BAADASSSSSS!
(a.k.a. GETTIN’ THE MAN’S FOOT OUTTA YOUR BAADASSSSS!!)

A Mario Van Peebles Film

*** 2003 Toronto Film Festival – Official Selection ***
*** 2004 Sundance Film Festival – Official Selection ***

RELEASE DATE: Spring 2004
RUNNING TIME: 108 minutes
RATING: “R” by MPAA
OFFICIAL FILM WEBSITE: www.sonyclassics.com
OFFICIAL FILM SOUNDTRACK: Available January 2004

PRESS CONTACTS (in Sundance):
Donna Daniels Public Relations (NY OFFICE: 212-869-7233)
Donna Daniels – c: (917) 287-8804
Rona Geller – c: (917) 750-5604
Marriott Mountainside, Park City
Ph: (435) 940-2000 / Fx: (435) 940-2010

FOR THE SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL:
PUBLIC SCREENING: Tuesday, January 20 at 3:00pm–Eccles Theater, Park City
PUBLIC SCREENING: Wednesday, January 21 at 11:30am–Prospector Theater, Park City
PUBLIC SCREENING: Saturday, January 24 at 6:45pm–Broadway 5 Theater, Salt Lake City
TALENT ATTENDING: Mario Van Peebles, Melvin Van Peebles
### 50 Top-Grossing Films

**[Week Ending May 19]**

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**Grand Total**

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CAST & CREW

MELVIN VAN PEEBLES  Mario Van Peebles
PRISCILLA  Joy Bryant
BILL COSBY  T.K. Carter
BIG T  Terry Crews
GRANDDAD  Ossie Davis
CLYDE  David Alan Grier
SANDRA  Nia Long
JOSE GARCIA  Paul Rodriguez
HOWARD “HOWIE” KAUFMAN  Saul Rubinek
JERRY  Vincent Schiavelli
MARIO  Khleo Thomas
BILL HARRIS  Rainn Wilson
GINNIE  Karimah Westbrook
MANNY & MORT GOLDBERG  Len Lesser
ROZ  Sally Struthers
WORKING GIRL  Jazsmin Lewis
BERT  Adam West
TOMMY DAVID  Ralph Martin
BOB MAXWELL  Robert Peters
ANGRY BROTHER  Glenn Plummer
MAURICE  Khalil Kain
ETHEL  Pamela Gordon
PANTHER  Wesley Jonathan
ATTORNEY  Joseph Culp
DETROIT J  John Singleton
BRENDA  Joan Blair
MEGAN  Penny Bae Bridges
ANGEL MUSE  Mandela Van Peebles
BARTENDER  E.J. Callahan
LARGE BROTHER  Keith Diamond
OFFICER  Don Dowe
PANTHERS  Brent Schaffer
DAVID  Mickey Mello
BLACK JOURNALIST  Christopher Michael
MAN  Tyrone M. Mitchell
JOSH  Alan James Morgan
BREWSTER  David Alan Smith
JIMMY  Nathan Wetherington
EXCITED LADY  Robin Wilson
PIMPY PAUL  Paul Roach

TRICK OR TREATERS  Marley Van Peebles
Maya Van Peebles
Bridget Avildsen
Craig Jones
STUNT COORDINATOR Kim Koscki
‘A’ CAMERA OPERATOR Ian Dodd
‘B’ CAMERA STEADICAM OPERATOR Dan Kneec
1ST ASSISTANT CAMERA Gary Ushino
“B” CAMERA 1ST ASSISTANT CAMERA Steven Mann
2ND ASSISTANT CAMERA Paul Gibilisco
DIGITAL UTILITY Skip Mobley
STILL PHOTOGRAPHER Nathan Crum
SCRIPT SUPERVISOR Michael O’Connor

BEHIND THE SCENE Steve Gurklys

KEY GRIP Johnny Martin
BEST BOY Frank Gardner
COMPANY GRIPS Marty Boger
Charly Winzer
Michael Valenzuela

GAFFER Paul Cuffe
BEST GIRL ELECTRIC Crickett Peters

ELECTRICIANS Ann Rosencrans
Kaiser Ki-Pyo Kim
Freeman Hardin
Jason Wood
Omari Thomas

SOUND MIXER David Parker
BOOM OPERATOR Derrick Cloud

ART DIRECTOR Jorge Gonzales Borrelli
SET DECORATOR Galit Reuben
LEADMAN Jake Blecha

SWING GANG Ryan Kriss
Kevin Hummel
BUYER Roni Spitzer
ART DEPARTMENT INTERN Mark Henderson
GRAPHIC ARTIST Jeffrey Powers

PROPERTY MASTER Dana Macduff
ASSISTANT PROPERTY MASTER Bob Hummel

WARDROBE SUPERVISOR Tanya Sanchez
ON SET COSTUMER Tasha Monique Carter
WARDROBE ASSISTANT Erick Anderson
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SPECIAL EFFECTS  Ultimate Effects
John & Beverly Hartigan
Bang FX
Albert Lanutti

TAPESTOCK  Media Distributors
TITLE SEARCH  Thomson and Thomson

TRANSPORTATION  Celebrity Suites
Cinema Vehicle Service
Hollywood Camera Cars
Star Waggons
Studio Services
Specialty Vehicle Association

WALKIE TALKIES  Wilcox Communications

Film Clip from GONE WITH THE WIND
Courtesy of Turner Entertainment Company

Film Clip from HOME OF THE BRAVE
Courtesy of Paramount Pictures

Film Clip from SWEET SWEETBACK’S BAADASSSSS SONG!
Courtesy of Xenon Pictures

Film Clip from LITTLE REBEL
Courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox Film Corp.

WATERMELON MAN Poster
Courtesy of Columbia Pictures

Stills Courtesy of Photofest
Additional Clips by F.I.L.M. Archives

CLIP CLEARANCE by
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MUSIC COORDINATION AND CLEARANCES
Adam Swart & Chris Parker

“Damn All The Fallacies”
performed by Tree Adams
New Dog Old Tricks Publishing  
Written by © Adam Hirsh  
Courtesy of Treehouse Music Inc.

“Ope Du Mar”  
performed by Tree Adams  
New Dog Old Treehouse Publishing  
Written by © Adam Hirsh  
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“I Wanna Touch Your Body”  
performed by Niki J. Crawford  
New Dog Old Trix Publishing, Country Girl Entertainment  
Written by © Adam Hirsh, Niki J. Crawford  
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“Up & Down”  
performed by Niki J. Crawford  
New Dog Old Trix Publishing, Country Girl Entertainment  
Written by © Adam Hirsh, Niki J. Crawford  
Courtesy of Treehouse Music Inc./Country Girl Entertainment

“Groove Me”  
performed by King Floyd  
Malaco Publishing  
Written by King Floyd by arrangements with Position Soundtrack Services  
Courtesy of Malaco Records

“Getting the Man’s Good Outta Your Baadasssss!”  
Lyrics by Mario van Peebles  
Performed by Jameel Hassan  
Black Panther Records Publishing  
Music by Black Panther Records and the Huey P. Newton Foundation

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Eothen Alapatt of Stone Throw Records
Blair Belcher
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Vicki Letizia
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In Memory of Pamela Gordon

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“Dedicated to all the Brothers and Sisters who opened the Door”
SYNOPSIS

“Melvin took on the Hollywood machine on his own terms and changed the game.”
- Ossie Davis

The year was 1971 and the hot ticket at the box office was THE FRENCH CONNECTION. Little did audiences and the film industry know that in the same year the birth of a new era was about to explode...Independent Black Cinema.

The city was Detroit, and a weathered Melvin Van Peebles sat alone in the Grand Circus theatre watching only a few ticket buyers enter where his new film - his follow up to the successful comedy WATERMELON MAN - was about to play. After months of clawing, scheming and fighting to finish the film he wanted to make, the moment had arrived, and in a virtually empty theatre, Melvin sat with just a few curious onlookers. By the end of the screening, Melvin was alone. No one could have predicted what happened after that momentous end would be the beginning of history.

Melvin Van Peebles stunned the world for the first time with his debut feature THE STORY OF A THREE-DAY PASS. Filmed in France and selected as the French entry in the San Francisco Film Festival, Melvin’s film was awarded the top prize. Saying it was controversial would be an understatement. In 1968, for a black man to walk up to the podium and accept the top festival award for a film he had to go abroad to make – now that’s how you make your mark.

After his comedy WATERMELON MAN, Melvin was determined to push the Hollywood boundaries with the groundbreaking, and even more controversial, SWEET SWEETBACK’S BAADASSSSS SONG. Turned down by every major studio including Columbia, where he had a three-picture deal, Melvin was forced to basically self-finance. Risking everything he had, Melvin delivered to the world the first Black Ghetto hero on the big screen, whether they were ready or not!

More than 30 years later, history is being fashioned again. Mario Van Peebles, Melvin’s son, directs an honest and revealing portrait of his pioneering father. Following in his dad’s footsteps, and documenting his exceptional journey towards political defiance through cinema, Mario directs and stars as Melvin in BAADASSSSS!, based on the book Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song written by his father right after making SWEETBACK. The book went onto become a best seller, has been translated into several languages and is now a standard in university film classes.

“When I went to my Dad about optioning the book, his words to me were simple: ‘Don’t make me too damn nice.’”
- Mario Van Peebles

“I wrote the book because I figured that no one would believe what happened. Plus, in case I got rubbed out in the process my children would at least have a chance to learn where I was coming from.”
- Melvin Van Peebles

In BAADASSSSS!, Mario sharply observes Melvin’s struggles to raise money to fund SWEETBACK under the guise of creating a black porno film. Melvin ducked creditors, the unions and had to bail out his camera crew after they were arrested because a white cop decided “a bunch of Negroes and hippies couldn’t have come by that camera equipment honestly.” Despite death threats and temporarily losing sight in one eye, Melvin managed to whip into shape a rag-tag, multi-racial crew and finish the film. The film had a winning formula – a hip, empowered black lead and a driving, energetic soundtrack.
with music from the then up-and-coming band Earth Wind and Fire. Maurice White of Earth Wind and Fire also contributes new music to the new film.

Before the Wright Brothers, there was no manned flight. After them, we have been to the moon and beyond. Before Melvin Van Peebles, there were no films that would dare depict a brother standing up to the “man” and living to tell about it. Baadasssss cinema had arrived.

Despite the fact that initially only two theatres in the whole United States would play his film, SWEETBACK became the top grossing independent hit of 1971 spawning a decade of similar studio fare – SHAFT, SUPERFLY and FOXY BROWN. Melvin had brought the hood to Hollywood.

