



FILM: **SORRY TO BOTHER YOU**

FDG RATING: 3.5 ☺☺☺☺○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Boots Riley: *director and writer*
Lakeith Stanfield: *actor, Cassius Green (Cash)*
Tessa Thompson: *actress, Detroit*

DATE: August 18, 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **SORRY TO BOTHER YOU**

[As a side note, in contrast to the almost daily news broadcasts of crime in Oakland, it is so encouraging to see yet another film based in our neighbor city of Oakland, CA, the director's hometown, that shows the city warts and all, but focuses on its colorful warmth and as a film achieves creative excellence.]

In 1996, Boots Riley's rap music career was sputtering so he took an unlikely part-time job: tele-fundraising, which incubated the idea for his 2018 debut film, *Sorry To Bother You*. As a rapper, he was inately aware of the range and power of his voice to connect with his audience. A skill that unexpectedly made him a successful telefundraiser. His film takes that idea and launches it into the fantasy satirical stratosphere along with other polical-social-cultural-economic points. Hold on, it's a wild ride.

We meet Cassius (Cash) Green (a superbly animated Lakeith Stanfield) living in his uncle's garage, in a very funny scene where he is barely waking up in late morning under the covers next to his artist, activist girlfriend, Detroit, in a bed that takes up the entire space of the small garage. The garage door flings up showing the neighborhood folks on the sidewalk, wide-eyed surprised at what they see. Cash immediately jumps up, slams the garage door shut, promising not to forget to get it fixed.

Needing a job, Cash goes for an interview at RegalView telemarketing, armed with a dusty, counterfeit trophy and a phony employee-of-the-month plaque, which due to his efforts at fakery, make him impressively qualified for the job. Stick to the script (start by saying "sorry to bother you") is the company mantra. An older, wiser, telemarketer in the next cubicle, hearing Cash repeatedly fail to get a conversation started with his list of target names, advises him to use his "white" voice.

It's the secret sauce to success. Cash's sales soar, bells ring for each sale, and in a fantastical altered state of what is really happening, we see images of Cash at his desk loom larger than life as they crash into the living spaces of the people he is calling. His success is rewarded with an office on the upper elite level that he has only imagined as he watched extravagantly dressed men and women take the elevator to the top floor. The satirical imagagery continues to morph out of proportion and explodes into some wierdness that many of us thought a bit too much. Others understood the point, that as Cash's low level co-workers banded together to protest unfair treatment, and he is torn between his loyalty to his friends and their values while the lure of exhorbitant wealth is so enticing, the price to pay for that existence must be just as high.

Riley successfully crowds the film with stabs at manipulative, tatalizing advertising; the absurdities of contemporary corporate America; racist perceptions; contemporary materialism; exploitation, economic injustice, cultural conflict, and more. Given the exaggerated ambiance of each scene, Detroit's, always changing gigantic earrings with forceful provocative words as part of their design, don't seem out of scope. And as a performance artist, she is the in-your-face version of all the performances each character is portraying. In one scene Detroit stands on-stage wearing a bikini made from black leather gloves with the bottom glove extending a middle finger up her stomach. While the audience pelts her with old cell phones, bullet casings, and water balloons full of sheep's blood, she recites, (the only time she uses a white voice, which sounded a bit like a British actress) a confusing passage from the '80s cult-classic *The Last Dragon*. It's a sharp, edgy contrast to Cash's performance telemarketing.

It's a lot to take in. Some of us didn't like the chaos. Others thought the futuristic vision, (not the expected robots) is too depressing. Most appreciated the topical spoofs and enjoyed the many comedic moments. Definitely a valiant effort for a debut film; this absurdist, dark comedy is extremely original, risky, and over the top creative. Despite some bothersome scenes, our answer to *Sorry To Bother You* is an almost worry free 3.5 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best)



See you at the movies!

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