

## A PINWOOD DIALOGUE WITH DANNY GLOVER AND JOHN SAYLES, MUSIC BY GARY CLARK JR.

The film *Honeydripper* is the first collaboration between actor Danny Glover and director John Sayles. A veteran of stage, screen, and television, Glover has starred in such movies as *Beloved* (1998), *The Color Purple* (1985), *To Sleep With Anger* (1990), and *Dreamgirls* (2006). In *Honeydripper* (2007), he plays the owner of a 1950s Alabama roadhouse that is threatened by the rise of rock 'n roll. The Museum presented a special evening with Glover, with opening remarks by John Sayles, a conversation with Glover and Sayles, and two songs performed live by the Texas blues guitarist Gary Clark Jr., who makes his film debut in *Honeydripper*.

### **A Pinewood Dialogue with Danny Glover and John Sayles, moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz and followed by live music by Gary Clark, Jr. (December 19, 2007):**

DAVID SCHWARTZ: Here he is, John Sayles.  
(Applause)

JOHN SAYLES: Hey, everybody. Thanks for coming. I've been thinking about a lot of the sayings that were current in the sixties, and reevaluating some. The one about not trusting anybody over thirty, I'm starting to reevaluate a little. (Laughter) But the one that I still kind of believe in is the one that is you're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem. I'm here tonight to introduce somebody who I feel has always been part of the solution.

People often ask me, "Do you really think that movies can make a difference? That it's important? You know, they're just kind of entertainment; you go, you forget about them, whatever." I've always felt like from the very beginning—you know, from right around 1900, when they started having movies, which were originally about twenty seconds to one minute long and they were kind of more like video games than anything—they were an important part of the cultural conversation, and that part that movies play in the cultural conversation can be part of the solution or part of the problem. You know, if you think about the movies' role in racial relationships in the United States, the first fifty to fifty-five years

of them they were part of the problem. They didn't do anything to help; they did a lot to hurt. One of the great things about getting to work with Danny Glover is he's somebody, from the beginning of his career—(starting with the American movies he's done and then continuing; because he's really somebody who works in world cinema now) by the kind of emotional depth and intelligence he brings to his performances, but also the projects that he chooses to do and to support and to help make happen by this participation in them—has always been part of the solution. You know, Danny's somebody who also goes beyond that. He is a movie actor, and that's what he's best known for; but he's also trying to be, as much as he can, part of the cultural conversation in other areas besides movies. So when we asked and he said yes, it was like, "Okay, we've got a movie here." So I'd like to introduce Danny Glover. (Applause)

DANNY GLOVER: Alright, come on. Oh, boy.  
(Applause) Thank you.

SCHWARTZ: Well, congratulations on the new movie—and John's going to join us later to talk about *Honeydripper* (2007)—but we're going to go back in time a little bit, and I'll pick up on something that John brought up about being socially engaged and socially involved. I want to ask you about a period which you've talked about as being very formative, which was this period when you were at San Francisco State. Because I think you were a college student in 1968, and

have talked about this being a really formative part of your career, and your life.

**GLOVER:** I remember coming, after finishing high school and spending a year at City College of San Francisco. (It's most noted because O.J. Simpson also went to City College of San Francisco). (Laughter) I remember a friend of mine—we were a year, about a year-and-a-half difference in age—Margie. She was probably one of the smartest people I knew. We'd always talk about what was happening in the Civil Rights Movement, what was going on. You know, we would follow the whole trajectory of what was happening with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and all that. This is in high school. She said, "You know, you're always talking about you want to work with kids." I wasn't doing anything except working at Lone Mountain College, washing dishes at the time. She said, "There's a tutorial program out of San Francisco State College, a summer tutorial program."

Well, I came out there that summer of '66. And it was the moment that changed my life. Of course, we worked with kids. And what are you doing during the summer? You help play games with them; you go swimming with them; you help build coasters; and other things like that. But more than anything else, there was a little room, a little room out at San Francisco State College, where people came and read poetry. And one of the people I saw reading poetry in the summer of 1966 was Sonia Sanchez. Sonia Sanchez and Reggie Lockett and all these people.

It brought me in direct contact with a whole number of people, men and women who had been part of SNCC and had resettled, were going back to college and resettling in San Francisco, in the Bay Area. All these kind of factors came together at this particular point in time in my life. I ended up going to San Francisco State in 1967. We invited Amiri Baraka out for a semester, the Associated Students—which essentially, BSU controlled the Associated Student budget at that time. (Chuckles) He came out to do what he called a community communication program. It was designed around poetry, plays, music, a newsletter. All those things were happening at that time. We used the old Fillmore Auditorium, I remember. And he came into the Black Student

Union one afternoon, and he says, "I want some of you so-called revolutionary brothers to come and be in these plays."

So I volunteered. (Laughs) I had never been onstage before in my life, save from holding the palm when I was a kid on Easter Sunday. (Laughter) My mother always said, "How come my kids never have nothing to say?" And we wanted to say, "Mom, we don't want to say nothing. All we want to do is hold the palm." That was the first time, you know? So the first way I came to this at San Francisco State, like all the things we came to, was that we felt we were of some use. We were a black student union that had an office in the community. We were involved in issues around what was then called re-development—which is now called gentrification—we were involved in those issues. We used the tutorial program, which had about twelve centers, as a way of inserting ourselves in the issues within the community. So it was this kind of groundswell, you know? And then the program itself that Amiri brought out was designed to influence and engage people in a conversation about art; using art as a way of them seeing themselves and telling their own stories.

