

## KEANU (2016)

- Released April 29th, 2016
- Peter Atencia directed
- \$15 million budget
- New Line Cinema
- Produced by Richard Brener, Keegan-Michael Key, Jordan Peele
- Rated R

## QUICK THOUGHTS

- Phil Svitek
- Marisa Serafini
- Zach Wilson
- Sara Stretton

## DEVELOPMENT

- The film was officially announced by New Line Cinema in October 2014, with Peter Atencio directing
- Many sites reporting on the film initially believed it to be a parody of the then recently released *John Wick*, although according to Atencio the two films were developed independently of each other, and the team was initially unaware of *Wick* until work on *Keanu* was already underway

## WRITING (Jordan Peele, Alex Rubens)

- The film is a mix of action and comedy, like most of the sketches from their show. Key and Peele, who produced the movie, wanted to celebrate the action films of their youth in the 1980s and '90s, which incorporate “lots and lots of laughs.”
- “Rell and Clarence get to enter this high-stakes world they dream about when they watch Liam Neeson’s films,” Peele said. “That’s very similar to Keegan and myself in real life.”
- Key said even though it is an action film, the main character is a kitten because “everybody loves a kitten.”
- They chose to name the cat Keanu partly because Keanu Reeves is also an action star known around the world, and the shared name could draw in a bigger audience.
  - “Our hope is that when you see that name, that’s the best foot forward and then you get to learn about the comedy of Key and Peele once you step through the door,” Key said.
  - “Keanu is one of those names — it’s funny because it only belongs to one person. Any name like that, like Sigourney or fucking Joaquin, is automatically funny to me,” Peele explained. “He’s the leading man. He’s the Hollywood kitten. He’s the hero. He’s the one. So that’s why Keanu was chosen, ultimately.”
- Like some of the comedy duo’s sketches, “Keanu” acts as a social commentary on race and the stereotypical “gangster life.” The comedians like to explore these topics because, as Key put it, they write “based on how [they] see the world.”
  - “The reason we are drawn to the topics of race and culture and masculinity often is because it’s fertile ground to be noodled around with,” Peele said. “You need somebody to take those things on, and when we first started the show, we realized that was part of our purpose and our voice.”
- In fact, the film was almost called “New Jack Kitty” at one point. “I went to sleep one night and an angel came to my bed and said, ‘No, save the puns for the next movie,’”

Peele said with a laugh. But the New Jack City influence will still be felt in the film, as well as about fifteen other “big, fun LA crime thriller type movies,” as Atencio described them, including *True Romance*, *Heat*, and *Razing Arizona*.

- When writing the script, Peele and Rubens considered some other “really white music” including the dulcet tones of Paul Simon, but ultimately George Michael won out, and that might just be for the best. “Since we’ve been making this movie, I’ve been listening to nothing but George Michael and the most fucking hardcore strip club rap music and it’s the best combination of music,” said Atencio, “It makes me feel sexy all the time.” Key added, “You forget, and then you’re like “George Michael is a badass. This song is fucking sweet!”

## STORY/CAST

- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** The simplicity of the plot
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Comedy vs action
- Keanu Reeves himself, who starred in *Wick*, would eventually get in touch with the production to offer his services
  - Subsequently a dream sequence was expanded to the movie, in which Reeves voices the titular kitten
  - **HOWEVER** At first, he said no: No, Keanu Reeves did not want to partake in a movie about an adorable cat with his name.
    - But when a trailer for the film was released in February, Reeves changed his tune. His sister thought the movie looked hilarious and told the actor he should get involved.
    - Unfortunately, the film was almost finished and was about to premiere at the South by Southwest festival in March. But director Peter Atencio was able to figure out a way to incorporate the 51-year- old star into the film at the last minute.
      - **DIRECTOR:** “He wanted to talk to me before he agreed to make sure that wasn’t the case. So I told him about the movie and talked him through the story. His personality has just transcended life, in a lot of ways. You wouldn’t have ever guessed that the guy from “Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure” would turn out to be this thoughtful, kind man.”
      - Does the film ever explain why the cat is named after Keanu Reeves?  
**DIRECTOR’s ANSWER:** “Not really. We didn’t want it to be something where you’re just kind of waiting for the big Keanu payoff, which is why it’s cool that he’s involved in this way — it’s a subtle way of acknowledging that of course he’s the direct inspiration for that name. The cat was named after him as an act of love for his movies, and especially the kind of movies that he makes. He has become an iconic movie star on a level that most people don’t ever attain.”
- In May 2015, Method Man and Will Forte joined the cast, with Darrell Britt-Gibson being added the following month
- Jason Mitchell plays Bud, one of the members of the Blips who Clarence and Rell work with on their quest for Keanu. Mitchell starred in “Straight Outta Compton” last summer as Eazy-E, but he said he does not want to be typecast as an actor who only plays gangsters

