to people saying stuff I was quite impact on that sense, because, you know, there's like two versions of the story. The version that in that case that people could relate and they know the truth and the other version that people that believe from when they see on television. So I think across the whole story in how they developed the story, I mean, the real story and also the story show on the on the television, it was quite interesting how they can manipulate people, but also at the same time, there's people who not get that kind of play and they took the real story as something as empowerment, as I told you in the past, I think on the same day, the movie's really it is really moving in the sense it's took the racist stuff like it was really hard when I saw the scene when they were with the policemen. And I was really angry in that moment, you know, you're you're like, oh my God, this asshole! So it's like you feel that in that moment, and I know that's true, that's something that's still happening in 2020. And yeah how they managed and you see it was not their fault, but at the same time, they have no choice to run because no one will believe them. Yeah and I mean that point of they don't have any other options. They cannot say their truth. It's a really, really, really something important. So yeah. So, Emily?

Emily [00:04:00] Yeah. I mean and an incredible film like and I think that I've just been thinking about it since we watched it. And I think that what was, I don't know for me, was one of those films that and because you you just like love the characters, you really, really get into the story and so, yeah, they just really, really take you with them on these on this journey, which is yeah, absolutely, I agree, Adrian and like it just like fills you with I don't know you just the rage that you feel in those moments of just watching this unfold and just seeing I don't know, like one of the things that you get so angry about is this is this feeling that like as soon as you see that situation, they go it they're about to go through it feels like inevitable or something like we've seen this so many times before, you know what's going to happen and it's just, yeah and yeah, you just want to kind of like scream it at the screen and but then alongside this is just this like, really gorgeous unfolding of like a love story and getting to, you're getting to know the characters as they get to know each other in a really, like, genuine way. You know, it's not like some like sappy, sappy, like love story, it's like it's Queen and Slim kind of being in the situation together and being vulnerable together and and getting to know each other and fall in love and and and so, yeah, you just you you really, really care about them and their journey and, uh yeah, so I think there was probably plenty of moments where I was just, you know, either leaning towards the screen screen ready just like arrgh or I think I feel like it internally maybe I was just making loads of sounds like I was like "oh oh no. Oh oh oh." I think that was probably what was going on in me. But yeah, an incredible piece of filmmaking. And I think because we've been this week, kind of working a lot around sound and the the sound was so it was so important in that film, really understanding that, you know, this amazing soundtrack and then like this, I think what I've been thinking about and why it's kind of stayed with me is just like the sounds of violence, like the gunshot at the end, sorry spoilers, I don't know, just just feels, sounds massive. Yeah.

Larry Achiampong [00:06:29] Thank you. Sam?

Sam [00:06:30] Yeah I do agree, yeah Emily. Yeah, unfortunately, I didn't finish the whole movie. I do enjoy, I think the character of the movie is very good. And most of the time it wasn't their fault. You see the just do it accidentally, they had killed a policeman, so they tried to escape. And most of the time they escaped they have trouble and try to get help and all that. Yeah. End of the day it's a very lovely story. And that's very good. A good character movie. I do enjoy it. I think I'll be back to watch again to finish the whole movie again.

Larry Achiampong [00:07:07] Cool. It's it is quite unfortunate because it was literally like a few minutes off from you leaving that film had concluded. But I, I agree. I think it's it deserves a rewatch, I think it's quite a unique film in the way that it opens up a story of of love, of essentially two people who don't really know each other. And and you're kind of on a road trip. It's a road trip film in a way, you know. And I think that exploration of of aspects of of of Black America are shown so beautifully, you know, from the travelling through from Ohio where our characters meet through to the likes of, you know, New Orleans and so on. Yeah and the soundtrack I just found was was incredibly vulnerable, heavily layered. Devonté Hynes, who is known for his work as, you know, Lightspeed Champion, I think the band is Test Icicles, was able to create, I think, sketches of of feeling that really just kind of melded with the characters, I think particularly the transformation point where they needed to cut their hair so that they were less recognisable as how they previously were, was was really powerful for me. One of the things that I noticed during, I guess like the kind of promotional period of of, you know, the film's release and and some kinds of like reviews and discussions around the film was the

way in which people likened the characters of Queen and Slim to Bonnie and Clyde, who I thought, yeah, I wanted to talk a little bit about that because...

Adrian Mejia [00:09:08] Honestly I was thinking of Bonnie and Clyde, the whole movie, but I didn't want to make that...