The cast of BAADASSSSSS! also includes David Alan Grier (KING OF TEXAS, TV’s “Life with Bonnie”), Joy Bryant (ANTWONE FISHER, SHOWTIME), Nia Long (BIG MOMMA’S HOUSE, THE BEST MAN), Paul Rodriguez (TORTILLA SOUP, COMIC RELIEF VIII), Saul Rubinek (THE CONTENDER, DICK), Ossie Davis – one of the few active black director’s when SWEETBACK was made (MISS EVERS BOYS, KING), Khleo Thomas (HOLES), Glenn Plummer (THE SALTON SEA, PASTIME), Karimah Westbrook (SAVE THE LAST DANCE), Khalil Kain (THE TIGER WOODS STORY, EXECUTION OF JUSTICE), Rainn Wilson (ALMOST FAMOUS, TV’s “Six Feet Under”), John Singleton (2 FAST 2 FURIOUS, BOYZ N THE HOOD) and Adam West (the original “Batman,” “Family Guy”). The film is written, produced, directed and starring Mario Van Peebles, co-executive produced by Tobie Haggerty, co-produced by Dennis Haggerty and executive produced Michael Mann.
50 Top-Grossing Films

[WEIGHT ENDING MAY 19]

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**Run-100%** - Of 'Sweetback' Ends Sack Booking; Poses Threat To Any Bay State Exhib Cutting Xexplicitly

**'Sweetback'** Nice $27,900, Cleve.; 'Strain Rousing $12,000, 'Giants' Flabby $5,200

**'Bananas'** Big $30,000, Hub; 'Blue' Wow $18,000, 'Sweetback' Neat $20,000, 2d

Chi Spotty; 'Switchblade' Socko 60G, 'Girl'- 'Man' Okay 5/2G, '101 Acts' Big $18,000, 'Sweetback' Sizzling 94G, 2d

**'Sweetback'** Mighty $58,000, Philly; 'Waltz' Pleasant 26G, 'Derby' $7,500

**'Sweetback'** Sock 40G, Hub; 'Taking' Brisk 15G, 'Making It' Okay $12,500

**'Sweetback'** Sock $50,000, K.C.; 'Ride' Moderate $20,000, 'Derby' Light 8G

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**SWEET SWEETBACKS BAADASSSSS SONG**

It's one of the best books on the making of a film I've ever seen.

SWEET SWEETBACK'S THEME and MOJO WOMAN shine from the smooth whole of the soundtrack.

Distributed by CINEMATION INDUSTRIES

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58
DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT/ ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

THE BEGINNING

“How’s your Daddy, he still getting some?” inquired Muhammad Ali leaning in with a conspiratorial wink, his broad rugged face grinning as he scanned the set. “Do some Malcolm for me.” I’d give him a taste, one of the minister’s later speeches. “Brother sure could talk couldn’t he?” Ali said suddenly reflective. I had first met the Champ at the premiere of my directorial debut, NEW JACK CITY, but never spent time with him until filming ALI for Columbia Pictures.

I had already directed what became a controversial film on the Black Panthers and had been struggling to assemble funding on a piece about Dr. King for months and now here I was on the well-healed ALI set portraying the political icon Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz). Recently it seemed I had been re-visiting roughly the same period in history each time from a different political vantage point.

I had grown up in a run n’ gun “do for self” indie film family; on ALI, I was like a poor kid in a candy store. With a budget, I mean a real big ass studio film, Michael Mann research budget. I visited prisons to meet with inmates who had converted to Islam while incarcerated and a car and driver took me there. Any books I requested usually appeared the next day. I met with Warith Deen Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad’s son who had taken over the nation of Islam, Mike Wallace, Minister Farrakhan and Ms. Shabazz, Malcolm’s eldest daughter, who was instrumental, giving me permission to humanize Malcolm as a father.

One of the last stops on my research pilgrimage was with my own Dad, who it turns out interviewed Malcolm at length when he was in Paris. Malcolm had said some disturbing things and the article was never published, some believe at the insistence of the U.S. State Department. Shortly thereafter he returned to New York where he was assassinated.

Melvin Van Peebles is many things at once – renaissance man, hustler, revolutionary, wise old sage, player, father, grandfather, friend, comrade, dramatist – and he’s layered like that proverbial onion revealing knowledge only on a “need to know” basis depending on your level and interest. I never knew the motherfucker got to interview Malcolm X. And here he was taking his sweet time about revealing the contents of said discussion. A pause for the revolutionary cause as he savored his stogie reflectively.

I grinned slightly at my own annoyance not too much of course or he’d notice and we’d get way off on some tangent about me letting him take his time as he saw fit. After all it was I who was once again the askee.

Anyway like I said, I’d grown accustomed to these dramatic pauses so I resorted to my usual tact, studying the lines of his hands and face. As a kid I’d often sketch out a quick cartoon of him. The jutting defiant jaw, the droop of his moustache, his heavy lids, I had him nailed. But today I was on a mission, any move for pen or paper could result in delay.

It’s interesting as a son to take a good long look at your old man, you can’t help wondering if you’ll end up aging like this guy. How much of you is in him? Or vice versa? Genetics? Karma? Mannerisms? Expressions? Couldn’t the son of a bitch have had more hair? Well at
least I didn’t inherit his long graceful chick-like fingers. On some level you kind of want to keep your parents frozen in the suspended animation of your memory. I’d seen his face so many times, in so many incarnations, and yet each time some nuance seemed different, and each time, I as observer was different.

Beyond the “mortality” if he buys-the-farm-guess-who’s-next-issues, “aging” is inconvenient. It complicates ones ability to place experiences. Was he different when I was a kid? Or was it simply my perspective then? Has he mellowed? Was it “tough love” or “paternal fascism?” And what about now? Can I truly grasp or articulate the complexity of all I feel about him as an adult? The dynamics have leveled out as we both grow as men and yet still we’re in a constant state of flux. Especially because, unlike some fathers, the only constant with MVP is that he remains perpetually in-motion learning, reevaluating and stretching beyond any apparent comfort zone.

In his twenties he was one of the first black officers in the US Air Force, then a painter, writer and SF cable car driver. Next he moved to Europe, taught himself French and became a filmmaker. In his thirties he “took the ‘hood to Hollywood” with his groundbreaking film SWEET SWEETBACK’S BAADASSSSSS SONG and when the studios started imitating his cinematic formula, he split for NYC. He had two plays running simultaneously on Broadway including my favorite “Ain’t Supposed to Die a Natural Death.” In his late forties he started running marathons. In his fifties he became the oldest and first black trader to hit the commodities floor and wrote a book about it. In his sixties he was working on his music, directing an indie film, and getting the French Legion of Honor award. (Yeah, technically he is “Sir Melvin” now.) Now at seventy he’s between Paris and New York working on two books and can still out run my ass any day.

In spite of all this and unwarranted as it may be, secretly for some time now I’d felt like my father’s father. As if on some level I was his protector, played out through the role of son. I wanted to see him win, to see him get his due, his props.

I remembered his eyes the last time we almost came to blows, I was already bigger than him and pretty sure I could take him. And there he was threatening me and knowing that I probably was thinking what I was thinking, and also that I’d never want to see him lose. Maybe winning seemed more important to him on that level or to his generation of warriors. I’d never want to see that spirit broken and yet I know he’s resilient enough to lose on any level and get back up; he’s done it a thousand times. I don’t think it’s as simple as me wanting him to win, so I win by proxy or because we share a last name. Maybe I want him to remain father, at least in his own eyes. I want to see that he has achieved what he wanted in this lifetime and for him to know that he passed it on… we got it.

I flashed back on my own sons as little guys insisting that I was the strongest man in the world, even when I told them differently. Were my feelings about MVP some version of this?

I thought about Ali and the question he had asked, yeah at seventy my Dad was still getting “some” and without
much prompting he’d give you the details (too much info man). I thought about how Ali was arguably the world’s first in your face “black power” athlete and that this cool old cat sitting in front of me with the dead stogie and heavy lids was arguably the world’s first “black power” filmmaker. Sir Melvin Van Movies had rocked the cinematic world back on its heels with his indie revolutionary hit SWEET SWEETBACK’S BAADASSSSS SONG. Not only was it the top grossing independent hit of 1971, it was the biggest true indie up till that time.

As Ossie Davis succinctly put it, “Melvin took on the Hollywood machine on his own terms and changed the game.” Not just for black film but for independent film as well. Accompanied by a pulsating soundtrack by the then relatively unknown band Earth Wind and Fire, SWEETBACK started the cinematic tradition of the empowered ghetto hero.

THE HISTORY

It’s hard to comprehend the significance of what crazy Melvin did without understanding the political context in which he had to act. During the Sixties, most African Americans were considering themselves “colored.” The subtext of being colored was that “colored” was just slightly different from white. As if to say, “Please let us have a small slice of the American pie. Please let us exercise our constitutional right to enroll in the same schools, sit at the same lunch counter or even in the same movie theatre with the rest of white America. Recognize our humanity, after all we are like you, we’re just a bit colored.” During this time the non-violent civil rights movement, spearheaded by Dr. King was making measured gains.

Cinematically, Hollywood for years had been acting with impunity, categorically dissing people of color. Hispanics were portrayed as oily bandits who “don’t need no stinkin’ badges.” Native Americans were screaming savages circling innocent white settlers who just wanted to take the red man’s land – “The only good Injun was a dead one.” Asians were deferential houseboys bowing politely. And black folks were members of some strange shuffling servant tribe, mumbling little more than “yes suh,” “no suh.”

When America needed to get black folks involved in World War II, Hollywood did its part by inventing what my Dad in his documentary CLASSIFIED X refers to as the “New Negro” or the noble “colored” character. They usually got their ass shot off in the fourth reel so the white hero could safely escape with the girl.

I remember as a kid watching “Star Trek” and wondering why Spock wasn’t the captain of the Enterprise. He was smarter, taller, more logical, and could clearly kick more “Klingon ass” than Captain Kirk. From what I could gather, Spock was the token Vulcan neo-Negro of the future. Spock seemed to be relegated to some sort of permanent unspoken intergalactic second-class citizenship. No matter how overqualified he was, our man Spock was never gonna get to be captain, or get laid on the Enterprise; he like us was “colored.”

Like brother Spock, Sydney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Dorothy Dandridge, Lena Horne, and Diahann Carroll often easily outclassed their white counterparts. They were the brightest, the best we could be and yet Ms. Dandridge barred from the whites-only bathroom where she occasionally performed, had to pee in a Dixie cup. Colored audiences had to watch their new colored stars from the “colored only” section of the balcony. American apartheid was alive and well.
Brother Malcolm chuckled at us from his podium, saying it doesn’t matter whether you call yourself “Negro” or “colored” or “black” or “African American” or “Christian” or “Muslim” or “Baptist,” you ain’t nothing but a nigger to the man. He’s been whipping our collective asses for four hundred years, he’s just getting better at it. Malcolm astutely went on to point out that the “Ghandiesque” turn the other cheek non-violent approach to civil rights worked in India because the East Indians were a majority and the occupying British colonialists a minority; in essence a big brown elephant sitting on a little white one. But here in the wilderness of North America, the lost tribes of stolen Africans made up a minority of 12% of the population.