So we did plays like *The First Militant Preacher*, by Ben Caldwell, or *Get a Job*, by Ben Caldwell. *How Do You Do?* And *Mad Heart* by Amiri himself. And so all this theater came out and it felt purposeful, in a sense. Felt like I could be some use. That's how it began, you know.

**SCHWARTZ:** Did you decide at some point...? I think you were going to be involved in city planning, community planning, and you made a career choice, at some point, that theater—I guess you were in theater first, before you went into film.

**GLOVER:** Well, I think the last play I did during that really hectic—I mean, so much happened from 1967 to 1970. From a student strike that closed the university down in 1968 for nine months and had most of us on trial (Laughs) all the summer of 1969, to all the things that had happened there. All the nights spent staying up... I mean, we read *everything*. We read Fanon, we read Césaire, we read Léopold Senghor and early Mandela. We just read; we just read. This is someone who's

dyslexic, you know? For the first time, there was a purpose for reading. We read everything—and talked about it, and argued till four o'clock in the morning about theory. (Laughs) Everything like this; and that was kind of like what happened, that's what happened with me at that early stage.

So I just didn't do any theater after 1970, for about four years. I finished school; I went to work at the Berkeley City Planning Department in the fall of 1971. Then I came to the City and County of San Francisco, in the Model Cities Program, in the Office of Community Development, where I was a program manager and did program evaluation for six years in that time. Then somewhere in between, I got involved in doing improvisational theater with a little group, and then decided to go to American Conservatory Theater at night. During that period of time, I met Carl Lumbly—Denzel [Washington] was at ACT, Delroy Lindo was at ACT at that time—as students. That's abbreviated; I wanted to bring that up, too.

**SCHWARTZ:** Well, that experience, if you ever want to run for governor of California, you're all set. (Laughter) But tell us about the importance of the playwright Athol Fugard for you, because of course, the production in New York of *Master Harold and the Boys* brought you a lot of attention. But those plays, *his* plays...

**GLOVER:** Well, I have to certainly draw attention to, first, Zakes Mokai. I met Zakes Mokai when I was in the Black Actors Workshop in San Francisco, at the American Conservatory Theater. Zakes Mokai, I met in the fall of 1975; and then also, Bennet Guillory. Now, Ben and I go back to when we were about sixteen years old, when we were basically hippies together, you know what I'm saying? Ben and I go back, way back. We were in high school at the same time in San Francisco.

Bennet Guillory came to me—who was also at ACT at the time, in the regular program—he said, like all actors do, they say, “Well, let's work on a scene. Let's work on some monologues. Let's do all this,” all this stuff. You're pumped, you know. The year ends, and he says, “I have this play called *The Blood Knot*.” And we started working on monologues, because they're beautiful monologues. I mean, the master of language; Athol Fugard is something else. And so we

started working on monologues. And then we started saying, “Well, let's do the scenes.” We went beyond that. We brought a friend of ours, a person I'd just met, who I thought I was just an intelligent man, Felix Justice, and said, “Why don't you help us with the scenes?” He said, “Let's do the whole play.”

So we did the whole play. Built the sets; did the music, using Dollar Brand, Miriam Makeba, Leadbelly; you know, the music and everything else. Built the sets; got someone to do the wardrobe for us and everything else; and in the little small theater that sat about thirty people, we did the play. The play was four hours of the two of us onstage! (Laughter) At that point—this was in, like, 1976—I knew this is what I wanted to do. I remember Ben and I looking at each other after we had finished that, after we finished the first performance, and we just nodded at each other. Ben and I said, “You know, you're on your way there. You know what I'm saying.”

**SCHWARTZ:** You were in some of the film and television productions that were coming through San Francisco. Is it true you were an extra in *Escape from Alcatraz*?

**GLOVER:** Yes, I was an extra, essentially, for the most part; but that came later. Let me go back to the Fugard. What happened with me with Fugard is that... The beautiful thing that you have with great artwork, great work, great writing, is that you're able to kind of say, “This is what I'm about.” Not only do you learn the craft of acting—and I challenge any actor: there's no way that you can't learn the craft of acting, and understand the craft of acting, the use of nuance, language and all those things, through Fugard. You know? Just the same way: Lorraine Hansberry. If you want to learn the craft of acting, go do Lorraine Hansberry. Or Arthur Miller: if you want to learn the craft. Shakespeare: the craft of acting!

All those teach you language, what language and the use of language—and the nuance of relationships within relationships. With Fugard, the added credit was that we were on the same side in the world. We were looking at the world and we wanted to see—we were on the same side. So here I am with material that teaches me the craft

of acting; and at the same time, I'm saying, "This is what is important for me in the world."

So Carl Lumbly and I were doing *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, and we would do a performance and we'd tell people to bring clothes and medical aids, and we'd have them pack the medical aids and stuff up and send them to Zimbabwe; you know, send them to Zambia for people in Zanu at the time, because I was very much involved in the African Liberation Support Committee at that time, in 1976 and '77. So there's a way in which you can use the art itself, not only in terms of telling people and mobilizing people, but telling them the story and having the story resonate with them, and to make them active, as well.

**SCHWARTZ:** Of course, the performance of *Master Harold* drew the attention of Robert Benton, the director who cast you in *Places in the Heart*. Could you talk about making that transition and doing that film?

**GLOVER:** Yes, yes. Well, I had been fortunate enough to do some television. I had done a couple of small roles I think. I did a movie with Alan Arkin and Carol Burnett called *Chu Chu and the Philly Flash*. Adam Arkin was in the film and a number of other people; Jack Warden was in the film, and so there were a number of people in that film. I did that, and I'd done some episodes of... I did *Lou Grant*, an episode of *Lou Grant*. In fact, I was...

