



FILM: **GREEN BOOK**

FDG RATING: 4.4 😊😊😊😊😊
Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Peter Farrelly: *director*
Viggo Mortensen: *actor, Tony "Lip" Vallelonga*
Mahershala Ali: *actor, Dr. Don Shirley*

DATE: December 16, 2018

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **GREEN BOOK**

Perfectly cast with Viggo Mortensen as Tony "Lip" Vallelonga, a Bronx bouncer, and Mahershala Ali, as Dr. Don Shirley, a supremely erudite (several doctorates), sophisticated (somewhat pompous), elegant, black jazz pianist/composer, popular with the wealthy, white, Park Avenue type audiences, the film follows their unlikely relationship as Tony agrees to be Dr. Shirley's personal driver during an 8-week concert tour. (Based on a true story, the actual road trip lasted a year and a half.)

It's 1962; racism is rampant, as he performs at prestigious venues beginning in Pennsylvania and ending in the deep south which is the main reason Dr. Shirley hired a street-smart, tough-guy, who could handle any potential problems despite finding everything about Tony very offensive from his chain smoking, irritating incessant chatter, to his taste in music, and rough language. We follow their journey and witness the increasingly ugly prejudice they encounter as they venture south. Simultaneously, we see their relationship slowly evolve.

One discussion participant noted that it takes courage to change people's minds which is what Dr. Shirley hoped his concerts would do, if only in a small singular way. Another criticized the film for being predictable, but several quickly countered that it's the way the story is told that makes it an engaging film.

There were many pivotal, memorable scenes such as in the beginning when Tony throws two glasses in the garbage that were used by the black plumbers his wife had called to fix their sink. Another is when in the home of a wealthy, white family in Raleigh, Dr. Shirley sits at the dining room table with the white guests invited for his performance, but is showed the outhouse when he needs to use the bathroom. Later in the film, he is not even allowed to dine with the guests. Dr. Shirley is abruptly stopped when he enters the large, sumptuous dining room where all the concert guests have gathered for dinner in anticipation of his performance. It's the law, the maître d' explains and suggests Dr. Shirley get food at a place for Negroes down the street. A small interesting observation is that Tony, a white man, just gets some raised eyebrows entering the all black establishment, but a Negro would get beaten to a pulp entering a white bar. Which is why it was a necessity, when traveling, to have The Negro Motorist Green Book listing of businesses (lodging, tailors, barber, beauty shops, gas stations, restaurants) that welcomed Negroes.

Rather than a broad look at racism, we experience it viscerally through two contrasting characters, their perceptions of each other, the reactions of the people they meet and the increasingly harsher segregation rules they encounter. Tony is a typical outgoing Italian, family comes first, (we really liked seeing his devotion to his wife) in sharp contrast to Dr. Shirley who is alone, lonely, repressed. Based on a true story, it's a testament to the ability of people to change. One discussion participant mentioned that we tend to have great respect for people who are cultured and hold street-smart unrefined folks in less regard. But there was much about Tony we admired. Two men from drastically different environments, upbringing, cultures, values, attitudes, and ways of looking at the world, themselves, and at each other form a most unlikely, life-long friendship. The film allows us to see the horrible prejudice firmly implanted in masses of people, (even those of the highest refinement), but shows us the irrationality of it and the warmth of acceptance.

Outstanding performances by the two main characters was a major factor in our applause for Green Book resulting in a very enthusiastic 4.4 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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