



SOUL ON FIRE

A Premium Limited Series Event

LOGLINE

In 1970s Atlanta, a gifted Black singer discovers that signing a record deal means selling her soul—literally and legally—as she battles an exploitative music industry that profits from stealing Black voices while systematically destroying Black artists.

TONE

ATLANTA meets **LOVECRAFT COUNTRY** meets **THE DEUCE**

- Grounded period authenticity with surreal musical sequences
- Gritty realism punctuated by transcendent artistic moments
- Social consciousness wrapped in spectacular entertainment
- Raw emotional truth elevated by cinematic grandeur

THEME

Cultural Theft as American Tradition - How the music industry was built on appropriating Black creativity while destroying Black creators. This is a story about ownership: Who controls the narrative? Who profits from pain? What does it mean to "own" someone's voice in America?

PITCH

"What if Amy Winehouse had been born in 1970s Atlanta? What if her destruction wasn't just personal tragedy, but systematic cultural theft?"

SOUL ON FIRE is the untold story behind every stolen song, every exploited artist, every voice silenced by contracts designed as chains. It's **ATLANTA's** surreal brilliance applied to **WATCHMEN's** unflinching social commentary, with musical sequences that rival **BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY's** emotional impact.

This isn't just another music biopic—it's a reckoning with how America has always consumed its Black artists.

DETAILED SYNOPSIS - PILOT

ACT I: THE SEDUCTION (Episodes 1-2) 1971 Atlanta. LENA MAYE JOHNSON, 24, possesses a voice that can make angels weep. Performing in basement clubs, she catches the attention of MALCOLM TATE, a charming white producer who promises national fame. Against her activist brother DARNELL's warnings, Lena signs with Crescent Records, trading her authentic sound for commercial

success. Her debut single "Love Ain't a Loan" becomes a hit, but each compromise chips away at her artistic soul.

ACT II: THE EXPLOITATION (Episodes 3-4)

As Lena's star rises, the industry's machinery begins destroying her. Malcolm pushes her toward cocaine to maintain grueling schedules, while systematically erasing her creative control. She falls in love with guitarist RICKY VALE, but their relationship becomes collateral damage in her accelerating addiction. When Lena discovers that Crescent Records owns her masters in perpetuity—her voice, her songs, her story are now corporate property—she realizes she's trapped in a golden cage designed to extract her talent until nothing remains.

ACT III: THE RECKONING (Episodes 5-6) Rock bottom becomes solid ground. Clean but broke, Lena joins Darnell's artists' rights movement, discovering her voice was meant for more than entertainment—it was meant for revolution. When Crescent Records celebrates their "Legacy of Southern Soul" with a gala honoring stolen music, Lena crashes the party and delivers the performance of her life: "Soul on Fire," an a cappella tour de force that transforms pain into power. Though the effort may cost her everything, her bootleg performance will escape their vaults and inspire future generations to reclaim what was stolen.

OUTLINE

- **EPISODE 1: "BURNIN' LOW"** - Discovery and seduction
 - **EPISODE 2: "GOLD IN THE GROOVES"** - Early success and compromise
 - **EPISODE 3: "TWO FLAMES IN THE DARK"** - Love and addiction
 - **EPISODE 4: "PAPER GOWN"** - The breaking point and ownership revealed
 - **EPISODE 5: "WHO'S GONNA SING FOR ME?"** - Awakening and resistance
 - **EPISODE 6: "SOUL ON FIRE"** - Final confrontation and transcendence
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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

LENA MAYE JOHNSON (24-32) - Lead Role, 6 Episodes Gospel-trained singer with otherworldly talent. Complex, flawed protagonist whose journey mirrors America's relationship with Black creativity. **Emmy-bait performance opportunity.**

MALCOLM TATE (45-55) - Primary Antagonist, 6 Episodes Sophisticated, charming music producer who represents paternalistic industry racism. Believes he's "helping" while building fortune on stolen Black labor.

DARNELL JOHNSON (28-35) - Supporting Lead, 6 Episodes

Lena's brother, Vietnam veteran, civil rights activist. The show's moral compass and voice of resistance.

RICKY VALE (26-30) - Love Interest, 5 Episodes Talented guitarist whose dreams were crushed by the industry. Finds purpose in Lena's success until addiction leads to betrayal.

MAMA ESSIE JOHNSON (55-65) - Recurring, 4 Episodes Lena's mother, church organist, keeper of spiritual wisdom about music's sacred power.