Malcolm said you’re talking non-violence to an enemy that doesn’t speak non-violence, to an enemy that will beat you down while you peacefully sing “we shall overcome.” An enemy that will sic dogs on students trying to enroll, turn fire hoses on you, jail you, lynch you, and blow up your churches.

Malcolm went on to say that you can’t sing your way to freedom, power concedes nothing without demand. “Do for self.” If they don’t want you in their restaurants, build your own. Don’t look for trouble, but don’t turn the other cheek if trouble looks for you. About Ali, Malcolm remarked with his West Indian-flavored wit. “Black people need to stop singing and start swinging; Ali didn’t get to be champ by singing up on freedom, he had to swing up on some freedom.”

If Dr. King was the carrot, Minister Malcolm was the stick – both necessary halves of the same revolutionary coin. Dr. King had a dream that one day we’d get freedom by peaceful means, Minister Malcolm X said freedom by “any means necessary…” and in the end America killed them both.

The ghettoes across the United States erupted in anger and despair. The assassinations of JFK, RFK, and Medgar Evers only added fuel to the fire. Once peaceful colored folk were now getting seriously pissed off. Cassius Clay gave up his “slave name”, became Muhammad Ali and refused to go kill the yellow man in Vietnam for the white man that was denying us our human rights here at home. Folks turned their back on the Caucasian standard of beauty, no longer straightening their natural kinky hair, they grew Afros. Terrified whites fled the inner cities in droves heading for the suburbs. Movie theatres became half empty barns. Studios couldn’t seem to gauge this rapidly changing audience (this was pre-multiplex). MGM was forced to sell off its back lot. Star driven flicks like Charlton Heston’s OMEGA MAN and ALEX IN WONDERLAND bombed. People who once sang “We Shall Overcome” were now singing “Say it loud, I’m Black and proud.” The Black Panther Party for Self Defense rose up in Oakland in response to extreme police brutality and unemployment. The black power movement had arrived in full force, trying to fit in, and be “colored” was over. The subtext of being “Black,” of course, is that unlike “colored,” it is the opposite of white.

Across America this incredible surge of militancy was taking place in the black community and yet Hollywood seemed oblivious. Ossie Davis had directed a black cop drama COTTON COMES TO HARLEM, and Poitier had slapped Rod Steiger back in THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT, but by and large we were still being depicted on the silver screen as servants and mammos or overqualified ubernegroes, noble colordas trying to be accepted by the dominant culture. There was a huge gap...
between the explosive reality of what was happening on the streets and the unreality of what was happening on screen. What Melvin did was fill the void.

Not only did he make the first revolutionary “black power flick” but his modus operandi was revolutionary as well. It’s like my father thought he was the Statue of Liberty for disenfranchised wanna-be filmmakers. Give me your tired, your hungry, your black, Hispanics, your hippies, women, and porn makers and they shall be my crew. Take all the folks who had been left out for so long, the cinematically disempowered and let them come learn to control their own imagery. Of course his goal of a fifty-percent minority crew would have been an impossibility if he did SWEETBACK union, like his first studio flick WATERMELON MAN. The “good ol’ boy” unions were almost exclusively male and white. Melvin took the chance of going non-union by making SWEETBACK under the guise of a black porno film. The union left smut films alone.

If you can cut off the head, the body will die. If you assassinate charismatic leaders like King and Malcolm, to some extent their movements die. The Panthers seemed to have learned that bitter lesson, rather than having one empowered leader they had several. Their slogan oddly democratic was “Power to the people.” They, like King and Malcolm, were most threatening to the status quo when they crossed the color lines linking up with the Brown Barrets, (their Hispanic counterparts) or the White Radical Peace and Freedom party. “Power to the People” meant empowering all, not only black. What Melvin did with this renegade indie film was not only empower indie filmmakers of all colors but put on screen that it was not starring a Hollywood actor but “the black community.” And he dedicated it to all the brothers and sisters who have had enough of the man. All power to the people.

As Jose Garcia, my father’s maverick Hispanic second unit cameraman on SWEETBACK, said, “there was a great sense of solidarity between the races back then, a sense that as young filmmakers they could somehow reach, inspire, unite and empower the masses.”

The graphic images of dismembered Vietnamese children that we saw in Life Magazine helped galvanize America’s feeling against the war. The first televised presidential debates between Nixon and Kennedy in which Kennedy handled himself in a presidential manner helped swing public opinion, elect a president and change the course of a nation. The film BIRTH OF A NATION with its images of violent, lazy neo-primate darkies helped create the KKK. During the fifties and sixties the power of the media was growing exponentially. More and more it seemed that the gatekeepers of imagery and information could control public opinion and thus to some extent policy. It’s easier to repress a people if you can first de-humanize and demonize them in the media. Melvin, by doing his funky angry ghetto response to four hundred years of having the man’s foot in our asses, was taking that power back.

Although at age thirteen I had production assisted on SWEETBACK and played a couple roles in it – including losing my cinematic cherry – I was only peripherally aware of the slings and arrows my father was suffering during its making. He was forced to self finance, constantly on the brink of ruin, his crew got arrested and jailed, death threats, and yet he refused to submit his film to the all-white MPAA ratings board for approval. He said they’re not a jury of my
peers, the dominant culture has been approving negative, crippling images of people of color for years, why should they decide what our cinematic agenda should be? The film then received an X rating. My Dad, true to form, printed up t-shirts that read “Rated X by an all white jury” and made it part of his marketing campaign.

At the film’s completion all he had left was about $13, sight in one eye, and only two theatres in the whole United States agreed to play it. In spite of the odds, the film caught fire with the Black Panthers who embraced it as a “revolutionary masterpiece” and made it required viewing for their members. Shortly thereafter the students, Yippies and Hippies came – the “mother country radicals” as the Panthers dubbed them.

In the end, SWEETBACK a funky black X-rated independent everyone had passed on, out-grossed LOVE STORY and caught the Hollywood studios totally off guard. If they won’t let you in at the bottom go in at the top. As Malcolm has said, “Do for self” – don’t beg for a seat at their restaurant, build your own. Melvin didn’t beg to be in their movies, he shot his own. By basically self-financing MVP was his own studio. The inherent risk with “do for self” cinema is personal financial ruin. He took that gamble for himself and our family and this time it paid off.

The rest is history. The studios quickly re-grouped and followed suit. MGM re-wrote a white cop script it had into black face and called it SHAFT, then came SUPERFLY, both with slamming soundtracks and the golden age of what would later be called “Blaxploitation” was born. As Dad often says, “the man has an Achilles pocket book.”

People often ask me about the Blaxploitation era, and like other visible minorities who have on some level achieved within the Hollywood system or behind enemy lines, I find myself in that awkward position of “cinema niggerologist.” I’ll inevitably be at some cocktail party trying to just get my little Merlot buzz on, or at some film festival often one of the few dark faces around and they’ll circle in and get me. “Mario is your Dad still alive?” “Didn’t he do this or that?” And what’s your opinion of Blaxploitation, O.J., rap music, affirmative action etc.

Sometimes the hardcore O.G. revolutionaries will pull me aside and remind me, least I forget, that my Dad’s flick was truly revolutionary, because it’s flawed character – by standing up against the “man” – made being a revolutionary hip. They believe that the subsequent films funded by the studios imitated the formula but diluted the revolutionary core. SHAFT made being a cop hip, while they contended that SUPERFLY was counterrevolutionary because it made being a drug dealer hip.

The more bourgeoisie despised SWEETBACK for its raw sexuality and it’s in the hood portrayal of black life; to them Melvin was an overrated troublemaker and opportunist. Some believe that any flashy images of us with Afros and guns were exploitative in nature. Others, more cinema black nationalists in spirit, resent the fact that after Ossie Davis, Gordon Parks, and my Dad, it was often white directors at the helm.

I suppose as I look back on it all, even if the films did eventually devolve into semi-stylish, ghetto, full-screen comic books, they did do one thing, bad or good – they did depict us as empowered. Even if only for two hours, we were Pam Grier or Richard Roundtree or Fred
Williamson.Fuck it, celluloid escapist fantasy or not it beats the “yes suh” “no suh” tribe. At last, we too were finally Baadasssssed!

**THE DEAL**
The conventional wisdom in Hollywood is that audiences usually avoid biopics. Black biopics are even a tougher sell. The truth is that historically, at least here in North America when we raise our heads as brother Malcolm or Dr. King or the Panthers did, we get shot down. Hoover and his COINTELPRO cohorts did a pretty good job of wiping out our leaders and as the infamous FBI memo reads, “preventing the rise of any black messiah, anyone who might unify or electrify black people.”

Traditionally we’re often portrayed as victims, not as empowered. We’re slaves and chauffeurs or jumping up and down hollering “show me the money” and by in large this is the type of fare the dominant culture still rewards. When they tell our story we become relegated to exotic backdrop. When Spike did X, he told it from Malcolm’s perspective not some white reporter interviewing Malcolm. When I did PANTHER, it was their story. I didn’t create a fictional white character to usher us through the narrative as suggested. Singleton did ROSEWOOD, Euzhan did SUGARCANE ALLEY, all historical period pieces told from our perspective. Naturally, we’re at home with ourselves; we don’t need a white host.

Historically most of our black towns got burnt to the ground, our heroes got assassinated or ended up broke, or broken, in jail or on drugs. Most Americans, let alone hard working Afro-Americans, don’t want to work all week long to spend their ten bucks on a movie just to see themselves getting their asses whipped no matter how noble a cinematic endeavor it may be.

Ali was different, he stood up against the system, sacrificed and triumphed and Ali is still here standing. During the seventies “Black is Beautiful” era, my Dad had written a line for a character in his Broadway play “Ain’t Supposed to Die a Natural Death.” The line was bellowed out by actor-director Bill Duke during a surrealist boxing match, “Black is not only beautiful it’s baaad too! It’s fast, classsy, asskicking, and name-taking too!”

I turned the line over in my head while my Dad sat there in Manhattan’s warm afternoon light still gathering his thoughts. It hadn’t occurred to me before how much it sounded like he was writing about the champ and now the champ was asking about him. I couldn’t help thinking about how much the man sitting right there in front of me had sacrificed and done. Against all odds he had triumphed and lived to brag about it.

Me

… Dad what do you think about me doing the
Sweetback story?

I put it right out there, interrupting the silence as if he had been privy to my inner monologue all along. No reaction, he paused then asked, mildly annoyed at the change in subject.

