

Green Book (12A)

Directed by Peter Farrelly



'19 UK 2hrs 10mins

Wed 30 Jan for at least one week

Director Peter Farrelly (Dumb and Dumber, There's Something About Mary) brings this charming, based-on-a-true-story tale of a successful black jazz pianist who hires a white man from the Bronx to chauffeur him around the Deep South of 1960s America.

Set in 1962, it follows Italian-American Tony Lip (Viggo Mortensen), who is hired by world-class black pianist Don Shirley (Mahershala Ali) to chauffeur him on a concert tour through the Deep South. Don is aware of the troubles that he might face in different locations due to the colour of his skin and requires someone to act as both staff and protector. Tony isn't an obvious choice as his views on race are problematic to say the least but he carries the required muscle and the unlikely pair embark on a road trip that's bound to change both of their lives...

Funny and moving, Farrelly boldly shows how he can nail not only comedy, but more dramatic tales too. With exceptional performances from Ali and Mortensen (they have an enchanting bond on camera) and having picked up the People's Choice Award at TIFF, this story of race, class, and redemption is not one to be missed.

Extracts of this article written by Mike Ryan featuring an interview with director Peter Farrelly originally appeared on Uproxx.com on 13 Nov 2018

It was quite a sight back at the Toronto Film Festival in September to see Peter Farrelly (of course best known as one half of the Farrelly Brothers directing duo that gave us Dumb & Dumber and There's Something About Mary) on stage for a standing ovation after the premiere of his new film, Green Book. It was one of those movies that just kind of came out of nowhere, with not much known about it, other than whispers of, "Can you believe Peter Farrelly has a movie at a film festival?" From his remarks, it seemed like Farrelly couldn't believe it either, admitting he's never even been to a film festival before. Now, here we are a couple of months later, and his film is squarely in the Oscar discussion. When talking to Farrelly, you can tell he missed working with his brother, Bobby, on this project. As Peter explains, when Green Book was being developed, Bobby was taking time off to mourn the loss of his son. So Peter decided to go it alone this time, with Bobby still always a phone call away as "his biggest fan." But under the sometimes-sensational humor, there's always been an underlying sweetness to the characters of the Farrelly

Brothers movies, so it's not terribly surprising that Peter Farrelly has made an emotional, sweet movie that tells the true story of the at first rocky but eventual lifelong friendship between a gregarious bouncer named Tony Lip (Viggo Mortensen), and classical pianist Don Shirley (Mahershala Ali), as the two traveled the segregated South together in 1962 on a concert tour. But even as Farrelly explains, it's a little surprising that someone let him make it.

This movie made me feel okay about humanity again for a little bit.

That's what drew me to this movie. When I heard of the story, I ran into a buddy of mine, he told me a black concert pianist has to take a tour of the south 1962. He hires a bouncer – an Italian American bouncer with a sixth-grade education – who's racist himself, but good with his fists, to drive them. Somehow, after being in the car for a couple of months, they became friends for life. That's what got me. I was like, "What? What do you mean? The racist and the concert pianist? They were friends?" That's when I thought, "I want to see how this happens." That's what hooked me in. I wanted something that would be hopeful. That's what this story was. It was about two complete opposites finding common ground.

So, getting this off the ground, did you have to convince people to go along with something that would be a bit different from you?

Well, I knew right away I wasn't trying to do something different. I wasn't looking to do a departure. When I heard the story, I knew I wanted to make this movie. First of all, it's hard to make any movie. But it was hard for me to make this movie because the studios were like, "Wait a second. What world do we see you doing this kind of movie? This isn't what you do." I said, "Well, yeah, but Steven Spielberg did Jaws and he did Schindler's List." They laughed at that.

Wow, you went for it.

Like, "Really? You're comparing yourself to Spielberg now?!" I said, "Well, it's just an example." What's hard, and the God's honest truth is, there's no way this movie gets made without Viggo and Mahershala. No way. I'm telling you if I had actors one notch below them, but very highly regarded, it doesn't get made. I needed the best actors in the world to get this made. Even then, the studio was wary of it. They were concerned. It was not easy. It's only by the grace of God, and Viggo and Mahershala, that it got made.

When was the moment for you knew, "Okay, I think we have something here"?

I did a test screening for friends and family, like you always

do before you do your regular test screening. I had about 80 people in the room at Ocean Avenue Screening Room in Santa Monica. At that time, the movie was 15 minutes longer. Without credits, it was two hours and 15 minutes. Like I said, there were 80 people in the room. Not one person got up to go to the bathroom, ever. At the end of the movie, my brother was the first one, he raised his hand. He said, "Pete. You realize that you just showed two hours and 15 minutes and nobody went to the bathroom. That's the national record." Honestly, I swear, I had to go to the bathroom for a third of the movie. I didn't want to go. I didn't want to miss anything. It was my movie! That's when I realized, not just the bathroom thing, but people talking about it after that night. They were like, "This is a special movie." And then when we did our first test screening. It went crazy. We scored 100.

