

MUSIC VIDEO: MICHAEL SHORE CONSUMER'S GUIDE

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□ GIL SCOTT-HERON AND THE MIDNIGHT BAND

BLACK WAX

★★★★½

Sony, 1986, 80 minutes

PRODUCED BY: Robert Mugge

DIRECTED BY: Robert Mugge

MUSIC FROM: Various albums by Gil Scott-Heron and the Midnight Band (Flying Dutchman, Arista, 1972-84).

SELECTIONS: "Storm Music," "Washington, D.C.," "Paint It Black," "Waiting for the Axe to Fall," "Billy Green Is Dead," "Angel Dust," "Gun," "Winter in America," "Whitey on the Moon," "Alien," "Black History," "Johannesburg," "'B' Movie."

and Afro-ethnic roots. Scott-Heron himself fairly glows with passion and sincerity, coming across as not only an exceptionally caring, committed, and driven artist, but also as an unusually warm, witty, and likable human being.

Gil Scott-Heron's long-standing political commitment and protean influence on rap sing-speech are finally given their due in this outstanding documentary. *Black Wax* was made by independent documentarian Robert Mugge, who shot the equally fine Sun Ra documentary *A Joyful Noise*, and he uses a similar technique here: mixing powerful performance sequences with equally potent, intimate footage of Scott-Heron in his home environs, which happen to be our nation's capital. The phrase "local color" takes on an entirely new meaning as we see Scott-Heron walking the streets of Washington while rapping his unflinchingly relevant protest sing-songs. As in *A Joyful Noise*, Mugge also comes up with some inspired set-pieces: he places Scott-Heron in a wax museum, where he makes some serious fun of the likenesses of various political/historical figures; and he has Scott-Heron recite his unforgettable "Whitey on the Moon" to a wax astronaut dangling over his head. Such Scott-Heron classics as "The Bottle," his unremitting and poignant antialcohol plaint, and the sharply observed Reagan putdown "'B' Movie" are included, and the only one missing is Scott-Heron's radical '60s anti-anthem "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." Throughout, the music of the Midnight Band is a supple, seductive fusion of soul, funk, jazz, pop,