Me

A remake?
Me
No the whole period, your struggle to make it. The birth of baadasssss anti-establishment cinema. James Brown’s the godfather of “soul,” you’re the godfather of “soul cinema”. We could base it on your making of the SWEETBACK book.

Pause… he removes the stogie from his lower lip.

Melvin
Who’s we?

Me
I don’t know who we is yet.

Melvin
Well who we is makes a big fucking difference to me.

Me
I hear you.

He eyes me. Takes a beat.

Melvin
I love you son… but I don’t want to get fucked on the deal.

Me
We’d option the book, the whole nine yards, if I can’t structure a deal where I have creative and political autonomy I won’t do it. And all rights will revert back to you…trust me Mel, it’s just your life.

I grinned slightly, he hates that Mel shit; Studio execs call him Mel. He refused to take the bait, eying me knowingly, a game we’ve played to perfection over a lifetime.

Melvin
You want to hear about Malcolm’s interview or not?

Me
All ears man.

About a year later my writing partner, Dennis Haggerty, and I had written a feature film script based on MVP’s making of SWEET SWEETBACK’S BADASSSSS SONG. Eventually our film would be entitled BAADASSSSS!, spelled the same way Dad spelled baadasssss, two A’s and five S’s.

Conceptually, I wanted our film to feel like some unseen camera crew had followed Melvin around while shooting the making of SWEETBACK and interviewing the cast and crew; our diverse ragtag “Greek chorus.” I find it interesting when ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are not articulated,
each character plays his or her own “truth” and, like life, their collective truths are often diametrically opposed.

I also wanted the film to go past the ‘making-of’ realm and capture the intimate difficult moments, like the ones between my father and me. I wanted to get inside his head and experience the creative and political state of siege he was under at the time.

This forced me as a writer to turn the emotional chessboard around and play my father’s position to the best of my ability, not just his side of the argument against what was once mine but against the world. Later when I interviewed some of the real players from the time, we were often astounded at the accuracy with which certain events had been re-created. “That’s exactly what your Dad said, did that mother fucker tell you that?” inquired one of his old crewmembers. And this is where things got bizarre. On ALI, I had experienced dreaming as Malcolm – consciously studying, immersing myself, and then being someone else twenty-four-seven until it became unconscious.

My experience on BAADASSSSSS! was different. It was as if I had some paternal umbilical cord wired into my hard drive allowing me to channel directly. I’d be thinking as my father, reacting as him without ever first translating as me. I know him, have studied him, have sketched him, been taught by and fought with him long enough to know his game, his response in most situations. I soon discovered how much in fact I was similar to this man that as a kid I hadn’t always liked and never consciously intended to emulate.

At any rate, Dennis and I had sent our script out to most of the studios around town and got passes. We received feedback like “original,” “provocative,” “powerful,” “unbelievable,” “Is this really a true story?” “Who’s the audience?” “Is this art house or mainstream?” “Black audience or white?” “Too political.” “Can it be more comedy or more drama?” “And how sexy is the sex going to be, is this R?” “Can’t we make Melvin more likeable?”

My Dad’s life was sexy, and political, and interracial, and humorous, and tragic simultaneously. To make it genre specific for the finance and marketing guys would be marginalizing some aspect of his persona. The one cat that got the script was Michael Mann - cinephile, historian, and unafraid of politically charged material. Michael Mann and his wife Summer had seen “Sweetback” on their first date.

In addition to his astute story notes, Michael, as producer, saw the inherent non-genre specific funding dilemmas we would clearly face. But he also noted another concern. He said he thought I had to play Melvin and he didn’t picture anyone else directing it but me. I’m inherently familiar with the story (which is not always a positive) and I obviously had the passion for it. But doing both was a challenge. Doing both on an under the radar hardcore independent with limited time and money was a risk at best.

Flash backward a couple of weeks, Jerry Offsay was retiring as president of Showtime and producing a few one million-dollar digital pictures. A straight shooter Jerry had expressed
interest in the project. We had worked together several times over the years but I didn’t see this as digital. It had to be film man – 35mm, big, and a million dollars? For a period piece in L.A.?

It was Michael Mann who got me re-thinking digital. Portions of the visually lush ALI were done digitally and he let me get a little experience with it when I directed an episode of his series “RHDLA.” The series was shot entirely digitally in L.A., often using a minimal lighting package at night.

Meanwhile the voices of my muse kept coming to me at all hours of the night. I’d wake up inspired and have to re-work some of the dialogue in the script or tighten some scene. Dennis would humor me, we’d get out the new and improved draft and still we were getting passed quicker than an Iranian hitchhiker on the New Jersey Turnpike.

Dad would call occasionally from Paris or NYC and he was cool. He knows the business and me well enough to know no news is no news and if I had news I’d tell him, so we’d just rap as father and son and leave the movie business alone.

We got other interest in the script but it was “could be, should be, might be” money. With each passing week that “no strings” million from Jerry looked better and better. My Dad had a sign in his office that read “If you don’t like my principles I have others.” I was sliding down the slippery slope talking myself into this shit, but how could I sell it to Pops?

I hooked up with a no-nonsense line producer who did up a bare bones budget on spec. The answer came back – we could afford about eighteen days to shoot the entire film if and only if we paid the crew, director, and actors close to bare minimum. I knew one director and actor who’d do it for scale and not give me any shit…me. That solved that equation but what about everyone else? And what of old Sweetback’s reaction?

Me
Hey Pop remember that offer from Jerry? (No reaction)
I think I should take it while the money’s still green.

Melvin
I thought we agreed that was a little tight.

Me
Yeah, yeah, it is but we’d have eighteen days…you shot SWEETBACK in what 20, 25?

Pause.

Melvin
Who’s gonna play me?

Me
Me.
Melvin
And you’re gonna direct too?

Me
Yeah man just like you did…

Growing enthusiasm, it’s all making karmic sense to me now.

We’ll be doing it in the spirit of the original and we’ll even get that same fifty percent minority crew like you had. Remember your question who is the we with creative control gonna be?… Me. The bad news is money’s tight; the good news is I can make the movie. No studio interference – good or bad the vision will be specific.

Melvin
Pause.

Well… Don’t make me too fucking nice.

And that was it. MVP’s truncated code for have at it, do as you will, I trust you and won’t interfere. And he didn’t. He visited the set twice at my request and he saw the film only after my final cut.

**FATHER AND SON**
Life seems to allow most of us the opportunity to play all the roles. One day you’re a kid dodging homework, checking out some cute girl, the next day you’re a parent trying to get your kid focused on their homework and your daughter’s a cute girl.

My life in particular has allowed me to play out all the roles. Yesterday I was a skinny kid with a big afro working on my Dad’s flick, the next day I’m literally playing my Dad directing me as a kid; and completing the circle, my own children are acting in my film – three generations of the Van Peebles clan.

At times during filming it seemed surreal, wearing the same pimpified crushed velvet Sweetback outfit he wore. I’d yell “cut” as Melvin directing a scene within the film that I was directing, and my crew would inadvertently cut as well.

Was it coincidence that thirty years later I was subjecting myself to roughly the same slings and arrows that he had suffered? Starring, directing, producing, and writing simultaneously on an eighteen day shoot with no money to throw at the inevitable problems that would arise? Michael Mann is a smart cat and he had given me that look. That “be careful what you ask for you might just get it” look. Is this what he meant? Was this also about walking in my father’s proverbial shoes to better understand him and some of the raggedy shit he did to my siblings and me as kids?
Not just the overt “wack you,” or be willing to cut your ‘fro off and stick you in a sex scene stuff that the world could see, but the less obvious stuff. Involving us in a battle as kids without ever explaining the war. Being unavailable as a parent to be available to fight that war. Sacrificing the opportunity cost of being our father, choosing to lead the troops in the cinematic revolution instead of playing with us, tickling us, taking us to jiu jitsu, or soccer, or movies and family adventures like I do with my kids. Giving us enough straight up “fun love” so that the inevitable and needed “tough love” would make emotional sense.

I feel sorry for my father on that level because he missed out on the early years with us, the pure irreplaceable “snuzzle” love years that I savor with my brood. Having missed them he has no real idea what he missed. Now having said that I had gone over my list of “father/son grievances” with my Dad years ago and he listened respectfully. Agreed and apologized in some cases, and not in others, and even more disturbing, as many parents (myself included) didn’t always remember some shit that was momentous to me. He handled it well, may I be as graceful as he. I believe I forgave him. I also know that on some level my kids will perceive me as letting them down, they may in turn compensate with their children giving them what they lacked from me and so on. I only hope that the desire and ability to communicate our differences is there as it has been with me and the old man.

Don’t get me wrong, I know I’ve been blessed with the parents I needed. “Not always getting what you want” as the Stones sang, but surely I got what I needed. Both my folks are exceptionally cool avant-garde individuals who have made living and thinking outside the box an art form. They were a young, artistic, hip, non-materialistic, interracial, and politically engaged couple.

After traveling Bohemian-style through Mexico and Amsterdam, my folks divorced. My sister Megan and I came back with our mother Maria to settle in San Francisco during the not always so peaceful peace movement. Dad stayed in France building up his cache as a French filmmaker. I didn’t really get to know the man until the summer of 1970. I was about twelve and he had moved back to the States, rented a one-bedroom flat in Hollywood, and started making SWEET SWEETBACK’S BAADASSSSS SONG.

Someone once said maybe it’s the mother that shows you the mountain, and the father that teaches you how to climb it. My mother had shown me the mountain so to speak. She turned me onto the arts, ecology, peaceful protest, Altamont, the Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan, Haight-Ashbury, and the zen of mat surfing. A free spirit who dabbled in photography, Mom encouraged my creativity. It was Mom who worked with me on every audition, making sure I got the nuances and lines right. If Mom had shown me the mountain, Dad taught me how to climb it, ‘i.e.’ make a living doing what I love. SWEETBACK was film school for many of Dad’s non-union crew, I was no exception. While other kids were out playing or at camp, I was organizing props, sorting filmstrips, storyboarding, or going for coffee. In reality, I was probably a hell of a lot less useful than Dad led me to believe. But you see that’s MVP’s trick, the ‘love’ part of his ‘tough love’ regimen. The man encourages that “I know I can” sense of self work-ethic thing – “empowerment.” As granddad had always said, “Can’t be afraid of hard work.” My Dad taught me to survive.
Forget whether or not I’m the guy’s son, only a dozen people care about that. I’d always felt this was a great story period. David vs. Goliath, a man with a vision and a Malcolm “do for self” spirit. As Bill Cosby put it, “Melvin had a dream, woke up, did it, and it’s still good.” But whatever my own personal motivations might have been or not, I had a choice, make the film under less than ideal conditions or postpone it indefinitely. I felt it was time, I wanted to do Dad’s story while he was still around to see it. The very fact that I could do the film under less politically adverse conditions then when he did SWEETBACK was a testament to his sacrifice – he had kicked the Hollywood door open. In all likelihood, had he been the cuddly, ever-present Dad I might have wanted I wouldn’t be here now enjoying the freedom I have as a filmmaker. The dominant culture would still have a strange hold of our imagery. We’d still be the supporting cast one-dimensional villains, or grinning and clowning as we assist the white leads. I’m not saying that we are not that now but we’re not that exclusively.

