



Sinners by Director Ryan Coogler

Review written by Colin Fels

Sinners, is not only a strong entry from Director Ryan Coogler, it's being heralded as one might call his magnum opus. The film has set a unique trend and will be referenced in popular favor for decades to come. Coogler has taken a very new approach with his latest film. For one thing, it's not likened to one of his Marvel releases such as his Black Panther and Black Panther: Wakanda

Forever. His latest film is also very much unlike the upcoming 2025 Marvel Television series, Ironheart. With this latest film release, Coogler has set his sights on something that delivers the scares, while centered around the historical Mississippi Delta scene.

Coogler has yet again cast Michael B. Jordan as his dual main protagonists for this latest entry. After all, by this point Michael B. Jordan is to Ryan Coogler as Leonardo DiCaprio is to Martin Scorsese, and that's highly favored. Coogler has enlisted his long-time muse Jordan for a number of releases over the years. The earliest released project beginning with his notable directorial debut, Fruitvale Station, a true story set around the last day of Oscar Grant's life, as he seeks to atone for past mistakes in the pursuit of redemption before tragic events that would eventually unfold. Since that time, we've witnessed the consistent rise of Coogler and Jordan with the three critically acclaimed Creed films, and Marvel Black Panther films, and now on to the latest project.

Sinners is set in Clarksdale, the birthplace of the blues genre itself. Where there'd be plantations, you'd find slavery, and where there is slavery, there's the very genesis of blues music. Except, in its' earliest conception, it's a tired but resilient declaration from slaves who endured long days of labor and very uncertain violent hardship. The story follows two bootlegging twin brothers Smoke and Stack, who return to their hometown after their formative time working for Al Capone's Chicago operations. As you might have assumed, the brothers are experienced businessmen and hardened by years of organized crime for one of the most ruthless figures of that time. They make a contentious deal with the white land owner of a Sawmill, and inherently the spirit of prejudice present during that historical

period becomes apparent. The two brothers strike a deal and the sawmill becomes theirs for the purpose of establishing a juke joint for the black community.

“Son, you keep dancin’ with the devil...one day, it’s gonna follow you home”

This proverbial line sticks with you. It has a way of setting the standard for what locals deem to be sinful nature in a 1930’s southern town. Sammie “Preacher Boy” Moore is the musician character played by Miles Caton. The early scene in the film where he stops by the old wooden sided and rickety church he regularly attends. The preacher gives him a lenient but honest lecture. The head of the church is imploring Sammie to tend to his duties in preparation for the following day of service. Sammie has his own agenda...take his acoustic, go where there is money to be made, pleasures to be sought, and a blues tradition to be planted.

Sammie accompanies the twins and others before the night of gathering at the old sawmill juke joint. With prohibition in effect, booze is a hot ticket, that mixed with music and celebration makes for a night of first time patrons spending their dollars and toasting libations to the soul of blues music. Smoke and Stack are grudgingly accompanied by Mary, Stacks ex-girlfriend played by the up and coming Hailee Steinfeld. Smokes estranged wife Annie is brought along with an old time piano player, sharecropper and many others. Festivities are soon to be in order.

Sinners would be the title of this film for a more symbolic reason. The essence of blues music seems to draw about something sinister from very dark unexpected corners...

There may be a corollary that becomes a focal point between Sinners and an old Mississippi blues folk tale. When one sells their soul at the crossroads, the debt later comes due. Robert Johnson was a legendary Delta blues musician who made it big around the 1930’s. The folk tale goes...there was a man who sold his soul to the devil at the crossroads in Clarksdale where the natural meets the ethereal. It would be here that an exchange would take place, an exchange for other-worldly talent. That coveted talent of course being able to sing and play the blues better than any man who came before. As the

tale also goes, the man who sold his soul was none other than the legendary Robert Johnson.

There's a playful idea here you can imagine...that if Johnson paid in part for a significant debt to gain newfound abilities, maybe others would later pay back the interest. There's a concept in *Sinners* where the essence of blues summons evil, except in this case, that evil would later approach as vampiric in nature and appearance, coming to congregate close to what it's long been owed...the very soul of blues tradition.

For the juke joints one and only night of dancing, boozing, and music...danger lurks when three vagabond strangers approach the sawmill with the wish of entry. The celebration of blues guitar and singing draws their ears. They arrive to the exclusive event where entry is prohibited to their separate company of another kind. Even though these strangers come with instruments, even performing a folk-inspired number, they would be denied access to the festivities they desired behind guarded doors.

The night eventually takes a turn, as evil finds a way to infiltrate a night of celebration and transforms its' community into violent and debauched monsters. From a certain point in the movie, the darkness makes its way into the story and changes the tone and direction.

What is fascinating about *Sinners*, is that it marks a significant shift in an otherwise common paradigm for the film industry. In terms of the rocky relationship directors and producers must co-navigate throughout what is essentially a major investment, director Ryan Coogler has found his own path. More importantly he just set a bold precedent for film directors. Firstly, rather than waiting for his cut after the production studio collects their investment on the film, the director would receive a percentage of the gross earnings from the box office from the very first dollar. Secondly, intellectual rights. Coogler will eventually regain ownership of the film after a period of 25 years. This by the way, accounts for something rarely seen in the film industry. This move in film rights yields creative control to the director as to whether there will be spin-offs, adaptations, or sequels in the future. My very opinionated guess, a probable "no" to all three, but only time will tell. Coogler could now be a major player for film, an insider scoop suggested, revealing that the director has even collaborated with Christopher Nolan himself, for direction and advice on recent implementation of IMAX and Ultra Panavision cameras for *Sinners*.

It seems like we might be living in an exciting renaissance period for black directors, with the latest change being the impact on studio-director dynamics. There are multiple projects that are turning heads within the film industry, whether that be a horror release from director Jordan Peele, a highly acclaimed masterpiece from Steve McQueen, or a fresh 90% rotten tomatoes score from a film by Bomani J. Story we never saw coming. But believe me, there are a quite a few other directorial debuts I haven't even mentioned here.

Sinners takes historical events and merges its' characters with supernatural confrontation from multiple angles. This film gives you the impression there is deep symbolism to be explored, urging its' viewers to take a dive, and see what they find for themselves.