Larry Achiampong [00:09:13] Yeah. Well the thing for me is that like I, I can, I understood why people made that kind of connection or even comparison. But but the issue for me was that, you know, Bonnie and Clyde, there were actual criminals, you know. Yeah. They you know, that that at that point in their life was based on hurting people, taking from people and killing people. You know, whereas this story between Queen and Slim, they are placed within a very particular predicament. A big issue that affects people not simply just in the likes of, you know, the United States, even in the U.K. I can even say as somebody who's been stopped and searched, you know, numerous times by police and unlawfully, I've gotten, you know, nothing to to hide but at the same time, I've been approached based on my race. You know, these these people have had violence placed upon them. And again, based on the history of of of slavery and so on. But, yeah, I just found that a bit unsettling, like thinking about why are they being likened to a criminal couple that that base their their careers on killing and maiming people?

Adrian Mejia [00:10:27] I think something that well, I'm a little bit obsessed with Bonnie and Clyde, honestly, because it's like but yeah, I was thinking about that, the whole movie, like I said, because it's like that love story, in a getaway car from the justice, you know, and it's like that feeling or that adrenaline that they should feel, or you feel I mean like running away from the justice is like I think that's when they do that cooperation between Bonnie and Clyde. But like you said, Bonnie and Clyde they were actual criminals, I mean, they were robbed banks, they did so many stuffs, and actually, when the end of the story of Bonnie and Clyde is also the same, they are killed. And yeah, I mean, well, the one thing I could say is I'm thinking about this is like the fact and I'm put in this again, in the end, the power of the media, Bonnie and Clyde they were white. Yes. So that's why they see everyone was romantic. And it's like, I want to be Bonnie and Clyde, but you see a black couple and there's like the media put them as criminals. I mean, like dangerous people. And I I was really, really with anger at the end when they when they put out the movies, they were killed because they were dangerous and armed and they they were they were even barefoot I think so they go I think was barefoot because they, but I mean it's like oh gosh, how they can switch the story, put up a character just for the race because honestly they done that maybe because it sells more, it sells more to put someone else from a different background, a as dangerous as a criminal. And yes, it is honestly something that in that moment I was really, really, really full, filled with anger.

Larry Achiampong [00:12:30] But you know, it for me, it kind of brought to mind the way in which Black people, in which Black people when when arrested or detained or held by officers, you know, when you have things like mug shots or images of them that, you know, you know, were portrayed as as like baddies, evil and whatnot, even when seeing actual footage of Eric Garner, he was killed in 2014 by New York Police Department officers. You see it directly there. And then post that point of that that imagery being shown, you know, all these kinds of stories and images of this guy who, you know, did all kinds of foul things, you know pop up and and and, of course, it is a manufactured manufactured in a direction to create a response to the fear of the of the Black figure, the Black subjects this kind of almost boogeyman type character. And so I really appreciated how the film, again, kind of centred itself within conversations around humanity and even celebrating Black culture, of course, it's from an American perspective. But I felt that there

was just so much waiting there to kind of like be opened up. And it was really about the way in which people look after one another in this case, the way in which Black people look after one another, because, of course, they're travelling from state to state and there are people who know what happened and they're looking out for them because they know and they've seen this kind of thing happen again and again and again. And they know that, you know, that the law enforcement are not going to, you know, look after them.

Emily [00:14:18] I think there's something about like the production of the images that are used though as well like, I dunno maybe related to the kind of Bonnie and Clyde, like iconography or something like that, because there's these like two sets of images, right, the images that are taken from that, I think it's taken from like the dash cam of the police, as you know, that appears in all of the newspapers that these these two people are criminals and you need to be on the lookout because they're super dangerous. And then there's this really and there's a photograph that is taken by a young boy when they're in a garage, it's a picture of them taken like on the hood of a car and there's just this this, you can also see the relationship between them in that photograph, and that becomes then because throughout the film as well, there's lots of talk about the idea of legacy our legacies through through one another as well, how our relationships become legacies of ourselves and what we and what we believe in. And that photograph kind of then to where the movie goes on to be a part of that legacy. So this also this taking over of of that image of of Queen and Slim as people in his and at that point is like two people that have been on like this, this journey together is really interesting. But maybe also links to some of that stuff that you're talking about in terms of like the glamour of Bonnie and Clyde. Yeah.