The black power movement paved the way for the women’s movement, the gay rights movement, Latino, Asian and other movements. What Melvin did was show us and the establishment that it was possible to have an independent vision that made a pile of money and that there was a big ass black and alternative audience out there to be reckoned with. That’s powerful stuff and it reverberated beyond race and class lines throughout the film community as a whole.

Of course the tight shooting schedule on BAADASSSSS! kicked me and the crews collective asses, but in a “Nietzsche” kind of way, “That which doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.” In fact I believe my role as filmmaker on a fierce independent playing a filmmaker on a more fierce independent was served by the intense pressures we faced. There were brakes between lighting set-ups for the other actors but not for me. I was forced to remain in an intense, ever-alert, pro-active mode reminiscent of my Dad. Always in the moment, strategizing, planning the next shot, the next day, dealing with the fire marshals, the actor that flaked, no permits, unions, MPAA, anticipating the next crisis – and in this storm I found him. I found something central to my Dad’s character, his ability, his sheer will to get it done, with humor, with force, by any means necessary.

With no time to act I just was. In the end I made no attempt to play him as good guy or bad guy, I played him as I felt him, as I knew him. The truth.

- MARIO VAN PEEBLES, November 2003
RECORD SAG EARNINGS IN '67

$108,900,000 Income
Greatly Due To TV Blurbs,
$26,600,000 From Pix

Due mainly to an impressive upsurge in earnings from TV commercials and industrial pix, but mostly from the blurbs. Screen Actors Guild membership earned a record $108,900,000 in 1967, exceeding previous year by $4,500,000.

This good news was revealed by national exec secretary John L. Dues at guild's annual membership meeting attended by more than 1,000 at the Palladium yesterday.

Record came despite a drop in vitamin earnings, which amounted to $35,900,000 of the total income. Two-pint coin was off $4,300,000 from preceding year because of longer episodes, more and quicker reruns during the season, increased number of feature pix on tv, and the resurgence of live and taped shows.

Actors earned $36,600,000 in theatrical films, about one-quarter of the total actor compensation under all SAG agreements. Feature pix work increased $3,000,000 in earnings.

But the big news was in commercials and industrial films, from which SAG members earned $42,300,000 — an elevation of $5,200,000.

Not A Grain Of Truth To Reports He And Son Will Raid 20th: Zanuck

New York, Nov. 17 — Twentieth Century-Fox today declared "there is not a grain of truth to reports he and his "new" partner, Richard, 20th-Fox ex-exec production company. Rumors in financial circles have hinted the Zankers were using a Swiss bank as a front to buy stock in heavy volumes. "I don't want people to stick their necks out and buy on the basis of what they think is inside information when it is absolutely false information," Zanuck said.

He added that he doubted the accuracy of reports that a tender offer or exchange offer may be made for the company's stock, which Friday (12) rose 2% to 38 1/2 on turnover of 136,000 shares. On

Award To Stewart

James Stewart was given the yearly Screen Actors Guild award for "outstanding achievement in fostering the finest ideals of the acting profession," at guild's annual membership meeting.

BAG proxy Charlton Heston presented the award to Stewart.

10 Producers Fired By KLAC In NLRBeef

The 16 producers at KLAC Fri.-day morning were notified their employment was terminated at 5 p.m. that day after they and Natl. Assn. of Broadcaster Employees and Technicians failed again to negotiate with Metromedia management on eliminating their function at the station.

Awarded, voted in by the producers last Aug. 30, immediately filed for an injunction against management with Natl Labor Relations Board, probably to file an unfair-practice charge later.

Battle between producers and
CAST BIOS

Melvin Van Peebles – “HIMSELF”
Mr. Van Peebles has worked in every medium of the entertainment industry, from music (a three-time Grammy nominee) to television (an Emmy-award winner) to Broadway as a writer and director (11 Tony nominations), and after 30 years his blockbuster movie, SWEET SWEETBACK’S BAAADASSSS SONG, remains on Variety’s list of all-time top grossing films. The film was recently released on DVD.

Mr. Van Peebles’ works are taught at such distinguished schools as Yale, Harvard and Columbia. Scott Gentry’s book, “The Film 100,” recognized Mr. Van Peebles as one of the most influential people in the history of cinema for his commercialization of both independent and black films.

Mr. Van Peebles began his career as a 10-year old selling second-hand clothes to winos. Since then, he has been involved with, among other things, the Boy Scouts, Astronomy, Youth for Christ, the Strategic Air Command, the Merchant Marine, the Artillery, the Post Office, Cable Cars, Het Nederlands Comedie, the ACLU, the Cinematique Francaise, the Harkness Ballet, Boston Marathons, Pinochle, the Block, Blues, Dues, the Senegalese Police and the Mexican immigration authorities. Recently, Mr. Van Peebles was awarded the prestigious French Legion of Honor.

His book, The Making of Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song, upon which the movie is based and which serves as an excerpt from one of the volumes of his upcoming autobiography, is in its fourth U.S. printing. It has also been published in the U.K. and translated into Japanese. Additionally, Mr. Van Peebles finished personally translating the book into French, which will be available in December 2003.

He is currently writing a novel that is a cautionary tale from mankind’s future entitled “Ratcatchers 2147”, in addition to opening “Soul Cabaret” in December 2003, a French musical review at the Peter Brook’s Theater in Paris.

Mario Van Peebles – “MELVIN VAN PEEBLES”
Never one to rest on his laurels, Mario Van Peebles has carved out a substantial career that is constantly redefining and inspiring modern cinema in the same revolutionary style his father pioneered in the 1970s.

Most recently, Van Peebles portrayed political icon Malcolm X in Michael Mann’s ALI and starred in the indie feature THE HEBREW HAMMER with Adam Goldberg. He also appeared in the telefilms 44 MINUTES, CROWN HEIGHTS, and TEN THOUSAND BLACK MEN NAMED GEORGE, where he played the historical figure Ashley Totten, who helped start America’s first Black union of Pullman train porters.

His feature directorial debut came with the critically acclaimed box office hit NEW JACK CITY, in which he also starred. Next, he would redefine the Old West directing and starring in the multicultural western POSSE. Mario received a Director’s Guild Award nomination for his
telefilm MALCOLM TAKES A SHOT, and he directed and co-produced the controversial, historical drama PANTHER, a film about the Black Panther Party for which he would win the Silver Leopard Award (among others) at the Locarno Film Festival.

Van Peebles’ other acting film credits include Clint Eastwood’s HEARTBREAK RIDGE, for which he won a NAACP Image Award. He has starred in the acclaimed telefilms Alex Haley’s MAMA FLORA’S FAMILY, THE RICKEY BELL STORY, SALLY HEMMINGS: AN AMERICAN SCANDAL, THE EMPEROR JONES, GANG IN BLUE and RIOT. He earned a Cable ACE Award nomination for his work in THIRD & OAK: THE POOL HALL, co-starring with James Earl Jones and was awarded the Bronze Halo Award for CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT. He also starred in the TV series “Sonny Spoon” and “Rude Awakening,” in addition to directing and starring in several episodes of Michael Mann’s series “Robbery Homicide Division.”

Van Peebles’ stage work includes “Waltz of the Stork,” which was directed by his father, “War Letters,” and “Oak and Ivy” in which he portrayed the acclaimed turn-of-the-century poet Laurence Dunbar.

Ossie Davis – “GRANDDAD”

As a playwright, screenwriter, director, producer, and actor during a career spanning over 50 years, Davis has been a staple of black theater with his wife, actor Ruby Dee. Both are longstanding political activists who were highly visible during the height of the Civil Rights movement and continue to speak out at rallies for progressive and humanitarian causes.

Davis delivered the moving eulogy at the funeral of slain civil rights leader Malcolm X (which he repeated for the extended coda to Spike Lee's 1992 biopic).

Born in Cogdell, Georgia, Davis began his career as a writer and actor with the Rose McClendon Players in Harlem in 1939. He most recently appeared in the Showtime movies DEACONS FOR THE DEFENSE and Anne Rice’s FEAST OF ALL SAINTS.

In 1946, Mr. Davis made his Broadway debut in “Jeb” and went on to perform in many Broadway productions, including “Anna Lucasta,” “The Wisteria Trees,” “Green Pastures,” “Jamaica,” “Ballad for Bimshire,” “The Zulu and the Zayada” and the stage version of “I’m not Rappaport.”

In 1961, Mr. Davis wrote and starred in the critically acclaimed “Purlie Victorious”. He was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame in 1994.

After making his film debut in NO WAY OUT in 1950 with Sidney Poitier, Mr. Davis appeared in such films as THE CARDINAL, THE HILL and THE SCALPHUNTERS. In 1970, Mr. Davis directed his first feature film, COTTON COMES TO HARLEM. He went on to direct four others: GORDON’S WAR, KONGI’S HARVEST, BLACK GIRL and COUNTDOWN AT KUSINI, which he also co-produced with his wife, Ruby Dee. Additional film roles included the animated feature DINOSAUR, DR. DOLITTLE with Eddie Murphy, GET ON THE BUS for Spike Lee, and I’M NOT RAPPAPORT with Walter Matthau.

Mr. Davis’ first appearance on the small screen was in the title role of the 1955 television production of “The Emperor Jones.” He received an Emmy Award nominations for his work in “Teacher, Teacher” “King” and most recently, “Miss Evers’ Boys.” He has been a regular or recurring player in “With Ossie & Ruby,” “B.L. Stryker,” “Evening Shade,” and “The Client.”
Additional notable television credits include “12 Angry Men,” “Promised Land,” “Night Gallery,” “The Sheriff,” “The Ernest Green Story,” “Roots: The Next Generation,” Alex Haley’s “Queen,” “The Stand,” “The Defenders,” and “Bonanza.” Currently, Mr. Davis co-hosts the African Heritage Movie Network’s Movie of the Month. His television writing credits include episodes of “EastSide/ West Side” and the teleplay of “For Us the Living,” for which he received the Neil Simon Jury Award.

Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee have produced several television specials, including “Today Is Ours,” “Martin Luther King: The Dream & The Drum,” and two segments of “A Walk Through the 20th Century with Bill Moyers.” They also co-produced the television series “With Ossie & Ruby,” which aired for three seasons. In 1980, Mr. Davis and Ms. Dee founded their own production company, Emmalyn II Productions Company, Inc.