**SCHWARTZ:** You did some *Hill Street Blues*.

**GLOVER:** Well, I was, at the Roundabout in 1980, doing *Blood Knot*, with Suzanne Shepherd directing. I did *Blood Knot*, and I got a call from my agent. They had told me, "Don't go to New York and do anything, because pilot season's coming up." I got a call from my agent, my agent said, "You got an offer to do a pilot and a guaranteed thirteen episodes." And I was sitting at the Roundabout getting \$250 a week, and they didn't have an extra—I mean, excuse me, they didn't have a stand-in for me, because they were paying me \$150 so I could live on that, so... You know?

So I told him, I said, "I can't leave this play. I'm committed to the play." So I turned down the

series, and the series was *Hill Street Blues*, you know. (Laughter) But if I had taken the series, you never know what would've happened, you know? I did *Blood Knot*, and one of the rehearsals of *Blood Knot*—who walks into the rehearsal or run-through but Athol Fugard.

He called me up when I was doing—I was in the second cast of a play at the L.A. Actors Theater, *Nevis Mountain Dew*, by [Steve] Carter. I was working around the theater, hanging sheetrock and doing electrical work and all that, helping build sets. He says, "Danny, I'm doing a play at Yale Rep, and I want you to come and do that play." I said, "I don't know anybody in New York. (Laughs) Last time I left New York I was hungry. Somebody's going to have to fight for me." He said, "I want you to do it." So I came back. And Rob Benton came to opening night, and then he told someone, who became a friend, that when he saw me washing those floors, he says, "I think I found my Moze," for *Places in the Heart*. Yes, yes.

**SCHWARTZ:** What was it like in this time, the mid-eighties, this period—Spike Lee didn't make his first movie till 1986, and there were not that many films being made by African American directors. It seems like every role, every major role, there would be some controversy around. Is the role in *Places in the Heart* to subservient? Is Mister, who you played in *The Color Purple* (1985), is that...? There's a lot of weight on every major role by an African American actor. How did you deal with that at the time?

**GLOVER:** Well, I think there's so much—so much has happened. If we look at this kind of arc, in terms of African Americans within film, we've gone through that period which most people refer to as black exploitation films, and everything else. It seems like everything that we did was geared toward television, you know? You had these great writers that would come out, who had written plays—Joseph Walker and others who would come out here from the Negro Ensemble—and they found that they were writing television sitcoms and everything else. There was so much energy placed upon that, you know? I mean, I can't—outside of Richard Pryor, it's almost hard to identify any actor during that period, or actress during that period. Even the actors who came out of that period of black exploitation, they found that

the work was—you know, Rosalind Cash and others—they found that the work was meager there.

So it's a very interesting dynamic. So you have *Places in the Heart*, which we shot in 1983. You have *Places in the Heart*; you have *The Color Purple* in 1985.

So I mean, of course you do a movie about someone who's been a sharecropper and picking cotton, you know, in *Places in the Heart*. (Laughs) I mean, sometimes there's a way, the ways in which you look at that film. But I felt that the humanity in the film far overshadowed the particulars that we often associate with African Americans and the South, you know? Cotton is always associated with slavery, you know; and the aftermath of slavery; and the institutional bondage of African Americans after the Emancipation Proclamation. Those are the kind of issues that certainly, you have to confront, you know. Whether we're talking about *Souder* (1972) or we're talking about—we always have this experience. That experience of African Americans circumscribed to a particular locality, locale—whether it was the real rural south in a cabin, or whether it was the urban North and some other kind of demeaning situation.

**SCHWARTZ:** You were really starting to form an interesting career. I believe the first of the four *Lethal Weapon* movies was in the late eighties, and then you—so of course, you had a big sort of blockbuster hit—and you got involved with producing. You produced—not only starred in, but produced—Charles Burnett's film, *To Sleep with Anger* (1990), which was another shoestring budget film, which became one of the best regarded films of that whole decade.

**GLOVER:** You know, it's interesting, because I mean, I had an opportunity. I remember meeting Lawrence Kasdan. Lawrence Kasdan said, "You know, I want to do a Western." You know? He didn't say, "I want to do a black..." "I'm going to do a Western, and I want you to be in it." He didn't say, "I'm doing a black Western." "I'm doing a Western," he said, "With a black hero in it." And all of a sudden, I'm in *Silverado* (1985). You know what I'm saying? Or Peter Weir. I met Peter Weir, and he said, "I don't have very much

in the film [*Witness* (1985)] that I'm doing. What role do you want to play?" I read the script and I said, "I want to play the bad cop." (Chuckles) You know what I'm saying?

So there; then you have *Color Purple*, and I think to Dick Donner's credit, and perhaps even to Warner Brothers credit—I had just finished *Color Purple*. *Color Purple* was a Warner Brothers film, and they were doing a buddy picture. At that particular point in time, there were several actors that were looked at for the role. White actors. So Dick Donner decided to go with me. I remember going and reading with Mel [Gibson], and the moment we finished the reading of the script, someone at Warner Brothers said, "Let's go make a movie," you know.

What happened with that film is that it provided me, the first one, provided the leverage to do Charles' film. The beautiful thing with Charles' film, for me, was that even though I was born and raised in San Francisco, California and certainly lived in the Haight-Ashbury since I was eleven years old—even though I was born and raised [there] I always had this strong connection to my grandparents in the South. The rural South. My grandmother was a midwife; my grandfather was a poor farmer. When they were married, in 1915, they started out as tenant farmers and sharecroppers and everything else. So when I read that script, there was something that came over me, all this stuff that I began to feel—and partly, this is what I call now my historic memory or psychic memory—began to kind of come out of me.