Adrian Mejia [00:15:38] You know, something I want to recall is maybe I'm not Black and I haven't in my life experience with racists, I mean, I've been quite fortunate in that sense. Like coming from a Latin American background is like this sounds rude for some people, but my skin colour is not Black enough to be racist with me, but what I do experiment is like the abuse of the power from someone else who should be the justice and when I was watching this scene with the white cop, treating them, I just remind me at the time the Home Office tried to deport me. And they played that bad cop game like, you know, I'm the justice here, you have nothing anything else to do. And I mean, I came, I'm actually I'm from a minority ethnic and you know, it's so hard to be in the situation when someone else say they represent justice. Say they represent all the good things in the country, you are trying to pass over your rights, pass over your humanity. And I mean, I've been in that situation. And when when the Home Office, they tried to deport me. And it was really, really, really caught in that moment cause I feel related. You feel like what should I do? I mean. I mean, it's like you are, I actually I can feel I was both characters in that moment. Part of me, it was Slim, I want to be nice and quiet because my life could be depend on this. But also, I want to be Queen like this is not right. I know my rights and you know, I will stand for my right. So, yeah, it's it's kind of interesting that it said anything. If it's one of the most remarkable on the on the on the movie for yeah coming from that background when when someone else try to pass over you is like a really, really and I mean it's like when they shoot the police you are like in a situation, I should be happy or I should... what should I feel right now? Because I mean, the actor that that plays that character, he's a really good actor and you hate him actually. You hate him. You're like..

Larry Achiampong [00:18:16] Oh, you mean the police officer. Yeah. Sorry. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Adrian Mejia [00:18:19] He's a really good actor. You hate him in that moment and you feel like, oh my God, he he, he got what he deserves. Yeah.

Larry Achiampong [00:18:26] Well, you know, for me to recap that the first time that I watched it and it was a packed audience in this, you know, the advance screening, people stood up and clapped. And I was there clapping as well, because, again, joining with with with you, and if I can perhaps even empathise, I've been falsely arrested before. I've had my clothes taken for forensics for a crime I didn't commit, of course. And and I even remember at the time and I was I was only 16 years old. I remember my mother like coming to the police station, local police station the next day. And, you know, in true traditional kind of like Ghanaian form you know "let that this be your last you know, you're not going to be going out anymore!" All of this stuff. She didn't want to hear anything she didn't want to hear, you know, what had actually happened to me. What what she knew was that these officers of the law have detained me for doing something wrong, doing something bad, which I had not done at all, you know, so that that stayed with me. It still stays with me today. And it makes its way in some respects through some of my work, some of the projects I do.

[00:19:37] But most certainly watching that scene when they were held by the police officer, it just kind of like my my body just kind of stiffened up. And at that point of release, when Daniel Kaluuya's character, Slim defended himself and Queen against the police officer, I was elated and I made no bones about that. So, yeah, but.. Yeah..

Adrian Mejia [00:20:07] I think it's a human reaction to empathise with with Queen and Slim in that moment because we are humans and I think like like I say, probably in the past sometimes people tried to blame you for what you feel in some moments, but they don't know probably you've been in the same situation or you been pushed in that situation. So you will release that you have sometimes inside I'm not saying I'm going to kill a cop, I'm not saying that, but I what I'm trying to say is, like, you could empathise with the release of someone make justice. And that's why I'm trying to say and you see that later on the movie, when you see the whole protest all day, all day, all the Black people coming in front of the cops and saying, what you got to do to us, shoot us or something like that? So you see that on the movie. You see that because that incident was inspiring to other people to come out and said, you know, enough of this. And as a gay man, I know that's happens also with the LGBT community where we was when we had the the riots on New York's I mean, that's riots they came because the police came to a gay club and arrest some transvestites or transgender people, so all that's came from something that was unfair in that moment, I just read about this story and the people just came and start to scream to the police and it was like something that that probably came from some, I put something like similar because it happens from one incident with the police, the police try thinking they are better, the police thinking they are the justice against a minority group that's called LGBT or Black people or anyone else. And this people who say, you know what? This is enough. We want to stand up and we got to fight for our rights. So, yeah, I was quite, quite, quite inspired in that that theme and all the people, they say it's enough. I mean, it's enough.

Larry Achiampong [00:22:23] Sam, Emily, I was wondering if there's anything that...

Sam [00:22:26] I do really enjoy the movie, to be honest with you, the part of it on my side, I think it's quite the racist and the English policeman is try to arrest them just for small thing and try to shoot the girl just for a small thing. And then finally, they tried to escape. And then I finally one of the Black policemen, just let them go when they try to escape. And anyway, they still came, were up, but they still enjoy the ride. They go to the horse farm. We have a ride on a horse for fun. And they still go to a nightclub and all that, they know

they aren't criminals. Then also they're also on the TV news, and what do we know them? That's why they got a haircut and try to make them so different with their long hair to a short hair. I do enjoy, I think obviously the sound system, I do agree is a very good sound system. And obviously I like to thank Heart of Glass to bring me to watch the movie in Odeon Cinema, and that's my first time in four years in Liverpool. It's not really I haven't got a chance to go to watch a movie there, because I knew that caused a lot of money. So at that time, I've only got five pounds a day, so I really want to thank Heart of Glass for bringing me to watch that movie. Thank you so much.