TALENT SUGGESTIONS

LENA MAYE JOHNSON:

- **Andra Day** (Golden Globe winner, *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*)
- **Cynthia Erivo** (Tony/Emmy winner, *Harriet*)
- **Keke Palmer** (Emmy nominee, *Nope*)

MALCOLM TATE:

- **Oscar Isaac** (*Moon Knight*, *Inside Llewyn Davis*)
- **Michael Shannon** (*The Shape of Water*, *Boardwalk Empire*)
- **Jon Hamm** (*Mad Men*, *Baby Driver*)

DARNELL JOHNSON:

- **LaKeith Stanfield** (*Atlanta*, *Sorry to Bother You*)
- **John Boyega** (*Small Axe*, *Star Wars*)
- **Stephan James** (*If Beale Street Could Talk*)

MAMA ESSIE JOHNSON:

- **Regina King** (*Watchmen*, *Seven Seconds*)
 - **Angela Bassett** (*What's Love Got to Do with It*)
 - **Aunjanue Ellis** (*When They See Us*)
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CASTING MOCK-UP GRID

SOUL ON FIRE



ANDRA DAY
as LENA



OSCAR ISAAC
as MALCOLM



LAKEITH STANFIELD
as DARNELL



REGINA KING
as MAMA ESSIE



JEFFREY WRIGHT
as RICKY VALE

DIRECTOR MATCH SUGGESTIONS

BARRY JENKINS (*Moonlight, If Beale Street Could Talk*)

- Proven ability to handle intimate Black stories with artistic grandeur
- Musical storytelling experience, visual poetry

REGINA KING (*One Night in Miami, Watchmen*)

- Understanding of civil rights era, strong with ensemble casts
- Experience directing musical performances

RYAN COOGLER (*Black Panther, Fruitvale Station*)

- Cultural authenticity, blockbuster sensibility
- Proven ability to blend social commentary with entertainment

NIKI CARO (*Mulan, The Zookeeper's Wife*)

- Strong female perspective, period piece experience
 - Musical film expertise
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LOOKBOOK/MOOD REEL REFERENCES

VISUAL INSPIRATION:

- **ATLANTA** - Surreal sequences, authentic cultural portrayal
- **LOVECRAFT COUNTRY** - Period detail, social commentary through genre
- **THE DEUCE** - Gritty 1970s atmosphere, industry exploitation
- **BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY** - Musical performance spectacle
- **MOONLIGHT** - Intimate character study, visual poetry

MUSICAL INSPIRATION:

- **A STAR IS BORN** - Raw vocal performances, industry critique
- **WHIPLASH** - Music as obsession and destruction
- **INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS** - Authentic musical performances
- **DREAMGIRLS** - Motown era, behind-the-scenes industry drama

MARKETING HOOKS & PROMO-READY TAGLINES

PRIMARY TAGLINE: *"Some voices are too powerful to own."*

SECONDARY TAGLINES:

- *"Her voice made millions. Her truth cost everything."*
- *"They owned the records. She owned the revolution."*
- *"In 1970s Atlanta, singing your truth was an act of rebellion."*
- *"From gospel to gold records to revolution."*

CAMPAIGN CONCEPTS:

- **"RECLAIM YOUR VOICE"** - Interactive social campaign
- **"MASTERS OF DECEPTION"** - Documentary tie-ins about music industry exploitation
- **"SOUL REVIVAL"** - Soundtrack and concert experiences

TARGET AUDIENCE & MARKET

CORE AUDIENCE:

- **Primary:** Adults 25-54, African American, college-educated, streaming-focused
- **Secondary:** Music lovers, social justice advocates, prestige TV audiences
- **Tertiary:** International audiences interested in American culture and civil rights history

PSYCHOGRAPHICS:

- Values authentic storytelling and cultural representation
 - Engaged with social justice movements and artists' rights issues
 - Streaming-native, binge-watching behavior
 - Active on social media, shares content that aligns with values
 - Willing to pay premium for quality, meaningful content
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WHY IT SELLS

AWARDS MAGNET: Built for Emmy/Golden Globe campaigns - period piece with social relevance and showcase performances

CULTURAL MOMENT: Arrives as artists reclaim masters (Taylor Swift), streaming pays battle royalties, and entertainment industry faces exploitation reckon

FRANCHISE POTENTIAL: Can expand to other cities/eras (Detroit Motown, Chicago Blues, etc.)