- “I want people to see that I’m really a contender no matter what form it might come in, because even though I do play two different gangster roles, one of them is all about comedy and the other one is all about full-blown drama,” Mitchell said.
- Mitchell jumped on board when he heard about “Keanu,” and he said it’s different than his past films because of the tight-knit nature of the cast and crew.
- Key and Peele played a large role in the casting process to make sure “Keanu” had just the right tone. They cast a variety of dramatic and comedic actors so that the film would not sway too heavily in one direction.
  - “It was extremely important to us as the producers to find a mixture of people who could handle the humor of the film without winking at it, without being conscious of it,” Key said.
  - Since Key and Peele are “comedians first and foremost,” they wanted to make sure that, above all, the audience will laugh while watching “Keanu.” “Our message is simple,” Peele said. “Sometimes, you want to walk into the movie theater, forget the rest of the world, forget the problems of your life, go have a crazy time with Key and Peele, see some fun violence, see some cute kittens and see some ridiculous comedy.”

#### **JORDAN PEELE** (Rell Williams / Oil Dresden)

- “Guys like Keegan and I have never been the leads of an action movie,” Peele said in a conference call interview with The Daily Free Press. “So ‘Keanu’ is kind of a symbol for Key and Peele in this movie, with us being able to step into this genre that we wouldn’t have been in if we didn’t write it.”
- Known for Bob’s Burger, Fargo, MadTV in addition to Key and Peele
- Jordan Peele attended the Computer School in I.S. 44 for Junior High School and went on to attend The Calhoun School for high school, graduating in 1997. He then went on to attend Sarah Lawrence College as a member of the class of 2001. His mother is white and his father is black. Jordan has been dating comedian Chelsea Peretti since 2013
- He auditioned by playing Barack Obama for Saturday Night Live (1975) and was offered to become a feature player but when the Writer's Strike came to pass in 2008, he found out that MADtv (1995) would be continuing and lost the part and the opportunity to be on "SNL". "SNL" cast member Fred Armisen plays Obama on that show and Peele now gets to write and perform his own Obama sketches on Key and Peele (2012)

#### **KEEGAN MICHAEL-KEY** (Clarence Goobril / Smoke Dresden )

- Key has a cat allergy he had to take medicine in order to be able to interact with them
- Known for MadTV, Tomorrowland, Lego Movie, Let’s Be Cops, Archer and Key and Peele
- Keegan-Michael Key was born in Southfield, Michigan and raised in Detroit. He was adopted as a child by a black father and a white mother. In 1989, he graduated from Shrine Catholic High School in Royal Oak, Michigan. Key attended the University of Detroit Mercy as an undergraduate and earned his Master of Fine Arts in Theater at Pennsylvania State University. While at The University of Detroit Mercy, he was a brother of Phi Kappa Theta
- “Our show is not based on huge characters. There are characters in our show; whether or not they reoccur is based on the audience. MADtv (1995) was a formula - our show doesn’t have one,. We try to incorporate the shows. We’re not trying to be cool here. We’re trying to be funny. If you watch the beginning of certain shows, you notice that

they're trying too hard to be hipsters and be cool. We're like, 'Why are you trying to be a badass?' We realize that we're nerds. Our goal in life is to get the laughs.”

#### **TIFFANY HADDISH (Hi-C)**

- Known for Carmichael Show, Real Husbands of Hollywood, Meet the Spartans

#### **METHOD MAN (Cheddar)**

- Known for *How High*, *Fast and the Furious*, *8 Mile*, *Gone in 60 Seconds*
- Member of the rap group Wu-Tang Clan
- Method Man's character is named Cheddar. In the series *The Wire*, he plays a character named Cheese

#### **WILL FORTE (Hulka)**

- Known for SNL, MacGruber, Nebraska, Lego Movie, Moonbeam City, Ridiculous 6
- Member of the Groundlings comedy troupe in Los Angeles
- Has the 36th highest score in the World for the classic video game Donkey Kong! Will played the game a lot while filming *A Good Old Fashioned Orgy* (2011) in Wilmington, NC after seeing the movie *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters* (2007). His score can be seen on the official high score website of Twin Galaxies, the official keeper of world records for the Guinness book of records for video and pinball games. Will and his stand-in Leo Daniels (13th highest DK score) on the film *A Good Old Fashioned Orgy* (2011) are supposed to have a Donkey Kong playoff in the near future
- Attended the weddings of his SNL cast member and good friends Seth Meyers and Andy Samberg in character as Hamilton, his white supremacist but ultimately good-hearted character from the show