Mr. Davis has received many honors and citations, including the N.Y. Urban League Frederick Douglass Award, the NAACP Image Award, and the National Medal of Arts.

He is the author of three children’s books: Escape to Freedom (honored by the American Library Association and the Jane Adams Children’s Book Award); Langston and Just Like Martin. He and Ruby Dee recently marked their 50th wedding anniversary with the publication of their joint autobiography, With Ossie and Ruby: In This Life Together.

David Alan Grier – “CLYDE HOUSTON”

Although David Alan Grier has been known for his ability to create comedy and humor, the graduate of the Yale School of Drama has successfully made the diverse jump from theatre to television to film and still alternates between all three.

Trained in Shakespeare at Yale, Grier began his professional career on Broadway as Jackie Robinson in “The First,” for which he earned a Tony nomination in 1981. He then starred opposite Denzel Washington in “A Soldier’s Play,” and both actors continued their roles in the film version, A SOLDIER’S STORY. Grier starred on Broadway in “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum.” He has also performed at the New York Shakespeare Festival in productions of “Richard III” and “The Merry Wives of Windsor” at Central Park.

Grier’s television credits are abundant, from recent comedy specials such as “The Book of David” to starring in “DAG”. He is currently co-starring with Bonnie Hunt in “Life With Bonnie” on ABC, but most audiences will recognize him as one of the principle cast members of the acclaimed television series “In Living Color” – where he helped to create some of that show’s most memorable characters. Keeping his close comedic relationship with the Wayans’ brothers, he co-starred with Damon Wayans in “Damon.”

In addition, Grier has gained recognition for his numerous feature film roles, including 15 MINUTES, BOOMERANG, JUMANJI, RETURN TO ME and STREAMERS, for which he won a Golden Lion Award for Best Actor at the Venice Film Festival.

He will next be seen in TIPTOES with Matthew McConaughey, Gary Oldman and Kate Beckinsale, and THE WOODSMAN with Kevin Bacon, Benjamin Bratt, Mos Def and Eve.
Grier was born in Detroit, Michigan and currently resides in Los Angeles. When not in production on a series or film, he continues to travel the country on his comedy tour.

**Nia Long – “SANDRA”**

Building a reputation as an actress of exceptional range, Nia Long has delivered outstanding work in box office hits, independent features and television. After a two year break to raise her newborn son, Long is returning as one of the busiest actresses today.

First up for Nia is joining the cast of NBC’s hit drama “Third Watch” where she plays Sasha Monroe, a struggling cop who partners with Molly Price’s character.

Long returns to the big screen in two diverse roles. She will star opposite Jude Law in ALFIE which begins filming this fall. Then Long is slated to star opposite Rosario Dawson in Spike Lee’s new film SHE HATE ME.

Nia’s other film credits include BIG MOMMA’S HOUSE, for which she was nominated for a Blockbuster Award and a NAACP Image Award for Best Leading Actress; THE BROKEN HEARTS CLUB, BOILER ROOM opposite Vin Diesel and Ben Affleck, IN TOO DEEP, BEST MAN for which she won the NAACP Image Award for Best Actress, HELD UP, STIGMATA, SOUL FOOD, LOVE JONES which received critical acclaim and tied for the prestigious Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival, MADE IN AMERICA and BOYZ IN THE HOOD.

Television credits include starring as the fiancé of Will Smith in the NBC hit comedy “The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air;” “Judging Amy;” the controversial “If These Walls Could Talk II;” and “ER.”

Long divides her time between Los Angeles and New York.

**Joy Bryant – “PRISCILLA”**

Destined to become one of the most talented young actresses of her generation, Joy Bryant has made an impressive transition from the runway to the big screen. Last year, her breakthrough performance in Denzel Washington's ANTWONE FISHER made people stand up and take notice.

The upcoming year will be no exception as she once again dominates the screen in the music-driven coming of age drama HONEY, co-starring with Jessica Alba and Mekhi Phifer, and Scott Ziehl’s sexy noir-thriller THREE WAY SPLIT with Gina Gershon.

Bryant made her onscreen debut in CARMEN – THE HIP OPERA opposite Beyoncé Knowles and Mekhi Phifer, followed by a small role in the comedy SHOWTIME, which starred Eddie Murphy and Robert DeNiro.

While enrolled as a full-time student at Yale University, Bryant was discovered by a modeling scout from Next Model Management. For several years, Bryant pursued a career as a fashion model in Paris and subsequently entered in an exclusive contract with Tommy Hilfiger. Bryant
continues to model between films as a cover subject for Victoria Secret, and in a number of prestigious print campaigns such as the Fall 2003 GAP ads.

Born and raised in the South Bronx, Bryant attended Westminster High School in Connecticut on a full scholarship. She is an avid supporter of the Fieldston Enrichment Program under the umbrella of "A Better Chance Public School Program," an organization that reaches out to minority talent to enrich their academic opportunities.

Bryant shares her time between Los Angeles and New York with her beloved pit bull named Nana.

Paul Rodriguez – “JOSE GARCIA”
Paul Rodriguez’ career as an actor and comedian spans more than two decades and includes starring roles and featured appearances in over 30 films and countless television series and specials.

Rodriguez is an actor, comedian, director, writer and producer. Most recently, he was the executive producer and star of the comedy concert film “The Original Latin Kings of Comedy,” which also stars Cheech Marin, George Lopez, Alex Reymundo and Joey Medina.

Rodriguez has honed his craft over the past 22 years and it is estimated that he has performed live to well over a million concertgoers from coast to coast.

Rodriguez is proud of his Latino roots, and also finds the time to work with various civic and educational groups, including the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF), for which he hosts an annual celebrity golf tournament and the National Council of La Raza for which he hosts the Alma awards.

Rainn Wilson – “BILL HARRIS”
Beloved (and desired) by morticians all across the globe, Rainn Wilson is best known for playing the role of Arthur Martin, the odd mortician intern on HBO’s “Six Feet Under.” Wilson has appeared in features such as GALAXY QUEST, ALMOST FAMOUS, AMERICA’S SWEETHEARTS and Rob Zombies’ HOUSE OF 1,000 CORPSES.

On television, he has played guest and recurring roles on several shows and played wonderfully quirky lead parts on many failed pilots.

Wilson was born and raised in the Seattle area and attended the graduate acting program at NYU. After spending many year doing Broadway, Off-Broadway and Regional Theatre roles, he moved to Los Angeles with a comedy troupe he founded called The New Bozena. After transferring their hit Off-Broadway show “Winter is the Coldest Season” to LA, the group developed their off-bear brand of slacker-vaudeville into a Fox pilot which was summarily dumped. He won Best Comedy Direction award for the show from the LA Weekly.
Khleo Thomas – “MARIO VAN PEEBLES”
At the age of 14, Khleo Thomas has already built an impressive resume in theater, TV and film. In 2003 he played Zero in HOLES with Sigourney Weaver and Jon Voight. Other big screen accomplishments include REVEREND DO WRONG AIN’T RIGHT, A MOMENT ON DOROTHY DANDRIDGE, and FRIDAY AFTER NEXT. Thomas made his show business debut in a McDonald’s commercial at the age of 3, and has stared in many more since then.

On the small screen, he has appeared on shows such as “City Guys,” “Family Law,” “Kids Say the Darndest Things” with Bill Cosby (which led to an “Oprah Winfrey Show” appearance at age 7) and “Wait Till You Have Kids.” He has also shined on the live stage in theatrical productions “Dinny & The Golden Millennium Seed,” “The Desperate Hours,” and “Call for Peace.”

Thomas often does his own stunts on set, can impersonate just about anyone and is mean competition in any skateboarding park. Thomas lives in Los Angeles with what he calls, “the perfect parents.”
**BAADASSSSSS CAMEOS**

**John Singleton – “DETROIT J”**
Producer, director and screenwriter John Singleton exploded onto the scene in 1991 with his first film **BOYZ N THE HOOD**, a tough, intelligent, plain-speaking look at friends in gang-ridden South Central L.A. The film earned him Oscar nominations for Best Original Screenplay and Best Director, making him the first African-American (and the youngest) filmmaker ever to do so.

Singleton has won numerous awards such as the LAFCNA New Generation Award in 1991, the MTV Movie Award for Best New Filmmaker in 1992, the New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best New Director (BOYZ N THE HOOD) in 1991, and finally the ShoWest Awards for Screenwriter of the Year, and the Special Award for Directorial Debut of the Year, 1992.

Singleton recently directed 2 FAST 2 FURIOUS starring Paul Walker, R&B singer Tyrese, Eve Mendes and Cole Hauser. He also wrote, produced and directed BABY BOY, starring Tyrese, Ving Rhames, Snoop Dogg, and newcomer Taraji P. Henson; the film has received four NAACP nominations. He also wrote, produced, and directed SHAFT, starring Samuel Jackson. He directed ROSEWOOD starring Jon Voight and Ving Rhames. He wrote, produced, and directed HIGHER LEARNING starring Omar Epps and Laurence Fishburne, and he wrote, produced, and directed POETIC JUSTICE starring Janet Jackson.

While Singleton was attending the Filmic Writing Program at USC he won three writing awards from the university, which led to a contract with Creative Artists Agency during his sophomore year. He was also a recipient of the John Nicholson Award in 1989 and 1990 and the Robert Riskin Award in 1989.

**T.K. Carter – “BILL COSBY”**
A talented black stand-up who branched out into comedy roles, T K Carter astounded critics and audiences with his richly textured portrait of a successful businessman who descends into heroin addiction in the acclaimed HBO drama “The Corner.”

A native of Los Angeles, Carter made his TV acting debut in an episode of the NBC series “Police Woman.” Carter began a successful career as the opening act comic for such musicians and groups as Gladys Knight and the Pips, James Brown, Kool & the Gang and Patti LaBelle. Concurrently, he began racking up numerous guest appearances and roles in sitcoms like “Good Times” and “Family Matters.” His first regular series role came as the genie Shabu in the ABC sitcom “Just Our Luck” (1983-84). Carter later joined the cast of “Punky Brewster,” the Disney Channel’s “Good Morning, Miss Bliss” and “The Sinbad Show.”

In film, Carter has appeared in the comedy CORVETTE SUMMER, SEEMS LIKE OLD TIMES with Chevy Chase and Goldie Hawn, DOCTOR DETROIT with Dan Aykroyd, RUNAWAY TRAIN with Jon Voight, and with Eric Roberts and Rebecca DeMornay and in the lead role of HE’S MY GIRL. In 2003, Carter starred as Rodney King in the independent feature L.A. RIOT SPECTACULAR.
Adam West – “BERT”
A true American icon, Adam West’s role as Batman in the classic series and movie continues to be seen throughout the world more than 30 years after it’s first showing. While Batman/Bruce Wayne is certainly his signature role, West has many other motion picture, theater and TV credits.

