

GREEN BOOK (2018)

- Released on November 16th, 2018
- 2 Hours 10 minutes
- \$23,000,000 (estimated) Budget
- Directed by Peter Farrelly
- Written by Nick Vallelonga, Brian Hayes Currie
- Participant Media, DreamWorks, Amblin Partners
- Rated PG-13 for thematic content, language including racial epithets, smoking, some violence and suggestive material

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Marisa Serafini
- Phil Svitek
- Demetri Panos

DEVELOPMENT

- Nick Vallelonga, the oldest son of Tony Lip, grew up hearing about his father's journey with Don Shirley. "This was a story I had on my mind basically my whole life from the time I was a young kid," says Vallelonga
- Vallelonga reached out to Shirley, whom he'd known since childhood, and spent hours interviewing him. "He was a meticulous, well-dressed, well-spoken, highly educated man. He was very, interested in my father's family, that my father was a family man. And he was so nice to my brother and me. He gave us gifts. I remember he gave me ice skates when I was small. He was a really special human being."
- Vallelonga had known actor Brian Hayes Currie (Armageddon, Con Air) for decades, and Currie had known Vallelonga's father well and had even appeared in Vallelonga's 2008 film, Stiletto.
- "When [Farrelly] came to me with this idea I thought it was exactly what he'd been looking for. I believed that this story could have some sharp edges on it with both these characters and that Pete would handle it tenderly."
- Oscar winner Octavia Spencer has long been a champion of stories that shine a light on the African-American experience and that expand the depth and diversity of the lives we see portrayed on screen. She subsequently joined the Green Book filmmaking team as executive producer during the early stages of development.

REAL HISTORY

- Jim Crow laws restricted where Black people could eat, sleep, sit, shop, and walk. They determined which drinking fountains and bathrooms African Americans could use. Indeed, they circumscribed almost every aspect of daily life. Certain Southern towns even instituted "sundown" laws that made it illegal for Black people to be driving or even outdoors after dark. Arrest was the least-terrible thing that could happen to you if you were caught.
- The Negro Motorist Green Book, an annual travel guide that was published annually from 1936 to 1966, which listed businesses and other establishments that served Black customers. The Green Book, as it was called, was created and published by an African-American New York City mailman, Victor Hugo Green, and became an indispensable survival tool for African Americans travelling by car.

- Dr. Shirley became a student at the Leningrad Conservatory at the age of 9, made his concert debut with the Boston Pops symphony at 18, and would go on to earn multiple doctorate degrees and to speak multiple languages. In 1955, at the time of his first album for Cadence Records, Tonal Expressions, Shirley was described by Esquire magazine as "probably the most gifted pianist in the business...so good that comparisons are absurd." Legendary pianist and composer Igor Stravinsky, who was a contemporary of Shirley's, said of him, "His virtuosity is worthy of Gods."
- In 2013, after more than 50 years of friendship, Tony Vallelonga and Don Shirley both died almost three months to the date of one another - Tony died January 4, 2013 at age 82 and Shirley died April 6, 2013 at age 86.

WRITING (Nick Vallelonga, Brian Hayes Currie)

- As Vallelonga and Currie began exploring script ideas, Farrelly, who was developing the DirectTV comedy series Loudermilk with Colbert Report alum Bobby Mort at the time, ran into Currie.
- In the weeks that followed, Farrelly found he couldn't get what Currie had told him out of his head. "I just kept thinking about it," he says. "I'd be lying in bed thinking, 'God, that's a good story.' I'd be driving along thinking, 'Man, that guy's got a great story.' So finally I called Brian and asked, 'Hey, what's going on with that story about the Black pianist and the Italian driver?' When he told me, 'we haven't begun writing that,' I asked, 'can I write it with you?' He said, 'Really?' And I said, 'I'd love to come on board. I love that story.'"
- "This movie is a departure for me," Farrelly says. "But this story is actually taking me back to what I have always wanted to do. Over the years, when people asked if I'd ever do a more dramatic film, my answer was always, 'Yes, when it comes along.' It's the universe that brings it to you. It's like asking, 'When are you going to fall in love?' It comes when it comes."
- Vallelonga and Currie had a rich trove of material to work with: Vallelonga's taped interviews with Tony, the notes from his interviews with Shirley, plus photographs, brochures, postcards, even the map showing the route of the trip, all of which Tony had kept. After Tony and Dr. Shirley's initial road trip, Dr. Shirley asked Tony to escort him after Christmas on a one-year concert road trip across the continental United States. Following that successful trip, Shirley then asked Tony to join him on his tour of Europe, but Tony declined because he didn't want to be away from his family any longer. Dolores had saved all the letters Tony had sent during that period, which Nick Vallelonga and Currie had access to, and the contents of which informed the screenplay and, for the actors, their performances.
- "There was so much information, so many great stories," Vallelonga says. "Some of them so fantastic that no one would believe them. We spent three, four weeks outlining the beats and then creating the scenes." When they'd finished, they presented their draft to Farrelly. "He was genius at knowing how to fine-tune it," Vallelonga says. "The three of us honed it, honed it, and honed it, starting all over from the beginning with Peter's input."
- As much as the story at the heart of Green Book is about the obstacles that Tony and Doc Shirley face together - institutionalized racism and other problems along the way - I was most drawn to the more complex obstacle of what each of our characters has to deal with in himself. And how each comes to deal with it."