Emily [00:23:53] Thank you for coming and hanging out with me at the movies.

Larry Achiampong [00:23:59] I love going to the movies personally like it's one of my favourite things to do. Yes. I've got to say, like outside of my my artistic career, I'm a bit of a boring guy. I've got two kids whom I do a lot of things with, we do karate and so on, but otherwise I do enjoy going to the cinema and sharing experiences, you know, and you're sitting down, you're taking in a conversation or a moment that someone decides to capture and the way in which, you know, everybody has nuanced or different approaches to what it is that they've seen. You know, much like this this context in which we're sitting, I think is is really special when you're able to share that.

[00:24:40] I wanted to I mean, it's it's I'm really sorry about this Sam because you didn't see the last bit, but we are going to talk a little bit about it, yeah, I still think you've got to watch it anyway. Oh yeah. Yeah. Spoiler alert.

[00:24:54] I wanted to talk about, you know, some of those final moments within the film and particularly where Queen and Slim are very close to getting on an aeroplane, I think, out of Florida. Right. And they're just approaching it. And you see a wide angle shot filming them face on as if they're coming toward the camera. And then just behind them, you can see a police car just shoot from the at the right side of the, wide, wide angle shot. And and again, just to kind of recap that, that the feeling in the audience of the special advance screening that I went to, people were just like "argggh. Shit." You know, and and how I personally felt about that was, it was there were two things that were at play within me. The first thing was that seeing what happened within, like, let's say like the first 15 or 20 minutes of the film, I thought from like a reality kind of based perspective as a young Black man, this isn't going to end well for them. But then going through the film and going through the this journey of beauty, of of trauma, of of of memory and so on, I kind of I was in this kind of trance of hope that they would actually get away because because it's a film, you know, as much as it's talking about, you know, reality instead, still a film. And for that, I hoped that they would get away. And they didn't. And they got murdered. And if anything, that's probably one of my bugbears with the film. Other than that I thought it was quite incredible. But the thing that I found annoying was that, you know, even even within a non-fiction setting of cinema, Black people or people of colour still can't find any justice or they can't make their way. You know, they weren't going to try and hurt someone. They were trying to get away because they're trying to live. And yet they couldn't. And and I felt, you know, in a in a critical kind of like perspective, like, this is just, well that's shit, isn't it? So, yeah, I want to open it up and see what you all felt.

Adrian Mejia [00:27:21] Yeah, I think across the movie, you love the characters, you feel empathise and so many stuffs and you have, you expect them to at least find a way to be happy. Yet when like like you when when I saw that there, that bit, I was like, ah yes, there's an aeroplane. They're going to make it. I was like, for one second I just breathed. But then I saw that the police coming and I was like, "Oh, God." And it's like, part of me,

knew from the beginning, nothing good starts in a get away car. So. And yeah, part of me knew that could happen at the end. But having that tiny light of hope that they could make it. And they were so close! Yeah. Yeah. And like you said, it's like that taste that you have like there's no justice and it's like that taste is like, I mean, they cannot have justice by the justice with the state, they should at least you have justice in other ways. I feel relate that my personal story, because I could never ask for justice for me in my country for all the stuffs that happened. There are so many people in my country be killed for being gay. There's so many people will be raped, be kidnapped, be tortured. That could happen to me. And I could never ask in my country for justice. There's so many cases of people being tortured and murdered. And they're just like that. They never capture any criminals and any criminal or something like that. So. Coming that way, that for that ethnic minorities, it's difficult to have justice. It's like. It's like I feel myself like if I can't have justice here, I could fly to other places and get justice there. That is my story of life. So I want them to be like me, like they cannot have justice there, they can run away to a place where they can find some happiness. But sadly they didn't make it.

Larry Achiampong [00:29:50] Sam, oh no well of course, Sam you still got to go and watch it, so we'll leave it there with you but um Emily?