He has made nearly 50 movies, including starring or co-starring roles in DROP DEAD GORGEOUS, THE NEW AGE, HOOPER, THE YOUNG PHILADELPHIANS, AN AMERICAN VAMPIRE STORY, SOLIDER IN THE RAIN, ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS and NEVADA SMITH.

West has starred in four other TV series including “The Detectives,” “The Last Precinct,” and “The Clinic.” His theater credits include “Valpone” at the Mark Taper Forum. In the animated realm, West has lent his voice to characters in such well-known shows as “The Simpsons,” “Rugrats,” “Family Guy,” “Batman,” “Animaniacs,” “Johnny Bravo,” “Spydogs,” and “The Super Adventure Team.” His animated short film, “Redux Riding Hood” was nominated for an Academy Award in 2000.

He is also the author of two books – Back to the Batcave and Climbing the Walls – and most recently he starred and served as a creative consultant in the CBS Movie of the Week “Return to the Batcave: The Misadventures of Adam & Burt,” where he breathed new life into the classic character.

West lends his support to numerous charities, recently winning $250,000 on “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” on behalf of an organization supporting women and children in Idaho. He can next be seen in MTV’s “Monster Island” with Carmen Electra and he appears in the January 2004 issue of Esquire about “America’s Top 10 Icons.”

Len Lesser – “MANNY & MORT GOLDBERG”
A veteran stage, TV and film actor, Len Lesser is probably best known for his 9-year portrayal of Uncle Leo on the hit sitcom “Seinfeld”, for which the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences awarded him a plaque honoring his work on the show.

Lesser has appeared in dozens of feature films including KELLY’S HEROES, OUTLAW JOSEY WALES, DEATH HUNT, MAIN EVENT and BIRDMAN OF ALCATRAZ. He also completed over 400 television shows, including a recurring role as Garvin in “Everybody Loves Raymond,” and has made over 100 stage appearances at the Mark Taper Forum and Ahmanson Theatre.

Sally Struthers – “ROZ”
A two-time Emmy Award winner for her performance in “All In The Family,” Sally Struthers’ current TV work includes a recurring role on the WB’s “Gilmore Girls” and a guest starring role on CBS’s “Still Standing.” She also appeared in cameo performances in the independent features OUT OF THE BLACK and A MONTH OF SUNDAYS with Rod Steiger, as well as a ten-episode cameo on ABC’s “General Hospital.”

Among her other film credits, she appeared with Jack Nicholson in FIVE EASY PIECES, and co-starred with Steve McQueen and Ali McGraw in her second feature, THE GETAWAY.

Struthers’ credits include the television movies “Deadly Silence,” “A Gun In The House,” “Your Name Is Jonah,” “My Husband Is Missing,” “Intimate Strangers,” “The Great Houdini,” “Hey, I’m Alive,” and “In The Best Interest Of The Children.” Sally also appeared in the television
series “9 to 5” and “Gloria,” and appeared on stage in Neil Simon’s female version of “The Odd Couple” and “Wally’s Café,” both on Broadway.

Sally starred as Miss Hannigan in the 20th Anniversary national tour of “Annie” and also as Miss Lynch in the national road company and on Broadway in the Tommy Tune production of the musical “Grease”. She often stars as Louise Seger in “Always Patsy Cline” at various theatres around the country; a true story based on the relationship between Seger and Cline.

Sally was also “heard” as the voice of the teenage dinosaur Charlene in the ABC series “Dinosaurs.”

For twenty years, Struthers has worked tirelessly to help the disenfranchised, hungry and uneducated children of the world. She has visited these children in many parts of the Third World and the United States, and has filmed numerous public service announcements and documentaries on their behalf.
FILMMAKER BIOS

Michael Mann – Executive Producer
A man of extraordinary vision in a career spanning three decades, award-winning producer and director Michael Mann has been an inspiration to generations of filmmakers.

Mann was born in Chicago and educated at the University of Wisconsin. He then moved to England to do graduate work at the London Film School. After completing his degree, he remained in Europe to start a small production company making documentaries, shorts and television commercials. In 1970, his short film, JUANPURI won the Jury Prize at Cannes. He came back to the U.S. in 1971 to shoot and direct 17 DAYS DOWN THE LINE, a documentary about a road trip upon his return to America.

In the mid-1970s, Mann made his theatrical film debut with THE THIEF, a modernist crime story starring James Caan and Jim Belushi that was nominated for the Golden Palm Award at Cannes. He followed this in 1983 with the gothic horror film THE KEEP, starring Gabriel Byrne, Scott Glenn, and Ian McKellen. In 1986, he directed MANHUNTER, a psychological thriller based upon the first of Thomas Harris’ Hannibal Lecter books, Red Dragon, featuring William Petersen and Brian Cox as Lecter.

Throughout the 1980s, Mann continued to work in television with the revolutionary “Miami Vice” and the acclaimed Chicago and Las Vegas drama “Crime Story,” starring Dennis Farina. In addition to these efforts, he produced the 1990 Emmy-winning miniseries “Drug Wars: The Camarena Story” and executive produced the 1992 Emmy-nominated sequel “Drug Wars: The Cocaine Cartel.”

In 1992, Mann directed, co-wrote and produced THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS, starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Madeline Stowe. Following this success, in 1995, he directed HEAT from his own original screenplay that starred Al Pacino and Robert De Niro; in fact, Ashley Judd and Amy Brenneman each had their first major roles in HEAT.

In 1999, Mann earned Oscar nominations for co-writing, directing, and producing THE INSIDER, starring Russell Crowe and Al Pacino. Based upon Marie Brenner’s Vanity Fair article: “The Man Who Knew Too Much,” the film tells the true story of Jeffrey Wigand, a tobacco industry executive who blew the whistle on the industry’s cover-up of cigarette’s known health risks.

In 2001, Mann took audiences into the heart and life of legendary boxer, Muhammed Ali in ALI, starring Will Smith and Jon Voight, both of whom received Oscar nominations.

Most recently, Mann produced “Robbery: Homicide Division” for CBS, starring Tom Sizemore. He is currently producing and directing COLLATERAL, starring Tom Cruise.

Jerry Offsay – Executive Producer
Jerry Offsay left his position as President, Programming for Showtime Networks in July 2003 to form his own production company for series and movies for networks and studios. He has spent the last six months exec producing 6 films, three of which have been accepted at Sundance in 2004.

During his ten-year tenure, he was responsible for all programming functions of Showtime Networks Inc. (SNI). He supervised the Original Programming, Program Acquisitions and Scheduling departments. While at Showtime Networks, he was responsible for more than tripling
SHOWTIME’s original programming slate of series and films. Many of these programs have appeared in the Venice, Toronto, Sundance and Cannes Film Festivals and have garnered Emmy®, Golden Globe™, CableACE, Humanitas and Peabody awards, among others. Most recently, Offsay had been responsible for greenlighting SOLDIER’S GIRL and TENNESSEE WILLIAMS’ THE ROMAN SPRING OF MRS. STONE, both of which just won a total of 5 Golden Globe nominations. Critically acclaimed projects that have aired under Offsay’s management have included: HIROSHIMA, 12 ANGRY MEN, THE TWILIGHT OF THE GOLDS, MANDELA AND deKLERK, THANKS OF A GRATEFUL NATION, THE BABY DANCE, INHERIT THE WIND, THE DEVIL’S ARITHMETIC, STRANGE JUSTICE, THE PASSION OF AYN RAND, NORIEGA: GOD’S FAVORITE, ARTHUR MILLER’S DEATH OF A SALESMAN, BOJANGLES, LAUGHTER ON THE 23rd FLOOR, THE DAY REAGAN WAS SHOT, KEEP THE FAITH, BABY, DAMAGED CARE and LAST CALL.

During his stay at Showtime Networks, Offsay had also worked hard to establish the network as a home for top-quality artists, providing access to important work that might otherwise not be seen. He was honored by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Southern California with its annual Bill of Rights honor for making SHOWTIME the premiere platform for artists interested in exploring topics and issues outside the mainstream. Examples of projects under Offsay’s direction include the hit series QUEER AS FOLK, as well as the films DIRTY PICTURES (2001 Golden Globe™ Award winner in the category Best Mini-Series Or Motion Picture Made For Television), RATED X, LOLITA, the two mini-series ARMISTEAD MAUPIN’S MORE TALES OF THE CITY and ARMISTEAD MAUPIN’S FURTHER TALES OF THE CITY, Anjelica Huston’s BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA and SISTER MARY EXPLAINS IT ALL.

Prior to joining Showtime Networks in January 1994, Offsay served as Executive Vice President, ABC Productions for Capital Cities/ABC Inc., where he was responsible for all production and distribution. Before assuming his position at ABC Productions, Offsay was President, RKO Pictures. He served as executive producer on many films including “Eight Men Out,” “Diabolique,” and “Hamburger Hill” as well as co-producer on “Narrow Margin.” Offsay began his career as an entertainment attorney for the Los Angeles law firm of Loeb & Loeb, where he was a partner involved in international film financing and the co-production of numerous films.

Offsay holds a B.A. degree from Harpur College in New York and a J.D. from Columbia University Law School. He is currently on the Board of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture and the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Foundation. He and his wife, Pam, have four children.

Offsay’s company, Parkchester Pictures, is based in Los Angeles.

**Tobie Haggerty – Co-Executive Producer**

For over 20 years, Tobie Haggerty has been a personal manager. She began her career with Bill Treusch & Associates with clients that included Christopher Walken, Sandy Dennis, Eric Roberts, Tom Hulce, Sissy Spacek and Tom Berenger. After forming her own management company, her roster included Kevin Spacey, Phoebe Cates and Mario Van Peebles.

Haggerty is presently managing the New York office for Vincent Cirrincione Associates, a Los Angeles based management company. Their clients include Halle Berry, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Jobeth Williams, Isaiah Washington and Mario Van Peebles.

Among her producing credits, Haggerty has produced THE PACKAGE with Gene Hackman and Tommy Lee Jones, and executive produced LOVE KILLS.
Dennis Haggerty – Co-Producer
Dennis Haggerty started his writing career with the story idea for THE PACKAGE with Gene Hackman and Tommy Lee Jones, which he also co-produced. He is currently working on the romantic comedy JUST THE WAY YOU ARE.

G. Marq Roswell – Co-Producer / Music Supervisor
The total movie experience, more often then not, is as much about sound as it is about sight. In the right hands, music that accompanies film imagery is capable of evoking the full spectrum of emotion in an audience. The artists who orchestrate what you hear in the theater, who guide every aspect of a film's musical content, are called music supervisors, and one of the industry's best is G. Marq Roswell.

