



The Main Feature

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Green Book

USA, 2019

130 min, Certificate: 12A

Director	Peter Farrelly
Screenplay	Nick Vallelonga, Brian Hayes, and Peter Farrelly
Cinematographer	Sean Porter
Music	Kris Bowers
Production Design	Tim Galvin
Art Director	Scott Plauche

Cast:

Viggo Mortensen	Tony Vallelonga/Tony Lip
Mahershala Ali	Dr Donald Shirley
Linda Cardellini	Dolores Vallelonga
Dimitre D. Marinov	Oleg
Mike Hatton	George



The Green Book (or more accurately The Negro Motorist Green Book¹) was published annually from 1936 to 1966 to help African-Americans navigate safe passage across America, notably in the South where facilities were strictly segregated by race and certain areas (“sundown towns”) were deemed off-limits after dark².

The film itself is set in 1962 and inspired by a true story. Tony Vallelonga (aka Tony Lip) is a former garbage truck driver, now working at the Copa nightclub in New York. He is a proud, Bronx born-and-bred Italian-American, instinctively uncomfortable outside his own milieu (which is a polite way of saying he is racist). He is street-smart and handy with his fists, but is ill-mannered and inarticulate.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Negro_Motorist_Green_Book

² There is an excellent Smithsonian documentary (50 minutes) on the subject freely available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpassQCcW78>

He needs a job for a 2-month period when the nightclub is closed for renovation and eventually accepts an offer to be driver and bodyguard to Dr Don Shirley, a cultured African-American pianist prodigy, on his tour of the Southern States. Dr Shirley is a literate and well-mannered polyglot, fastidious & eccentric, but is uninformed about popular culture and cuts a lonely figure away from the nightly concerts.

As they drive deeper into the South, several well-staged set pieces underline the indignities and humiliations Don has to endure and the relationship between the two develops.

The director and co-writer Peter Farrelly was previously infamous for gross-out, unsubtle comedies (such as *There's Something about Mary* and *Dumb and Dumber*), but here handles what could have been a clichéd and predictable story with care and some humour. The performances from the two leads are excellent, and Linda Cardinelli provides sterling support as Tony's wife, the recipient of suspiciously articulate letters from her husband as the tour grinds on. The final post-tour scene in the Bronx on Christmas Eve is warm-heartedly sentimental but not oversweet.

A closing caption records that Tony Lip and Dr Donald Shirley remained friends until they died within months of each other in 2013. The Shirley family however loudly objected to the movie, claiming that Tony and Doc were not friends & that there "was an employer-employee relationship". Mahershala Ali responded with an apology to Shirley's nephew saying that "I did the best I could with the material I had" and that he was not aware that there were "close relatives with whom I could have consulted to add some nuance to the character." The row rumbled on over the Awards Season, despite a rare recording emerging in January this year in which Don Shirley stated, "I trusted him implicitly... You see... not only was [Tony] my driver; we never had an employer/employee relationship. You don't have time for that bull****. My life is in this man's hands! So you've got to be friendly with one another."

The film was also criticised in some quarters for advancing a "white saviour" narrative. Peter Farrelly told Entertainment Weekly that he disagreed as it is "about two guys who were complete opposites and found a common ground, and it's not one guy saving the other. It's both saving each other and pulling each other into some place where they could bond and form a lifetime friendship."

The film won three Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Supporting Role - Mahershala Ali, Best Original Screenplay and Best Picture. Ali also won the Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild, and BAFTA awards for Best Supporting Actor. Green Book was well-rewarded at the Global Box office too, garnering \$320m against a production budget of a modest \$23m.

And finally - do not try this at home! Viggo Mortensen put on 20 pounds for the role of Tony Lip. He gorged on Italian cuisine, mostly pizza and pasta. His technique - which he does not recommend because (surprise) it is bad for your health - consisted of rich dinners followed by at least one dessert just before going to bed. He admits that losing those pounds was much more difficult and less fun than gaining them. Merry Christmas!

Eugene Smith



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Green Book – would it qualify as a Christmas Film? No? More suggestions from Eugene Smith (Junior), reprinted from Palatinate (Durham University student newspaper) – 6th December 2016

Alternative Festive Flicks

The trouble with Christmas films is that, being made at a time of year that isn't Christmas, their seasonal schmaltz can often feel somewhat disingenuous. It is, therefore, far better to bypass the saccharine scenery and stick your teeth into the grittier takes on everyone's favourite time of year. Here are my top three options for doing just that:

Die Hard (1988)

It's Christmas Eve in Los Angeles. Bruce Willis' New York cop John McClane doesn't know it yet, but he's about to become the iconic hero of what I long ago chose to describe as the *Citizen Kane* of popcorn action movies. A group of vaguely European terrorists, led by the peerless Alan Rickman as the positively seminal villain Hans Gruber, seize control of a Japanese corporation's skyscraper and take the staff hostage, at which point it is up to McClane to save the day – largely by roaming the building's ventilation shafts in a grimy tank-top, shouting into a walkie-talkie and sweating. Though the film paved the way for a stream of inconsistent sequels, and opened the floodgates for a deluge of formulaic copycat actioners, every minute of its 131-minute runtime is captivating. From explosions to gunfights, and from dramatic deaths to grammatically-dodgy German, whacking this on at Yuletide will bring you the very best of thrillingly non-Christmassy Christmas cinema.

