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Hit film's glass ceiling because of my race, says director Isaac Julien

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The director calls for more black movie executives as BFI highlights talent



Celebrated: Isaac Julien won film prize at Cannes

An acclaimed director spoke out today about running into the British film industry's "glass ceiling" due to his ethnicity – and called for more black people to be hired in top roles.

Isaac Julien, 56, who won a Cannes Film Festival prize for his movie *Young Soul Rebels*, said that throughout his two-decade career he had experienced difficulty in the industry.

The director, who works in De Beauvoir Town in east London, told the Standard: "Big television and film organisations, the people at the top are white. White producers and editors are reluctant to say yes to content that's not a reflection of themselves, quite simply. I have experienced this glass ceiling and little has changed. The only way to change it is to have more black people at the top so they too are reflected in the content that's commissioned."

He said he was "flabbergasted" by the amount of British talent in front of and behind the camera, hailing it as one of our greatest exports: "At the moment I think it is positive to have black talent flying the British brand abroad.

"We have always been quite progressive in terms of diversity compared with other European countries but that reputation has been rocked with Brexit. It's good to have British talent out there." Released in 1991, *Young Soul Rebels* is set in the skinhead, soul and punk scenes of 1977 and follows the tensions in a London community following the murder of a local black gay man. It gave an early starring role to Sophie Okonedo.

The film will be screened this weekend as part of London Live's Black London film season. The season is being produced in collaboration with the British Film Institute's Black Star festival, which is highlighting great performances by black actors with a series of screenings and re-releases.

The BFI polled British moviegoers and film experts on their favourite performance by a black actor.

The public vote went to Sidney Poitier's portrayal of Detective Virgil Tibbs in 1967 drama *In The Heat Of The Night*, while the experts picked Angela Bassett as Tina Turner in 1993's *What's Love Got To Do With It*. The survey spanned 100 film and TV performances over 80 years.

Next month the BFI launches *Black Britain on Film*, making more than 140 titles available on BFI Player. It includes rare footage of Muhammad Ali.