INTERNATIONAL APPEAL: Universal themes of artistic integrity and corporate exploitation

SOUNDTRACK GOLDMINE: Original music drives additional revenue streams and cultural impact

PRESTIGE BRANDING: Elevates network brand as destination for important, quality programming

COMPARABLE FILMS & SERIES

DIRECT COMPARISONS:

- **ATLANTA** - Cultural authenticity, surreal musical elements, social commentary
- **LOVECRAFT COUNTRY** - Period piece with supernatural/surreal elements, HBO prestige
- **THE DEUCE** - 1970s setting, industry exploitation themes, character-driven drama

ASPIRATIONAL COMPARISONS:

- **WATCHMEN** - Reimagining of American history through Black perspective
- **WHEN THEY SEE US** - Social justice storytelling that sparks cultural conversation
- **THE CROWN** - Period prestige drama with cultural significance

MUSICAL COMPARISONS:

- **BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY** - Musical biopic with spectacular performance sequences
 - **A STAR IS BORN** - Music industry commentary with authentic performances
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PRODUCTION VALUE

BUDGET TIER: Premium Limited Series (\$1 - 1.5M per episode)

KEY PRODUCTION ELEMENTS:

- **Period Production Design:** Authentic 1970s Atlanta locations and sets
- **Musical Sequences:** Cinematic performance numbers requiring choreography, multiple cameras
- **Original Music:** Full soundtrack of period-appropriate soul/funk compositions
- **Costumes:** Award-worthy period wardrobe and hair/makeup
- **Locations:** Mix of studio builds and authentic Atlanta historical sites

POST-PRODUCTION: High-end color correction, sound mixing for musical performances, potential VFX for surreal sequences

STORY & HOOK – WHY THIS STORY MATTERS NOW

CULTURAL RECKONING: As the entertainment industry faces overdue reckon with exploitation, SOUL ON FIRE provides historical context for contemporary battles over artistic ownership and cultural appropriation.

ARTISTS' RIGHTS MOVEMENT: With Taylor Swift re-recording masters and streaming royalty battles in headlines, audiences are primed for stories about artist exploitation.

BLACK LIVES MATTER CONTINUATION: Extends BLM conversation into cultural sphere, showing how systemic racism operates through contracts and copyrights, not just police and prisons.

STREAMING WARS CONTENT: Premium networks need prestige content that generates cultural conversation, awards attention, and international sales.

MUSICAL MOMENT: Post-pandemic audiences crave communal musical experiences; this provides both nostalgic soul music and contemporary social commentary.

DEMOGRAPHICS

PRIMARY DEMOGRAPHIC (65% of audience):

- Age: 25-54
- Race: 60% African American, 25% White, 15% Other
- Income: \$50K+, college-educated
- Platform: Streaming-first viewers
- Behavior: Social media active, culturally engaged

SECONDARY DEMOGRAPHIC (35% of audience):

- Age: 18-34, 55+
 - Music industry professionals and enthusiasts
 - Social justice advocates across all demographics
 - International viewers interested in American culture
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MARKETABILITY

AWARDS SEASON: Limited series format perfect for Emmy campaigns, with showcase roles for lead actress, supporting cast, music, production design

CULTURAL CONVERSATION: Story sparks discussion about ongoing industry exploitation, making it social media and think-piece friendly

MUSIC MARKETING: Soundtrack becomes cultural event, driving streaming numbers and concert opportunities

INTERNATIONAL SALES: Period American drama with universal themes of artistic integrity and corporate exploitation

BRAND ELEVATION: Positions network as destination for important, quality programming that respects Black stories and voices

FRANCHISE DEVELOPMENT: Success enables expansion into other musical eras and cities, creating ongoing brand value

TALENT MAGNET: Prestige project attracts A-list performers, directors, and behind-the-scenes talent

DOCUMENTARY POTENTIAL: Can spawn companion documentaries about real music industry exploitation

EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS: Universities, civil rights organizations, and cultural institutions provide additional marketing and credibility

THE BOTTOM LINE

SOUL ON FIRE is more than entertainment—it's a cultural event. It's the series that will define how this generation understands the price of Black creativity in America.

In a landscape hungry for authentic voices and untold stories, **SOUL ON FIRE** delivers both spectacle and substance, providing the prestige content premium networks need to differentiate themselves in the streaming wars.

This is the show that makes careers, wins awards, and changes conversations.

Available for development at premium networks and streaming platforms.

NCCA
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