I wanted to know, what was it all about? What was I touching? What world was I touching that, certainly, was not really connected to the world I had in San Francisco, but was connected to something much more far reaching than that world, you know? That's the reason why I wanted to do the film, in a sense. (Laughs) To be in a space and to begin to listen, because I began to hear the stories of my grandmother. I remember vividly stories my grandfather would tell, or my grandmother would tell. You'd be sitting out there—because when you're off of Highway 1, and there's nothing but pitch black out there, it gets scary, you know? (Laughter) As a kid. But you're hearing these stories and you're kind of

moved. I wanted to insert myself in that experience and try to understand that through this film.

That's the beautiful thing that's happened to me. I did *Places in the Heart*, [where] my work is a tribute to my mother, who died in an automobile accident the same day that I found out I was going to get the role. So my work is there. So that little handkerchief that I give Sally was a handkerchief of my mother's. So I was going to give praise for the most—my life. I mean, she brought life to me, you know what I'm saying?

Then to be able to do a film, and to be able to kind of insert myself in the film, and to be feeling all these things, and wondering what all these things are about, you know? That's the beauty of that, you know? Easily... I've been able to do some of that. Not always. But often, I've been able to begin to enter into a world, and I want to know what that world is about. Somewhere in that world is a part of what I could believe, and I always like to talk about a collective memory.

**SCHWARTZ:** It's such an interesting, enigmatic character that you play in that film. I want to ask you a bit about your approach to film acting, because we haven't talked much about the craft. You have an ability to play characters where there's a lot suggested, a lot of inner life suggested.

**GLOVER:** Well, I think the work that you do in front of a camera is certainly connected to the work you do before you get before the camera. (Laughs) All the preparation. I think that everything that you do is about preparation, preparation, preparation, you know? I find my way of getting to it, roles, work. A great deal of it is not prescribed to any method. Intuition, instinct, I think, play an important role, and I think whatever method that you do ascribe to is certain formed within that sense of using your intuition and using your sensibilities, you know?

We can talk about *Honeydripper*. Just the idea of being in front of a piano, and being able to divest yourself of all the inhibitions there are about that, and be able to see yourself—just that, just the physical language itself. Because most of the approach—and most of us learn this as actors on

the stage—begins with: How do I physicalize something? How do I center the character? How do I place this place where the character stands and becomes, yes, some part of Danny, but all of the kind of manifestations of Danny's imagination, and what he's learned, what he chooses to do. That's what happens in the process of doing it; and then having to come alive.

So my work comes about from all everything. From when I wake up early in the morning, or I have some kind of vision of something, or I see the scene, the moment right there. Or it could be anywhere from... One movie, I found where I needed to go by doing Pilates, you know? By just doing Pilates. So all I did was, I did Pilates five days a week, and I found right where I wanted to go. I found right where I wanted to center the character; right there, and everything else came out of that. For that one film, it was Pilates, and John Coltrane's *Equinox* (Laughter) that got me—that's what I heard! It was playing in my head all the time that I'm [acting]. And everything I'm doing is playing...

**SCHWARTZ:** So you don't think much about—In a way, it happens naturally. I mean, I'm not saying it happens naturally, because there's a lot of work behind it. But what goes on inside of you, you trust that to project?

**GLOVER:** Well, I trust that, you know? That's why it's hard for me to look at my films, because all I can do is say what I was trying to do and what I was trying to trust inside of me. Whatever the place we get to, you know. I remember *Beloved* (1998). I had this room in my house—I call it the *Beloved* room. I had pictures on the wall, and I had all this, and books open and everything. Sometimes I'd go in there and I'd look at that; or I'd play the testimony that I got from the U.S. Congress on slave narratives, and all that kinds of thing.

Sometimes I'd go in there, I could sit in there five minutes, and I had to get out because it was just too strong. Sometimes I'd sit in there and I'd find myself reading something, or looking at something, and crying. All that kind of things, you know. One thing I learned from early on doing theater—and particular doing Fugard. Every single night I would dedicate my performance to

someone. Every single night when I did a Fugard play, I would say, "I'm going to do this. This is for Nelson Mandela." Or, "This is for Hector Peterson," or "This is for..." Always finding someplace where the work itself is elevated. The work itself takes on another life, because you give the work some sort of purpose, you know? I think on the one hand, when I think about, when I look at this what I call "cultural work" which has value, then the value comes out of the purpose that you give it.

**SCHWARTZ:** I'm going to read a quote from a review. It's actually a review that Ben Brantley wrote of one of your stage performances, but it reminded me of many of your film performances: "Mr. Glover suggests a man for whom calm is an existential choice in a violent society." It's very true in *Honeydripper*, where there's a kind of strength that you project, and a sense of what kind of person you want to be and what kind of inner strength you want to have, that you're able to project onscreen.

**GLOVER:** Well, I don't know. If that comes out, then it's coming from where I started from and what I begin with, you know? John Sayles gave me a *wonderful* place to start when he wrote the kind of narrative, the background of Tyrone, you know? Then how do I build into that, you know? What do I add into it? What moments do I have—specific moments; specific moments at what point in time—do I add to that narrative that John wrote that kind of give me another kind of clarity?