Kiss Kiss Bang Bang (2005)

This sharply witty neo-noir crime caper was one of a handful of films that heralded Robert Downey Jr's triumphant return to the big screen following his substance abuse and rehabilitation in the early 2000s. Playing Harry Lockhart, a petty criminal mistaken for an actor and given on-the-job experience of detective work to prepare him for a role, Downey's performance is authentically droll and his double act with Val Kilmer (*Top Gun*, *Batman Forever*), playing Harry's private detective mentor 'Gay' Perry, truly sizzles. What begins as an ironic kind of buddy-cop comedy soon becomes tantamount to a fast-paced conspiracy thriller, as the plot thickens so much as to actually require the tension-breaking levity of the film's countless one-liners and set-piece visual gags. The whizzing action sequences – involving shootouts, car chases and a hilariously misjudged game of Russian roulette – are also punctuated by the protagonists' attendance of the odd Christmas party, which is what validates the film's inclusion on my list.

Children of Men (2006)

The Nativity is all about a pregnant mother seeking a place of refuge in which to give birth; so is *Children of Men* – the difference being, in this thoughtful sci-fi thriller, everyone on the planet stopped being able to give birth two decades ago. Directed by Alfonso Cuarón (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Gravity*), the film is set in a dystopian 2027, where inexplicable global infertility has resulted in deteriorating social order and rampant state terrorism. Clive Owen stars, alongside a glittering supporting cast of Julianne Moore, Michael Caine and Chiwetel Ejiofor. Released in the United States on the 25th of December, *Children of Men* is simultaneously the best, and least Christmassy, film on my list. Together with hauling you to the edge of your seat through a flurry of enthralling action scenes, the film also coaxes you into a real intellectual engagement with its fascinatingly broad sweep of issues and characters. The denouement, set in an overcrowded refugee camp infested with corruption, police brutality and religious radicalism, provides one of the most breathtakingly provocative and memorable scenes in cinema.

Eugene Smith (Junior)

Comments and reactions to: **Sherlock Junior**

No of reaction slips received = 21

Average score = 6.52

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	1	~	3	7	5	3	2	~

A good example of pre-talkies comedy – primitive slapstick but technically complex

Clever filming

Clever and pacey

Keaton, the master stunt artist

Keaton proves again that timing is everything

Surprisingly fresh, funny and inventive. Excellent choice

Must have been a remarkable film in its day

Always enjoyable and still amazing stunts and off-the-wall ideas

Remarkable

Comments and reactions to: **La Tortue Rouge (Red Turtle)**

No of reaction slips received = 25

Average score = 6.52

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	2	2	3	4	6	6	~	2

Lovely to watch, but I'm not sure what the point was

Beautiful animation. Most enjoyable

Technically brilliant, but rather too long

Beautiful fantasy, very well-made

Deeply compassionate and touching. An unusual movie

Beautiful

Impressive animation, but can someone explain it?

Lost me about half-way through, I'm afraid

Visually and aurally haunting

Delightful film but just a bit too long

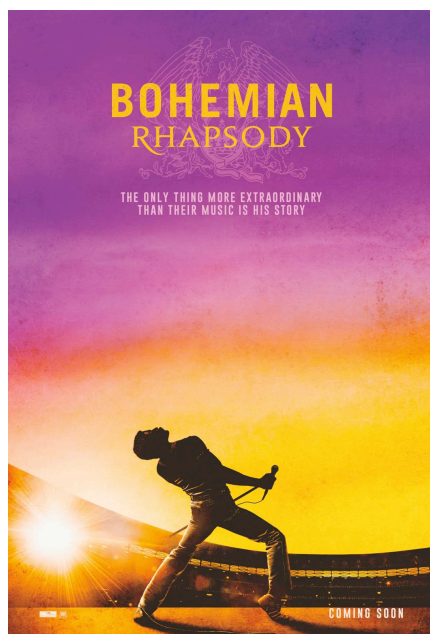
Absolutely superb

Remarkable

Magnificent

Position	Film	Average score
1	The White Crow	7.29
2	Before the Flood	7.17
3	Stan and Ollie	6.92
4	Ballon (Balloon)	6.91
5	Todos lo saben (Everybody Knows)	6.71
6=	Sherlock Jr	6.52
6=	La Tortue Rouge (The Red Turtle)	6.52

Forthcoming attraction: 9 January 2020



Bohemian Rhapsody

"Bohemian Rhapsody is a foot-stomping celebration of Queen, their music and their extraordinary lead singer Freddie Mercury, who defied stereotypes and shattered convention to become one of the most beloved entertainers on the planet. The film traces the meteoric rise of the band through their iconic songs and revolutionary sound, their near-implosion as Mercury's lifestyle spirals out of control, and their triumphant reunion on the eve of Live Aid, where Mercury, facing a life-threatening illness, leads the band in one of the greatest performances in the history of rock music."

Rotten Tomatoes