STORY/TOPICS

- Racism/Prejudice
- 1960s Backdrop
- Buddy Traveling/Road Trip

CAST

- "In casting the [Don Shirley Trio] roles, I needed to find musicians who could act or actors who could play instruments... These guys are seamless on stage. They're really fantastic, but also great actors. They blew us away." - Farrelly

VIGGO MORTENSEN (Tony Lip)

- Viggo put on 30 pounds for the movie.
- "I remember sitting with Brian Currie and Nick Vallelonga, and all these actor names were flying around - a lot of Italian names," Wessler says. "And then Pete said, 'You know who's perfect for this? Viggo Mortensen.' It was one of the first names to come out of Pete's mouth. And everyone went, 'What?! Isn't he like Danish or something?'"
- "You have to see these characters as real people, in real settings and Pete managed to do that," Mortensen says. "The period details, the dramatic aspects of the story are so well handled. There are funny bits, but it's not funny in the way his other movies are. The infectious humor in the film is organic, generated more out of situations and the contrasts between the characters."

- Two days after they sent Mortensen the script, Wessler says, Mortensen called Farrelly. "I told Pete, 'Well, I really like the character for many reasons and I love the story between these two men,'" Mortensen says. "I just wasn't sure I'd be right for it. I hadn't played a guy like this before. But he insisted, so I said, 'Let me read it again.'"
- Months before the shoot began, Mortensen had jumped on a plane from his home in Spain, flown to New York, and had driven to Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, to meet the Vallelongas - Nick, his brother, Frank, and their Uncle Rudy -- at the Tony Lip Restaurant, which Frank runs.
- [Listened] and [watched] the audio and video tapes of Tony, going to the Bronx neighborhood where he lived, and spending hours there, "talking to the old timers about the way it used to be," Mortensen says. (He even binge-watched every season of The Sopranos, which he had never seen.) At one point prior to shooting, Mortensen returned to New Jersey and spent a couple of weeks with the Vallelonga family, listening to them, talking to them, learning from them.
- "Even though the Vallelonga and Mortensen families are very different -- ethnically, our backgrounds -- we related to each other strongly, to a shared sense of humor and a family dynamic. My dad was from Denmark, but his attitudes in terms of race and politics, his working-class background, a certain stubbornness, a certain charisma -- all of that was very similar to what they were telling me about Tony. The kind of jokes Tony told, his behavior, his contradictions -- I just kept relating it to my dad and shared that with them. We laughed and bragged about our fathers, found real common ground. That kick-started it for me."
- "Stepping out of our present time can also strip away all of the noise of our own immediate preoccupations and prejudices," Mortensen says. "All those things that keep you from listening to someone when you're have an argument. When you look at a period movie -- if it's as well constructed and directed as Green Book is -- and at the way people behaved in the past, it often allows you to learn things about now that you might not learn from watching a movie in a contemporary setting." -Mortensen

MAHERSHALA ALI (Dr. Don Shirley)

- Once Mortensen had signed on to Green Book, the filmmakers needed to find an actor who shared that level of commitment and could both embody the complex, brilliant Dr. Shirley, and also hold his own on screen with Mortensen. Early on, one name kept coming up: Mahershala Ali.
- "What really intrigued me about Don Shirley was how complicated he was," Ali says. "There's so much to pull from in terms of the things he was dealing with, the things he struggled with, the things that he exhibited a degree of excellence in. The range of things that I was going to be challenged with and tackling -- all that was really attractive to me." -Ali
- "It rings true because it is a mix," Ali says. "The way Peter Farrelly, Brian Currie, and Nick Vallelonga sculpted this script, it pulls you to the heights of laughter and plunges you to the depths of struggle and pain."
- "Don Shirley happened to be gay at a time when it was particularly difficult," Farrelly says. "That's something that will resonate today with people throughout the world. These are the same issues we're talking about now."
- Actor Mike Hatton, who plays bassist George in Shirley's trio in the film, says that watching Ali become the character was awe-inspiring. "He is nothing like the real Don Shirley," Hatton says. "They talk differently, stand differently, look different. Their

mannerisms are different. You watch and see the process that he goes through to get into character and, man, he is really working. He's an amazing actor and so sweet, handsome, and charming. He's one of the coolest dudes I've ever met in my life."