And I can call on that. I can call on it because now, it becomes part of my emotional life and my emotional experience. So what are the kinds of moments there? What are the moments that I called on, at that moment when Stacy Keach and I are doing that, in that place; where he represents the law, and everything that slapped me in the face, and everything that has come up, that I've come into conflict with throughout my life? He represents that obstacle for me. You know, all those particular things are moments that you find. You personalize them, enrich them, within the moments that I concoct in my head, or the moments that I was stopped by a policeman in San Francisco, and knowing that anything could happen at that particular moment, as a kid,

you know what I'm saying? All those are the kind of things that you...

Or stories that my grandfather—when I asked my grandfather about fear. I asked my grandfather, who lived in the deep South all his life, I said, "What moment could you talk to me about when you were really afraid?" This is a man who's eighty-something-years old just before I did *Color Purple*. Late eighties. And he said, "The moment where I was most frightful: when I was working on the road, building roads in Alabama. We were in a compound with all black men working on the road, and the rumour got out that a white woman had been raped." He said, "That was the most frightening moment in my life." My grandfather. So I tried to picture what it meant to this man, who in some sense, was his own person, you know? You know, he used to talk about how he'd carry his own gun around with him sometimes, if you mess with him... But in some sense, it was amazing that that was the most frightening moment in his life. And he's seen everything, you know? I imagine he's seen everything. A lot he could speak about, and lot that went with him to his grave.

**SCHWARTZ:** So tell us about writing this character. Since you started as a novelist, you've said, and you write a lot and really know a lot about characters before you put them on the screen...

**SAYLES:** Yes, I know. I kind of started thinking about the situation. You know, I started *Honeydripper* with the music itself, and thinking about that transition that happened, especially for the musicians, when the solid body electric guitar showed up and people had to deal with, "What's going to happen next, and I'm going to be part of it?" And that happened in 1950. So I said, "Okay, well, this music comes from the South." You know, blues comes up from the Delta. It's got to be in the Deep South. What else is going on in the Deep South in 1950? Well, people are still picking cotton by hand; the Korean War is starting, and Truman has (mostly with pressure from Eleanor Roosevelt and H. L. Randolph) has finally agreed we're going to integrate the combat troops, and the real fear of the army was not what's happening on the army base, which they thought they could control, but what's going to happen,

where our bases are situated when our guys go on leave.

So it started to spread from that, and it started with somebody who owns a club. And then I started thinking about stories I've heard. And there were guys like—you know, Danny was describing his grandfather. You know, you hear stories. During my time in the South, they pointed it out. "See that guy there? He never took shit from anybody. And he's alive to tell about it. You just knew you didn't mess with him." We said, "Well, why was it?" "Well, just the way he carried himself," you know? And then you start to think about, Who would he have to be? How would he... You know, because it had to be [intelligent], as well as a physical presence. You know, so that there's somebody who's good at the politics of it, without being too shifty, in a way, because you also have to just be a stand-up guy. And so I started thinking about that guy.

And then I wanted to add that one other guy, Charles Dutton, who I finally got to work with in this. There are these guys, and they kind of complement each other. Very different personalities, but they watch each other's back, you know, and they run this club together. And you don't mess around in their club. (Laughter) One of the reasons they're allowed to own this club, you know, Danny's character's allowed to own it, is that there's never been a killing in there. And so the sheriff doesn't have that chance to say, "Hey, I'm going to shut you down because of this thing, unless you make me a partner." You know? So just thinking about all the things that that character would have to go through, and how you would have to carry yourself in 1950, in Alabama, and not get killed, but still be your own man, as an African American. That started to be a really interesting character to hang the story on.

GLOVER: Yes.

SCHWARTZ: Could you talk about how you got—you've gotten so many great actors over the years to be in your films (Laughter) and you've said that you get some big name actors to take a vacation from their big salaries sometimes to work on your films. Or maybe Maggie [Renzi] does that! (Laughter) But could you talk about—how did you decide to be in this?

GLOVER: Well, you know, I first met John at Sundance, at the Moveon.org party. I had never met John before, and it was the first time I met him. I mean, if you'd have told me who John Sayles was, you'd have to show me to him and point him out, you know? (Laughs) I didn't know... First of all, I was surprised we're the same height! But soon after that, in 2005, he got the script to me. I read the script like that, and I said, "I'm in. Period." Then we went through the journey of trying to get it funded; what were we going to do? We had hoped to do it in 2005, but it didn't happen.

We're fortunate. We're fortunate that John and Maggie believed in what they were doing, and so they put up their own resources to make this happen. That doesn't always happen. The second thing that always happens, as most of us know who've been involved with acting, you can see a project that is so worthy of being done one moment, and it gets lost in transition. Next year, it ain't going to happen. You almost have to let it go at that moment, once it gets—if it's not done. But fortunately, you know—and I mean, just fortunately—it was able to make that next leap, and we found out we were shooting it in the fall of 2006.

SCHWARTZ: And what was the production like? One thing that I know about you is that you shoot in such a compressed amount of time. You have all this preparation about your characters, you really know these characters; but you have five weeks, I believe, to shoot?

SAYLES: Yes, this was five weeks. We've made them in as short as four weeks—which I don't recommend. (Laughter) This was five weeks. We only had Danny for three-and-a-half weeks. He was in a project before and a project after. So there's actually—in that scene, Keb and Danny were in the same place at the same time. There is a scene in the movie where Danny's looking at Keb's character...

