

## Film Review

## GREEN BOOK

By Aakash Bakaya

In college, I use to participate in public speaking contests held by the public speaking and elocution club. I didn't win many of those competitions but the one time I did win (that's why I remember it so well) was during an open jam session where the topic was 'time'. Long story short, I made up a story about building a time machine, setting the date and place to 1960's USA and promptly deciding to not go back to the present and stay where I am.

It got laughs; it got applause and it remains one of my fondest college memories. But it didn't come out of nowhere - USA in the 60's and 70's is a time period I'm most fascinated with. It is a time of tremendous cultural upheaval, political strife and of course the golden age of American cinema. It's also the time period 'Green Book' is set in - 1962 to be precise.

Coming from a self-professed enthusiast about the time, place and people that inhabit this film - it does a great job recreating the atmosphere and is an authentic period piece that will effortlessly transport you there. As a film though, it falls slightly short for being a bit too straightforward in the storytelling department and for not really saying anything new about its themes. Minor shortcomings aside the real meat on this movie's bones are the two lead performances by Viggo Mortensen and Mahershala Ali who are such pleasures to see hone their craft on screen.

Mortensen is no stranger to full-blown body transformations after putting his body on the line as Aragon and his great performances for David Cronenberg in 'A History of Violence' and 'Eastern Promises'. On the other end, Ali is an absolute revelation as the iconic pianist Dr Don Shirley. It's a more subdued role compared to Mortensen and I found the small delicate mannerisms he inserts into his character to be captivating. He remains one of the most exciting actors on the scene and watching both of these amazing performers working of each other is worth the



price of admission alone.

Speaking about revelations, praise must be given to director Peter Farrelly who was the last person I thought would be spearheading a period piece revolving around race relations. The Farrelly brothers created my favorite comedies of the 90's and 00's and I was glad to see at least one of them come back strong here. His touches are all over the story as well with some hilariously witty dialogue and sharp comedic timing from even the smallest roles. It's never hysterically funny but his ability to draw out a laugh or a smile even during some of the film's most dramatic moments is breath of fresh air especially in an age where making a joke requires the public's approval.

The plot is as simple as they come. Italian-American Tony Lip (Viggo Mortensen) is a night club bouncer who is temporarily out of work. A well-connected family man, he tries his best to stay clean and far away from the mob circles his job (which involves punching people) regularly pushes him into. Just as desperate measures started to set in - he gets a call from a record label looking for a driver to take their star pianist out on tour.

Dr Don Shirley is that pianist and he is the definition of an enigma at first. Distant, eccentric and extremely intelligent he is the complete opposite of Tony's lovable but rough demeanor. They are perfect foils to each other and I appreciate that the story

doesn't waste time getting to that point where they at least respect each other. There is a mutual admiration right of the bat and even though Lip is shown being bigoted towards African-Americans near the start of the film, he drops that attitude since he understands his final paycheck depends on it.

What follows is your standard road-trip film only this time it's through the most racist and intolerant parts of USA at the tail-end of its segregation laws. Thankfully it doesn't get too bogged down with any particular predicament the duo land up in. The story moves swiftly and covers quite a bit of ground and expect for one run-in with the police - it stays away from unnecessary modern day parallels. But because it is "inspired" by a true story and is based on real characters (it is even co-written by Tony Lip's real life son) the story as a whole plays it much too safe. The themes are solely based around the two leads and any greater implications are simply ignored. This is far from harsh criticism of the film - I would argue that it's actually beneficial to end product. There is a lighthearted tone throughout and the filmmakers seem to understand that the compassion between its characters is often times more compelling than just saying "racist people are bad".

'Green Book' may not win any major awards come the award season but that shouldn't dissuade you from watching it. Fans of great acting should most



definitely go to watch two absolutely wonderful performances by the leads while those interested in razor-sharp screenwriting will definitely have a favorite quote or two by the end. Lines like "Being genius is not enough, it takes courage to change people's hearts" may not get posted on many Facebook feeds but it is tremendous in the context of the film.

Before going for 'Green Book' I was quite annoyed at the whole cinema "experience". I was either greeted by annoying crowds, blurry screens due to shoddy 3D practices or just a general lack of

quality film screenings at least in cinemas near me. Going to the cinema to watch the next bombastic, explosion-filled movie usually ended up giving me more of headache than a good time. But watching 'Green Book' took me back to the days when I laid back on the couch watching those great middle-of-the-road features you catch randomly on TV. I was filled with a nostalgic comfort I rarely come across in the theatre nowadays and that feeling stayed with me long after the credits.