#### **EASTER EGGS / TRIVIA**

- Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele's first motion picture, and their first major production after the conclusion of their comedy sketch series "Key & Peele" on Comedy Central
- The Liam Neeson movie they saw was called *Substitute Teacher*
- During a car chase scene, there is a brief shot of a "Judge Jessie" bench by a curb. This is a reference to one of their sketches from "Key & Peele" in which Keegan-Michael Key played a daytime-TV Judge named Judge Jessie
- Clarence's wife's name is Hannah. Cheddar's pet snake is named Montana. Hannah Montana is a famous Disney Channel show
- There is a scene where they're discussing the enjoyment of Liam Neeson after leaving the theater of the named actor. This is a nod to a skit from their show where Key and Peele are valet parkers praising the acting of Liam Neeson

#### **DIRECTING (Peter Atencia)**

- “Peter Atencio and Jordan and Keegan have a bond because they’ve been working together for so long on ‘Key and Peele,’” Mitchell said. “It’s such a passion project for these guys, so coming onto it has just been a pleasure.”
- Directed 54 episodes of *Key and Peele*
- “The world lost an icon of mythological proportions. When I first realized I was a weirdo, David Bowie was the first person who made me feel like I might belong somewhere. I

don't know that I've ever felt this strongly about the passing of someone I never met, but merely worshipped from afar.”

#### **PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY** (Jas Shelton)

- Known for *Cyrus*, *Jeff Who Lives at Home*,
- Seven tabby cats were used for the shoot
- Filming began on June 1, 2015, in New Orleans, Louisiana, and concluded on July 10

#### **EDITING/VFX** (Nicholas Monsour)

- Known for *Key and Peele*, *Drunk History*, *Teachers*

#### **SOUND/MUSIC** (Steve Jablonsky, Nathan Whitehead)

- *Faith* Written and performed by George Michael
- *Don't Say No* Performed by Kelli Strader
- *Fuck Tha Police* Performed by NWA (as N.W.A.)
- *Tap the Bottle* Performed by Young Black Teenagers
- *I Don't Get Tired* Performed by Kevin Gates
- *Fuck Up Some Commas* Performed by Future
- *Shang Tsung's Boss Music* Composed by Dan Forden (as Daniel Forden)
- *Night Is On My Mind* Performed by Oliver
- *Freedom! '90* Written and performed by George Michael
- *Two Clocks* Performed by RÜFÜS DU SOL
- *Father Figure* Written and performed by George Michael
- *Start Your Car* Performed by Trwbador
- *Tom's Diner* Performed by Giorgio Moroder featuring Britney Spears
- *Honest* Performed by Future
- *Main Title/Trinity Infinity* from *THE MATRIX*
- *So Much* Written and performed by Kelli Wakili, Mansa Wakili, Elgin Thrower Jr., Jaron Lamot, Cheapshot and Jason Rabinowitz
- *Ima King* Written and performed by Jaycal Johnson, James Katalbas, Cheapshot, Jason Rabinowitz and Jaron Lamot
- *California* Performed by Colonel Loud

#### **PROMOTION**

- A work-in-progress print was screened at the South by Southwest Festival in Austin, Texas on March 13, 2016
- Warner Bros. originally scheduled the film to release on April 22, 2016, but in January 2016 the film was moved back a week to April 29, 2016
- Posters for the film spoofed *The Martian*, *The Revenant*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *The Big Short*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *Bad Boys II*, *Scarface*, *Captain America: Civil War*, *Speed*, *The Matrix* and *Deadpool*

#### **BOX OFFICE/RECEPTION**

- In the United States and Canada, pre-release tracking suggested the film would gross \$10–14 million from 2,658 theaters in its opening weekend, besting fellow newcomers *Mother's Day* (\$11 million projection) and *Ratchet & Clank* (\$8–10 million projection)
- Domestic: As of MAY 3RD, 2016: \$9,453,224
- Foreign: N/A

- Worldwide: N/A
- Domestic Summary
  - Opening Weekend: \$9,453,224 (down 65% from the original)
  - (#3 rank, 2,658 theaters, \$3,557 average)
- Widest Release: 2,658 theaters
- In Release: 6 days / 0.9 weeks

## RECEPTION

- IMDB: 7.1
- RT: 76% Tatometer, 70 Audience
- Cinemascore: B
- "*Keanu's* absurd premise and compulsively watchable starring duo add up to an agreeably fast-paced comedy that hits more than enough targets to make up for the misses."

## SEQUEL

- Post credit scene suggests Allentown Brothers go after duo

## FINAL THOUGHTS