GLOVER: Yes. (Laughs)

SAYLES: At least they didn't have to trade lines. But some of it is really... You have to look at a project and say, "With the resources we have, with the time and the money we have, can I make

this movie *well?*” And if you can’t, you don’t make it then. That takes some experience and some realism on your part. And we felt like, “Okay, five weeks; we’re working with really, really good actors. I can prepare the hell out of the thing. The good thing with the actors is, they don’t get stale.” You know, Danny didn’t get to hang around the hotel a whole lot once he got there. (Glover laughs) You know, he’s there, and on the set, and working. So for the actors, it’s like an athlete. Your muscles aren’t going to stiffen up, because you don’t get to sit on the bench. You know?

GLOVER: Yes.

SCHWARTZ: You’re also known for not having big, cushy trailers.

SAYLES: No, no. (Laughter) But you know, also I think the other thing is that there is an excitement of the production that happens. And you know, Danny’s been on some of these big, big things, and it’s like, “Oh...” You sit around for a day, and a special effect isn’t working, and you don’t get to work that day.

GLOVER: Exactly.

SAYLES: And it’s tough to keep the momentum going. We had all these incredible actors in this movie. Okay, I’ve written this bio that I sent along, we’ve talked on the phone a little about the character; they know who their characters are. I’m going to put them in a situation together. And this is the other thing that actors do for each other, is, you know, just like good musicians, they’re talking to each other. But they don’t set aside, “What are we going to do in this scene?” like directors do; they do it on the floor. They do it in, “Okay, next take, I’m going to get him.”

GLOVER: Yes; yes.

SAYLES: You know, “Next take, I’m going to do this; let’s see what he does.” At times, we had four or five actors in a scene, all working. And that, I mean, is just great. And the interesting thing about *Honeydripper* is, I also had musicians doing the same thing, the way that musicians—I don’t know how they do it, because I’m not a musician, I don’t read music. But all of a sudden, without anybody saying anything, they’ve added

sixteen bars to it. (Laughter) And somebody said to do that on their guitar or on their saxophone or—Just with a look. And the sixteen bars they’ve added make absolute sense. Now, the actors aren’t changing the lines, just like they’re still playing *My Funny Valentine*, if it’s, you know, Miles Davis; but every take is different. You know. And that’s, for me, the really exciting thing about, you know, getting Danny and these other good actors together. And they’re not doing it as themselves; they know who their characters are. It’s their characters just being a room with each other and facing off and working out that dynamic.

SCHWARTZ: Tell us a little bit about casting Gary Clark, Jr., who we’re going to meet later, but who has not done a film before.

SAYLES: No. Gary Clark. One of the nice things— And there’s a scene at the end of the movie, where this kind of makeshift band is thrown together. And it includes this kid who’s come on a train. You know, hopped a freight. And when you open up his guitar case, there’s this contraption that nobody’s seen before, that doesn’t have a hole in it. It has wires hanging out of it. And he says it’s a guitar, but he’s obviously crazy. (Laughter) There’s a saxophone player who’s old enough to have played with Buddy Bolden. And then when he says, “I’m going to bring a drummer,” he walks in with a fifteen-year-old kid. You know, so some of the point of that is that the great thing about music is that on one stage, you can have the past of music and the future of music.

GLOVER: Exactly.

SAYLES: Now, in our movie, we had a similar situation. You know, we had actors like Danny, and Charles Dutton, and Stacy Keach, and Mary Steenburgen. They were working with relatively new actors like Yaya DaCosta, who is terrific in the movie.

SCHWARTZ: Who is here.

GLOVER: Yes, she is. (Applause)

SAYLES: And Gary Clark, Jr. (Applause) There’s no such thing as non-actors in my movies; they’re all new actors. You know. Gary’s a new actor. But he

is a performer. And so, you know, we had just been very lucky to find Gary in Austin, Texas, where he's from, and has been playing without us knowing it, since he was fourteen years old. And a friend of ours who runs the South by Southwest Festival said, "You've got to check this guy out. He may be too young for you." Little did he know that it was going to take us two years to make the movie. (Laughter) And then we said, "So you want to come and read for this part tomorrow at our friend's house in Austin?" He said, "Okay, cool." He came, and it was like, "Oh, God, I think he can act, too." That was such a relief that, you know, well, we're not going to have to, like, cut away every time he opens his mouth, you know? (Laughter)

And then I think the other thing that happened on the set for Gary is that like Keb Mo, who's very comfortable with a guitar in his hand. Well, Gary didn't get to perform with a guitar the whole time, but he's working with these good actors. But it's not like they took him aside and said, "Here's what we're going to do in this scene, kid." It was really like they stayed in their characters, and each time, kept demanding from him that he react as his character, you know. So what a great school to go to. Just like a musician.

**SCHWARTZ:** And one thing I liked about the movie a lot is that you seem to capture a lot of spontaneities; that's what you're talking about. But you decided to shoot in gold old 35mm film. You used a cinematographer, Dick Pope, who—I mean, it's a really classic looking, handsome movie.

**SAYLES:** Well, you know, everything that goes on the screen is part of the story telling. You know, the costume tells you about who the person is; the dust on the street; every room you walk into tells you a story about who that person is. So one of the parts of this story telling is the visceral feel of those towns, of that time. And you know, the two movies previous to that, I'd shot in Super 16mm. And that was fine for those movies. This particular movie, I asked Dick Pope, the cinematographer, who did a great job. He said, "We can't get it to have the right look, it won't have the right feel, unless we shoot 35mm—and so, you know, we're going to take the time to do it." I think we almost killed him, to try to make it

look that good in five weeks, you know, because that's not an easy thing to do. But we pulled it off.