- To prepare for the film's many piano playing and concert scenes, Ali met with the film's composer Kris Bowers, one of the music industry's most respected and talented young pianists. "I wanted to see what it felt like to sit on the piano bench and try to have the dexterity the character obviously has to have, although I knew I wasn't going to get close to that," Ali says. "I wanted to be around the music, around the piano and pick up on things."
- Bowers booked an hour of time at a Steinway showroom for their introductory meeting, which turned into a three-hour session. "Mahershala is pretty awesome," Bowers says. "He has a laser focus when he's trying to do these things." Ali says that another challenge in preparing to play Dr. Shirley was the limited archival footage of him. Ali did, however, get access to a documentary on Carnegie Hall where Shirley was a composer-in-residence at the Carnegie Artist Studios.
- WORKING W/ ALI: "The first time we met, we hit it off," Mortensen says. "It was a one of those cocktail party situations with a lot of press and I looked at him and he looked at me, and there was this connection right away. In those situations you usually don't talk to anyone for too long, but we talked for at least a half-hour. It's rare when that happens in any profound way, and we both kind of said the same thing, 'It would be great to work together, to do something together one day.' And we laughed because we were saying the same thing at the same time. After that, we'd see each other in passing, but never had another conversation. Then Pete says, 'Mahershala's playing Doc Shirley,' and I thought, 'Oh, there it is!' It's what we both wanted."

LINDA CARDELLINI (Dolores)

- When it came time to cast the role of Tony's wife, Dolores, the filmmakers considered a lot of great actresses, but finding the right person proved challenging. They wanted someone who physically resembled the petite and feminine Dolores, yet someone who could hold her own against the big presence of Mortensen as Tony. Most of all, they were looking for that indefinable it-factor: chemistry.
- "Linda's known for mostly comedies, a lot of broad comedies, but I've always liked her and thought she was a fantastic actress."
- "When Linda came in, she just knocked it out of the park. What set her apart was the chemistry with Viggo. They seemed like a married couple, finishing each other's sentences, like they'd known each other since they were teenagers, which Tony and Dolores had. You could feel it and we knew she was the one." -Farrelly
- "I remember coming in and reading with Viggo, and I couldn't see the acting at all," Cardellini says. "It's completely seamless, so it's just about being there with him. It's just fun from there on, because you feel like you're in the character and in the story."
- "Linda had listened to her and knew Dolores didn't have one. And once you saw her and Viggo together, they fit."

DIMITER MARINOV (Oleg)

- "We found Dimiter Marinov who was trained in Russia. He's actually a violinist, but he does play the cello. He's a quick study." -Farrelly
- Farrelly felt he struck gold when Bulgarian-born actor and classical violinist Marinov came in to audition. "Dimiter Marinov - remember that name," Farrelly says. "He's

excellent. Dimiter hadn't played the cello before, but he had played the violin like 15 or 20 years ago. The others who came in were decent, but all of a sudden this guy comes in. I was like, 'Who is this guy?' I'd never heard of him, never seen him, although he had been acting for a while."

- With only five days to prepare, he rented a cello, hired a teacher, and practiced night and day.
- "At the audition," Marinov says, "Peter said, 'Just show us how you hold it and look professional.' And I said, 'No, actually I'm going to play.' He said, 'You're going to play?' And I said, 'Yes, I'm going to play the theme song of the film, 'Water Boy' and I did." After he was cast, the production rented a cello for him and paid for his continuing lessons. In a month, he had learned to play all six of the songs that are performed in the film.

MIKE HATTON (George)

- "We got Mike Hatton on bass, stand-up bass, who's a phenomenal actor and he's a really decent bass player." -Farrelly
- Hatton, who was friends with Vallelonga and Currie, had grown up playing the bass in a band with his twin brother. As the start of production neared, Hatton reached out to Vallelonga asking him if there was anything he could possibly do - and that's when Vallelonga remembered, "Hey, wait a minute-you play the bass, right?"
- "Nick told me to clean up, shave my beard, and to meet him the next day at the music store on Ventura Boulevard in L.A." Hatton met Vallelonga at the music store the next day. They took a photo of Hatton holding an upright bass, converted it into black and white and sent it to Farrelly. And when Farrelly saw it, he told them to bring Hatton in the next day for a meeting and audition.