Emily [00:30:00] Yeah. I mean, as you were describing that scene again, like, oh, yeah, heart flips, just just like horrible to watch because, yeah that moment where the police cars kind of come around and you realise what's about to happen. But I think it's yeah and you have that feeling like oh really like it and I suppose the scene that kind of happens before that, which is where they're where they're about to get caught, like there's a scene where it feels like, okay, this is about to happen. But then they're they're basically allowed to escape. And it's a feeling like, oh, maybe this is changing, maybe this maybe actually the ending of this is going to be different. And so when those police cars swing round, you just say, oh, I know it's even here, as you say, even in cinema like this, this isn't going to turn out the way that it should do. But I think that also that that scene for me is also about like, the the relentlessness of the violence of the state really like that, that even though what what we what we know, like between us as people is right and what is wrong and what the state says is right and wrong are two very different things. But. But the state has has power. And it's and in this case, in this in this film is just is just kind of like relentless, like you're saying they've not done anything wrong and they're trying to they're trying to escape. They're trying to get away. They're trying to kind of they are they are defending themselves and they are escaping and they're not and they're not enacting violence upon other people. It's it's it's totally wrong. And so for me, that scene as well, just kind of also setting up an understanding of of who these two individuals are in that moment, the moment in which they're about to die by, you know, saying that they're armed and they're dangerous and they're criminals in this moment where they're in the most vulnerable position that like they had the two people on an on a runway who have been travelling and have been running for their lives and and now surrounded by about 30 police officers with with shotguns, basically, and rifles, a helicopter and a helicopter. And you look at the scene and you're just like, okay, the imbalance here of what's happening is is ridiculous. But that's kind of when you see it, because it's is a horrible scene. But at the same time, it's a really clear scene of the reality of the situation by seeing that seeing the two individuals like here and seeing the surroundings of what's going on around them, it's just a really for me was just like a it kind of took my breath away, this really clear depiction of the reality of the violence of the state and and and and and I don't know. I think that then. Yeah, I agree with. Oh, I agree with you, Adrian, just like feeling that that's quite um for me was quite it kind of depressing moment of seeing that and just be like it's it's so, it's so huge. And so how do you even start to kind of like how do you push against that or how do

you how does this ever end? Because it feels like so massive and so then I suppose those those kind of few following scenes and towards the end are really yeah what has kind of been set up throughout the movie as well, this idea of our connections with each other, they can how important they are and and and how and how is how a story is then told afterwards as well. Like who who controls that story and how is it how is it passed on?

Adrian Mejia [00:33:44] Can you share something that you said? I think quite interesting that what you said about the state oppression, because I just reminded me you haven't seen the Bodyguard from BBC?

Larry Achiampong [00:33:59] I know of it. I haven't seen it yet.

Adrian Mejia [00:34:01] Well, there is in the first episode, there's one girl she has like a bomb suit. So she's going to explode on the toilet. So this came the fella who is he protagonist, the main character. He came to that girl and say, I could help you, but I will tell you, there's this officers outside, if you came out of the toilet, they're going to shoot you because they don't care about you. So it's like the main character has a little bit of empathise from the woman, which was Muslim and was not British and kind of kind of like they remind me like that, like the police officer they don't care about the humans there. They don't care if they die or if they live. I mean, they just want to destroy the danger. Yeah, it's quite a similar because in that set up the bodyguards, they are on a train. And you could see so many so many guys with so many guns and everythings and they are just like that and you're waiting for for for the order to shoot. But what this fella from the Bodyguard what he does is like he came and instead he helped that girl. So in that, in that way, the guys from outside, they cannot shoot the girl without shooting him. So it's like kind of twisted apart, but it is like the same the same feeling like this...

Larry Achiampong [00:35:28] Quick question, because I think I know the answer to it. But the bodyguard is he white?

Adrian Mejia [00:35:33] Yes.

Larry Achiampong [00:35:33] Yeah. So that's the thing. That's why, you know, because again, like these, you know, Queen and Slim, they are Black people and, you know, you even hear like tales of like Black police officers being brutalised by, you know, white police officers. I wonder again, what what might that situation be like if that officer was Black, even, for example, you know. But I thought you bring out, like, really good point, you know.

Adrian Mejia [00:35:59] Yeah. No. One I'm trying to put in comparison is like that where like like it's not fair like an army of guys with guns, rather just one person. I mean that girl she was armed with a bomb sort of , but it's like the feeling of they don't care if that people lives. As far as they do their job.

Larry Achiampong [00:36:16] Indeed. Yeah. And their job is is to eradicate the target. Yes. And when that target has a darker skin tone. That price is higher. Anyway, I think we'll probably stop there. Thank you all so much, Adrian. Emily, Sam for your time. This was another podcast from the Mic Drop and you're listening to Larry Achiampong. Thank you very much. Bye.