**SCHWARTZ:** And since you're both so experienced—you've worked with so many great actors, and you work with so many great directors—I'll start with you, and just talk a bit about was there anything particular in the experience of working with Danny Glover that you could say characterizes him?

**SAYLES:** You know, I think the fun for me with any actor is: I haven't seen this actor, who I know is a good actor, do this exact thing before. I don't cast actors because I've seen them do it already; I cast actors because I've seen them do some good stuff, and I want to know what they're going to come up with. So for me, the fun was the first day, when I didn't know what voice Danny was going to be in and, you know, when his physical thing was going to come. Just watching the first day and saying, "Okay, I'm going to see—this guy's going to develop, but I like this guy, you know? This is the guy that we're going to deal with."

It's not Danny, it's the guy that he's starting to create. We're not ad-libbing lines or anything like that. But then to see the other actors come and have to react to that guy. Whatever the technical problems you have, or line problems or anything like that, Danny's absolutely in the character—which is what I always tells actors. "Look, we're all going to fuck lines up. We're all going to have, you know, the grip stand fall over during the thing. Don't worry about that; know who your character is, and for each other, be that character." That, I think for me, was the most fun with working with Danny, is seeing that play out with the other actors. And who's this guy Tyrone? We don't do that many takes in five weeks, you know? So a lot of the most interesting stuff is the first or second time you do it. You know, that shock of the new that you get between good actors.

**SCHWARTZ:** Could you talk about working with John Sayles, or maybe what you learned from him? I think we're all hoping that one day, you direct. I know you have this project on Toussaint Louverture, which we hope to see you direct soon. So could you talk about working with, and seeing this director at work?

**GLOVER:** Well, I mean, outside of the basic thing of knowing and of working with someone of vision, working with a director with a vision, who has an idea and a vision that you buy into and you believe and you trust—those are the first things that come to mind: that I want to be a part of this vision. Reading the script and then see the application of the vision itself was just something really rich for me, and wonderful for me. That's the first and obvious thing.

And then just to watch how we work. You know, there's a certain work methodology, that was inclusive and everything, and that brought everyone in. That part of it was just really strong for me, and I like that... and the fact that we *didn't* do a lot of takes. I think that's important. Sometimes we get too married, as actors, and too self-indulgent in what we're doing, and we want this take after that take. But sometimes it's there, right there, and being able to be a part of that was quite amazing for me.

**SAYLES:** A lot of the trick with a low budget movie is to give the actors the illusion that they have all the time they need. (Laughter) You know? And have your shit together so that, really, it is about the acting when you hit the set; that they actually have a lot of time. It's not unlimited, you know, but not to feel like, "Oh, that was good enough, let's move." If an actor really doesn't feel like they've done it yet, we'll keep doing it.

**GLOVER:** Well, you know, the other thing that John said: "There's no wasted time." When you come to that, you come ready to work and excited about it. I was excited every day I came there. I was excited by what was going to happen. Of course, I'd run through in my mind what I want to do; but something else happens all along between what happens between me and Charles, or what happens between Yaya and me, or Gary and me, or what happens between Lisa Gay Hamilton and me. All those things are changing, and you get excited about that, and excited about the idea that now you have the application of just wonderful language that you get a chance to speak; and at the same time, to use the other elements around you, and to be full-fledged, deep into that, immersed into that moment and what's happening.

**SAYLES:** There's a scene in the movie between Danny and Yaya where they're hauling ass down this railroad track, and they're having this conversation on the move. Yaya's character is playing somebody who has a heart defect and really shouldn't be running along. We were shooting it with two cameras but no real coverage, and it was these two tracking shots along this railroad track. We were hoping we got it done—as the sun is going down and it's getting darker—and so there's no way you can hide from the actors that we're in a hurry. At any moment, the CSX Railroad train may come through (Laughter) and that may be the last hour of our day, is watching toxic waste roll through southern Alabama. (Laughter) But there is that great energy, which is: yes, they knew that we were in a hurry and all this kind of stuff, but they absolutely hooked into each other, even though for—you know, it's like a minute long scene—fifty seconds of that scene, they're not even looking at each other. But that connection and that energy of, "Okay, we're going to nail this thing," is really exciting for the whole crew.

**GLOVER:** Yes. It's beautiful. It's a wonderful moment, you know... And it helps to be a father with a daughter! (Laughs) It helps, too, you know, for me, you know? So the energy of being a father with a daughter, in the same way, played out; it was something that I could use at the moment.

**SAYLES:** And the crew. The crew gets into it, too. "Look at these guys, they're just killing this scene. Let's not mess anything up." It was a very difficult scene to do physically, you know, with the tracking and the lights and everything like that. So it's like everybody's rooting for each other at that moment...

**GLOVER:** Yes; yes.

**SAYLES:** ...of, Well, they're doing it; now it's the defense's time to not make a mistake so that, you know, these guys can go home and we've got the thing in the can.

**SCHWARTZ:** And you did get to act in a scene with...

SAYLES: Yes; you know, I commit acting every once in a while. (Laughter) Mostly in other people's movies now, but every once in a while, there's a part where I feel like, "Okay, I know how to play this; I don't need to cast somebody else; I don't have to pay for the airplane ticket to get them there." (Laughter) I'm in the Screen Actors Guild, you know.

Sometimes, quite honestly (and the case of this part is), "Okay, this is a very short scene. You know, whether people know it's me or not, really, the important thing is that without really the lines to do it, this guy has to be a little bit intimidating. I said, "Well, who do I know who's taller than Danny Glover (Laughter) because we're going to be walking side-by-side for a second?"