DIRECTING (Peter Farrelly)

- On set, Farrelly sets an inclusive tone that encourages collaboration and fun. "Pete has one of the more perfect styles as a director," Burke says. "He's both collaborative and he has a point of view, and those two things don't interfere with each other. He knows what he wants to do, but he's open to other ideas."
- Ali calls him, "by far the most collaborative director I've ever worked with." And then some. "The first day on set, Peter announced to cast and crew: 'If anyone has any ideas, anything that can be better, just pull me aside and tell me, pitch me your idea,'" Ali says. "In 20 years I've never, ever seen a director do that. What a joy to work with a really intelligent director this open. That encourages other people to be open in their work in the same way."
- "Peter includes us in everything, and he doesn't have to do that," Vallelonga says. "After a take, he'll always turn to myself or Brian [Currie] and ask if there's anything we see or want to add or change. Ultimately, it's his vision that's up there. He knows what this movie has to be and I feel blessed to have him doing it."

PRODUCTION (Sean Porter)

- Filmed over 35 days - from November 2017 through January 2018 - the production found almost every location it needed in and around The Big Easy.
- Aside from a day of exteriors in New York City with Mortensen and a couple of days of second unit work in the northeast and near Shreveport, Louisiana, all of the filming for Green Book took place on locations in the greater New Orleans area.

- "We had one night when we were filming about an hour-and-a-half north of New Orleans where we had a big rain machine and it ended up actually raining," Burke says. "The next night we had a snow machine for a driving sequence and it snowed, and they said they hadn't seen snow in the New Orleans area in nine years."
- Mortensen remembers there was talk about wrapping for the night, but he wanted to keep shooting. "So I said, 'No, let's drive, I can drive in the snow. I learned to drive in the North,'" Mortensen says. "So Pete says, 'Okay, we'll just follow you with a camera, we'll put a camera on the car and we'll follow you.' And we started driving. We got a lot of great footage we would have never gotten unless we went north later. We saved time and, I guess, some money that way, but more than anything, it was fun. It was also beautiful, all that snow! We got lucky with the weather, unusually cold for Louisiana, and made the most of it."
- "We went everywhere. We went to mansions, plantations, hotels, apartments, at least 50 clubs that could work as venues for Dr. Shirley to play at. We didn't want to have to build too much. We found little towns about an hour outside New Orleans that looked pretty much as they did fifty, sixty years ago. We needed to recreate a time and places and we found almost everything we needed in and around New Orleans. And the food in that town is maybe the best in the country, so a nice plus." -Wessler
- PRroduction designer Tim Galvin. Galvin's research and attention to detail was exactly what Farrelly was looking for. "Tim is spectacular and I loved the work he did on The Butler," Farrelly says. "He was probably my first hire on the film. I had by far the biggest pre-production I've ever had - five, six months of really thinking through everything: the clothes, cars, signage, architecture, furniture. It was a million things to think about."

EDITING/VFX (Patrick J. Don Vito)

- Per Viggo Mortensen's suggestion, the movie has no opening credits or title card. This immerses viewers in the action and makes them forget they're watching a film.
- This was Universal Pictures' second Univisium 2.00:1

TRIVIA/EASTER EGGS

- The film is dedicated to "Larry the Crow," a bird that hung around the shooting location. Viggo Mortensen cared for the animal after it was hit by a car.

SOUND/MUSIC (Kris Bowers)

- "We brought in some superstars on this one," Farrelly says. "We have TOM WOLFE and MANISH RAVAL. Tom is one of the greatest superstar music supervisors in the last 20 years. He's done almost every show or movie that has great music. And we have Kris Bowers, one of the greatest young pianists in the country. We did a search of who the best young pianists in the country were and his name kept coming up."
- We met in Pete's office and we said to Kris, 'It's really simple: Can you play the music? Do you like the script? If so, here's what we want you to do: We want you to compose for the movie, which means composing music that has nothing to do with Don Shirley, and we want you to play Don Shirley's songs, which we're then going to play back in the movie.'"
- Bowers remembers it much the same. "When they called me in to meet for the first time, it kind of seemed like I already had the job," he says. "It was a pretty easy process compared to what I'm used to."

- Bowers began playing piano at age four, and was accepted into Juilliard at age 17 where he earned his BFA and MFA degrees.
- Like Shirley, Bowers plays exclusively on Steinway pianos, each of which are handmade, and according to Bowers "project sound like no other instrument." As a Steinway artist, Bowers understands why Dr. Shirley required a Steinway piano in his contract whenever he performed. "It's simply the best," he says.

PROMOTION

- The film won the People's Choice Award at TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival) in September 2018, where it premiered.
- The actor in the hot dog eating contest actually ate hot dogs with Tony Lip.

BOX OFFICE

- Domestic (as of December 5th, 2018): \$15,571,981
- Foreign: \$13,213
- Worldwide: \$15,585,194

RECEPTION

- RT: 83% Tatometer: 95%
- IMDB: 8.3/10
- Cinemascore: NA

SEQUEL/LEGACY