Wow.

It was 100 percent. It was a half black and half white crowd in Long Beach. The studio was so shocked by it that they said, "Well, we have to do another one. These numbers don't make sense."

They really said, "This doesn't make sense that so many people liked this?"

We then did it at the Arlight. We got a 99 percent. There was one asshole who said they didn't like it.

We should find this person.

We should find them. "Mother f**ker. We got the papers! Do a handwriting analysis. Some p**ck." Anyway, yeah. I knew we had something great, but I have to be honest, even with those scores, it wasn't until we were at Toronto where you got 1500 rabid film fans. Their reaction to it to me was like a Led Zeppelin concert. The ovations after and the love that we felt. That's when I knew, "Okay, this is a f**king home run. This is a good movie."

Your name is coming up in Oscar talk. Is that crazy?

I'm telling you the God's honest truth. I'm not bullshitting you, Mike. This is how I feel about all the awards. I'm glad they're there because I want people to see this movie. That's it. If we didn't have awards talk and all that stuff, this is the kind of movie that could slip through the cracks.

That's true.

That's why you have awards shows. That's what I always said. There's Something About Mary didn't need awards. Dumb & Dumber, we didn't need awards. What needs awards is, you know, Philomena. That needs awards. Philomena is a masterpiece. If that doesn't get awards, I don't think I would have seen that movie. Captain Fantastic...

Starring Viggo...

If there are no awards, I wouldn't have seen it. They say, "Oh, Viggo got nominated for an Oscar. Oh really?" I was under the impression it was a superhero movie. I didn't wanna see it. And then I find out, no, it's something different. I went to it. That's what this movie is. This movie is a movie that needs that kind of stuff. It's good for it. That's why I'm glad that stuff is there for the movie.

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Was it weird to not have Bobby around? I assumed you spoke, but I'm also under the impression you two kind of feed off each other.

I did miss it. The only reason it happened, by the way, I'd rather not go into too much detail about here, just because I don't want my brother to have to keep reliving it, is that his son passed away.

Oh, I didn't know that.

Yes. His son, he died of a drug overdose. 20 years old. My brother, he has been reeling pretty much since. It was a couple years ago. He was in no shape to work right around that time I found this project and went off. I wasn't looking to do something without my brother. It just happened that my brother was like, "I can't f**king work, Pete. I need time." He's just coming out of it now. He'll be back. Yes, I did check in with him all the time. He's my biggest fan on this movie. Like I said, he loves this movie and has been my biggest supporter. Yeah. I missed him. On the other hand, I had Nick Vallelonga and Brian Curry, the co-writers on the set with me all the time. And Viggo and Mahershala were very hands-on with the script, the story, every part of the deal. I wasn't alone. I had plenty of support.

With those two actors, I can see this being a true collaboration. That's also what makes this project so interesting.

Yeah, this is the great thing about those two guys. They're both very much collaborative and hands-on, and want to have a say. The great thing is, they're both smart as hell. Both really smart. That's what's phenomenal. Your fear is that you get a hands-on actor who's an idiot. That's my worst nightmare.

And I'm under the impression that does happen.

Oh my God. You kidding me? It happens all the time! People taking over movies. They think suddenly they're writers and they forget, "No, you're an actor, man. Just, come on, stick with it." But these guys are writers. They're brilliant. Viggo's written books, he's written poetry, he's written short stories. Mahershala is just a genius. I wanted their input. Trust me, they made the movie a lot better. Before we even started shooting, of what they did to the script.

I didn't realize until a few days after I saw the movie that Tony Lip is Carmine from The Sopranos.

Yeah, well, we originally, when I did the very first screening, that friends and family thing, at the end, we said, "He went on to act." The way that happened is, he was the Maître D eventually at the Copacabana. When they did The Godfather, they came in looking for faces for The Godfather. They said, "Hey, you want to be in a movie?" And he got in it. He was in The Godfather. Then he was in Goodfellas. He worked his way up. Suddenly, he had speaking parts. At the very end of the movie, the first thing it said, "He went on to be in these things." A couple people came over to me and said, "You know, I wish I didn't know that right away. I wanted to just savor this moment of who these guys were. Now you're spinning it on me. Now I have to have a whole different perception of this guy." That's why we pulled that off.

That's an interesting way to put it. It was fun to figure that out later.

Later on, it makes sense. He had a mug. He knew everybody. He grew up across the street from John Gotti. He was a guy who could have been in the mob, but chose not to. Just the way we showed it in the movie, where he didn't want to do that. He didn't want to cross that line. He was a scammer. He'll scam a hat for 100 bucks, but he's not going to go rough people up.

Well, I think this movie is going to surprise a lot of people.

You know what feels great about this, Mike? When we did There's Something About Mary, we were able to sneak up on people because nobody was doing that kind of movie: an R-rated comedy, that pushed the envelope that hard. I always told people, "I'll never be able to sneak up on people again." We did with this one. We snuck up on the other side.