Just as, you know, at the end there's a scene where this character who you think is this mountainous guy, who's a cotton picker, ends up between Danny and Charles Dutton and you realize he's not that big. He better behave himself in this club. Sometimes when it's shorthand, you've only got a minute long scene, just the physicality of a character is important. That's often how I—you know, I started my acting career playing large retarded people. (Laughter) I was Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*, and I played Chief Bromden in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and so it's often the most notable thing about my performance. (Laughter)

GLOVER: We have something we share. I played Lennie in *Mice and Men* too, you know? (Laughs) I remember my mom came to see me play Lennie in *Mice and Men*. She came back and said—this is 1976—she came backstage and she said, "Son, the people say you can act!" (Laughter) I said, "Ooh, I love you!" (Laughs)

SCHWARTZ: Well, I played a catatonic character in *Cuckoo's Nest* in high school; that was the end of my acting career. (Laughter)

SAYLES: Catatonic's good to start with.

SCHWARTZ: But maybe you'll cast him when you direct *Toussaint*.

SAYLES: I speak French!

GLOVER: Okay then, there we go, there we go! (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: I'm going to ask you, since you're both so involved in making movies and producing films, now that you have a production company, Louverture Films; you produced one of the best movies that came out last year, *Bamako* (2006)...

GLOVER: Yes, yes.

SCHWARTZ: ...could you talk, maybe both of you, how you see the scene right now, getting these projects made?

GLOVER: Well, I tell you... (Laughs) John could tell you, it's going to be tough, you know? And it is tough. I'm sure that [producer] Warrington [Hudlin] can tell you the same thing: that it's tough trying to get these movies made. And we're going to have to be imaginative in how we find financing. We have to be imaginative in how we do P&A for this. That's where we need people's bodies in seats. We need to get people out there.

In fact, I had—I haven't told this to John yet—but my cousin called me. My cousin lives in Atlanta. He said, "Cuz, I haven't talked to you in a while." He said, "You've got a new movie coming out." I said, "Yeah, *Honeydripper*." He said, "Yeah." "And I know that you go to the biggest church, one of the biggest churches in Atlanta, Ben Hill." He said, "Yeah." I said, "How about your minister hosting something like that?" He said, "Yeah! We can get—he knows five other ministers, so we can get a theater." So I call the minister, and he's right on that, you know what I'm saying? We can get a theater and get people in the seats, get people talking about the movie.

This is a very ingenious way of introducing a movie into an audience: finding the audience, finding the target audience and getting the word out there. We have an opportunity to do this. Let's use the opportunity so this becomes a template for other people who want to do films and want to find different ways, because this movie could easily get lost in the whole shuffle that happens at this time of year. Most notably, it doesn't care whether my name's on it, or whether John Sayles' name's on it. This is a problem. So we need people to see these movies. And in seeing these

movies, then we ensure the possibility—and only the possibility—that we can make other movies! (Applause)

**SAYLES:** You know, a lot of what we've been talking about is not accepting status quo. You know, you hear all the time—I mean, basically, a lot of my motivation for doing anything is somebody tells me, "You can't do that." I have to say that it's probably not a very positive character trait in some way, but people say you can't do something, I say, "Oh, well, that sounds interesting." (Laughter)

So the standing wisdom is you can't open a picture nowadays unless you've got fifteen- to thirty-million dollars to advertise it, and that's the only way to reach people. Well, there are other ways to reach people; you just have to be imaginative. Really, the trick is: yes, there is an audience for the movie that Danny—I'd love to see this movie, you know? But getting it made first is one obstacle; and then making sure that those people who would like that movie, who are interested in that movie, can know about it and get there, without spending that extra \$30 million dollars (which you probably don't have, because you've spent it all making the picture). That's where you want to spend it. You know, you want to put it on the screen.

**SCHWARTZ:** I really just want to thank both of you for being here tonight.

**SAYLES:** Alright. Thanks a lot.

**GLOVER:** Thank you. Thank you. (Applause)

**SCHWARTZ:** Please welcome Gary Clark, Jr. (Applause)

**GARY CLARK, JR.:** Alright. I'm just going to play some inspiring... Danny Glover's career.

*If you are the big tree,  
I am a small ax  
Ready to cut you down.  
Ready to cut you down.  
These are the words of my master  
Telling me that no one shall prosper  
Then whosoever did the deed  
Shall fall  
Then whosoever did the deed  
Shall fall.  
If you are the big tree,  
We have a small ax  
Ready to cut you down.  
Ready to cut you down.  
If you have a big tree,  
We have a small ax  
Ready to cut you down.  
Ready to cut you down.*

Something like that. (Applause) I'll do one more for you. This is a song I wrote called *Worry No More*.

*Well now, I ain't gonna worry no more.  
Well no, no, I ain't gonna worry no more.  
Well, you can check me all you want,  
I ain't gonna worry no more.  
Oh, no, no, you can't stop me now.  
Oh, no, no, you can't stop me now.  
Well, I'm gonna rise to the top  
You can't hold me down.  
Oh, no, no, I refuse to back down.  
Oh, no, no, I refuse to back down.  
Well, I shall not be moved,  
I'm gonna stand my ground.  
Well, I say I shall not be moved,  
I'm gonna stand my ground.  
Well, I shall not be moved,  
I'm gonna stand my ground.*

Thank you so much. That's all I got. (Applause)

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**TRANSCRIPT: A PINWOOD DIALOGUE WITH DANNY GLOVER AND JOHN SAYLES, MUSIC BY GARY CLARK, JR.**

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