A sixth generation Californian and graduate of UCLA's prestigious film school, Roswell knows all too well how music can contribute to almost any film's ultimate success. To date he's lent his talents to almost 30 films, including SPY GAME, starring Robert Redford and Brad Pitt, SWEET NOVEMBER with Keanu Reeves and Charlize Theron, PAY IT FORWARD with Helen Hunt and Kevin Spacey, END OF DAYS with Arnold Schwarzenegger, Norman Jewison’s THE HURRICANE with Denzel Washington and Sam Raimi’s FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME with Kevin Costner.

Roswell has the unique ability to seek out and immerse himself in the music for each project, no matter what genre it occupies. He worked with pop/country artists Lyle Lovett, Trisha Yearwood and Vince Gill on FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME, assembled hard rockers Guns -n- Roses, Korn, and Limp Bizkit for END OF DAYS, sought out contemporary rhythm and blues artists Ruth Brown, Ray Charles, The Roots, and Me'Shell NdegeOcello for THE HURRICANE, and worked with a host of Middle Eastern musicians for SPY GAME.

Due to the nature of how music compliments a film's content, Roswell prefers that his role begin very early in the process, and depending on the complexity of the music used, that involvement can last many months. Another such labor-intensive project was director Norman Jewison's THE HURRICANE, for which Roswell researched nearly 40 years of rhythm and blues.

As the music supervisor for all of the above films, Roswell was responsible for the placement of these successful tracks. Roswell has a unique understanding of how music affects film audiences. It's no wonder that he's one of today's most respected and sought after music supervisors.

Currently, Roswell has worked on the films DAWN OF THE DEAD with Sarah Polley and Ving Rhames, Lasse Hallström’s AN UNFINISHED LIFE with Robert Redford, Jennifer Lopez and Morgan Freeman, and the TV movie “Redemption” with Jamie Foxx.

Robert Primes - Cinematographer
Robert Primes, ASC, is a pioneer in digital cinematography, having won the first ASC award ever given to a digital production (MDs) in 2003. He received Emmys for “My Antonia” and “Felicity” and has five other cinematography nominations. He is credited with changing the look of television with his innovative work on “thirtysomething.” His feature work includes BIRD ON A WIRE, THE HARD WAY, MONEY TALKS, A MURDER OF CROWS and ASPEN EXTREME.
Short films he directed have won a Cine Golden Eagle and a gold medal at the Atlanta Film Festival. He also directed Harold Pinter’s Night in 2002 and Theo Plays Chopin, the first high definition production shot in progressive scan.

Mr. Primes serves on the advisory boards of the National Film Preservation Board, the Art Institute of Los Angeles and The Wide Screen Film Festival. He serves on the board of governors, is treasurer of the American Society of Cinematographers, and is a member of the national executive board of the International Cinematographers’ Guild. Mr. Primes holds an honorary doctorate from Columbia College in Los Angeles and has served on the faculty of the American Film Institute and lectured at UCLA, California Institute for the Arts, the North Carolina School of the Arts, the University of Texas, the International Film Workshops at Rockport, Maine. He gives an annual seminar on crew relations for the Directors Guild of America.

Tyler Bates – Original Music

It is not often that a charismatic performer with a one-of-a-kind songwriting talent and a flair for composing distinctly original film scores emerges in the film and pop music worlds respectively. Tyler Bates is this rare talent. Whether he's writing and arranging material for his band Widget or a bebop/jazz film score, Bates' versatility, vision, and talent always produce desired results.

Since leaving Chicago in 1993, Tyler’s career has been on a fast track filled with unexpected Hollywood-style adventures. During his first year in Los Angeles, he scored five films and began collaborating with singer Lisa Papineau, creating an impressive body of original work that Tyler produced in his home studio. With demos out and A & R interest, they formed the band Pet. Shortly after, manager Arthur Spivak (Tori Amos, Collective Soul and Paul Reiser) saw the band perform and became intrigued by their truly distinct sound. A relationship was formed.

Pet landed a song on the soundtrack to THE CROW II: CITY OF ANGELS and Sony 550’s compilation, Spirit of ’73, before signing a record deal. Soon after, Tori Amos formed Igloo Records, a subsidiary of Atlantic Records, and signed Pet upon seeing the band play in Los Angeles. Pet’s self-titled debut was produced by Tyler in Ireland at Amos’ studio in her 17th century home.

While Pet awaited the release of their album, Tyler began his 15th film project and his most ground breaking score to date – Steven Kay’s THE LAST TIME I COMMITTED SUICIDE, a film about beat poet Neal Cassady that stars Keanu Reeves. After the film’s theatrical release, the score received critical acclaim and was included on the film’s soundtrack.

After a successful run that included numerous tours and chart topping singles, Pet disbanded in late ’97. Bates immediately began the creation of a new project with himself as a singer, songwriter, and producer. His new music is a sonic thrill ride that spans the pop spectrum.

Since THE LAST TIME I COMMITTED SUICIDE, Bates has scored several films, most notably RATED X, directed by and starring Emilio Estevez. Tyler has recently begun work on Zack Snyder’s DAWN OF THE DEAD.
FILMOGRAPHY

MELVIN VAN PEEBLES (Actor, writer, director, composer, producer, editor)

Actor
Antilles sur Seine (2000) – L’Américain à la soirée
Smut (1999)
Time of Her Time (1999) – Thompson
Love Kills (1998) – Abel
Gang in Blue (1996) – Andre Speier
Panther (1995) – Old jailbird
Fist of the North Star (1995) – Asher
Terminal Velocity (1994) – Noble
Last Action Hero (1993) – Cameo appearance
Posse (1993) – Papa Joe
Boomerang (1992) – Editor
True Identity (1991) – Taxi Driver
Identity Crisis (1989) – The Inspector
Jaws: The Revenge (1987) – Mr. Witherspoon
America (1986) – Man Interviewed
Sweet Sweetback's BaadAsssss Song (1971) – Sweetback
Watermelon Man (1970) (uncredited) – Sign Painter

Writer - Film
Le Conte du ventre plein (2000)
Vrooom Vroom Vrooom (1995)
Panther (1995) (screenplay)
Greased Lightning (1977)
Don't Play Us Cheap (1973)
Sweet Sweetback's BaadAsssss Song (1971)
Slogan (1969)
The Story of a Three-Day Pass (1968)
La Permission (1967)
Cinq cent balles (1963)
A King (1957)
Sunlight (1957)
Three Pickup Men for Herrick (1957)
MELVIN VAN PEEBLES, cont.

**Writer – Books**
- How to Get the Man's Foot Outta Your Ass (2003)
- Panther (1995) (novel)
- Bold Money (1986)
- Just an Old Sweet Song (1976)
- The True American (1976)
- Ain’t Supposed to Die (1971)
- A Bear for the FBI (1968)
- The Cinois de XIV (1966)
- The Big Heart (1957)

**Director – Film**
- Le Conte du ventre plein (2000)
- Gang in Blue (1996)
- Vrooom Vroom Vrooom (1995)
- Identity Crisis (1989)
- Sweet Sweetback's BaadAsssss Song (1971)
- Watermelon Man (1970)
- The Story of a Three-Day Pass (1968)
- La Permission (1967)
- Cinq cent balles (1963)
- Sunlight (1957)
- Three Pickup Men for Herrick (1957)

**Director – Theater**
- Champeen (1985)
- Waltz of the Stork (1981)
- Out There By Your Lonesome (1977)
- Don't Play Us Cheap (1973)
- Ain’t Supposed to Die (1971)
MELVIN VAN PEEBLES, cont.

Composer – Film
Le Conte du ventre plein (2000)
Vroom Vroom Vrooom (1995)
Don't Play Us Cheap (1973)
Sweet Sweetback's BaadAsssss Song (1971)
Watermelon Man (1970)
The Story of a Three-Day Pass (1968)
Cinq cent balles (1963)
Sunlight (1957)
Three Pickup Men for Herrick (1957)

Composer – Albums
Ghetto Gothic (1996)
What the #@!%…You Mean I Can’t Sing? (1978)
Serious as a Heart Attack (1970)
Ain’t Supposed to Die (1969)
Brer Soul (1968)

Producer
Le Conte du ventre plein (2000)
Gang in Blue (1996)
Vroom Vroom Vrooom (1995)
Panther (1995)
Identity Crisis (1989)
Sweet Sweetback's BaadAsssss Song (1971)
Sunlight (1957)

Editor
Vroom Vroom Vrooom (1995)
Identity Crisis (1989)
Sweet Sweetback's BaadAsssss Song (1971)
MARIO VAN PEEBLES (actor, director, producer, writer)

Actor
Raw Nerve (1999) – Detective Blair Valdez
Love Kills (1998) – Poe Finklestein
Los Locos (1997) – Chance
Stag (1997) – Michael Barnes
Gang in Blue (1996) – Michael Rhoades
Solo (1996) – Solo
Panther (1995) – Stokely Carmichael
Highlander III: The Final Dimension (1994) – Kane
Posse (1993) – Jessie Lee
New Jack City (1991) – Stone
Identity Crisis (1989) – Chilly D
Heartbreak Ridge (1986) – Cpl. 'Stitch' Jones
Sweet Sweetback's BaadAsssss Song (1971) (as Mario Peebles) – Kid

Director
Love Kills (1998)
Gang in Blue (1996)
Panther (1995)
Posse (1993)
New Jack City (1991)
MARIO VAN PEEBLES, cont.

Producer
Judgment Day (1999) (V) (executive producer)
Love Kills (1998) (producer)
Los Locos (1997) (producer)
Gang in Blue (1996) (producer)
Panther (1995) (producer)

Writer
Standing Knockdown (1999)
Love Kills (1998)
Los Locos (1997)
Identity Crisis (1989)
OSSIE DAVIS
Life's Back Pocket (2003) – Floyd Metters
Here's to Life! (2000) – Duncan Cox
Dinosaur (2000) (voice) – Yar
Alyson’s Closet (1998) – Postman Extraordinaire
Doctor Dolittle (1998) – Archer Dolittle
I'm Not Rappaport (1996) – Midge Carter
Get on the Bus (1996) – Jeremiah
Client, The (1994) – Judge Harry Roosevelt
Grumpy Old Men (1993) – Chuck
Gladiator (1992) – Noah
Joe Versus the Volcano (1990) – Marshall
Do the Right Thing (1989) – Da Mayor
School Daze (1988) – Coach Odom
Avenging Angel (1985) – Captain Harry Moradian
Harry and Son (1984) – Raymond
Hot Stuff (1979) – Captain John Geiberger
Cool Red (1976) – Ernest Motapo
Let's Do It Again (1975) – Elder Johnson
Malcolm X (1972) (voice) (also archive footage) – Eulogy
Sam Whiskey (1969) – Jedidiah Hooker
Scalphunters, The (1968) – Joseph Winfield Lee
A Man Called Adam (1966) – Nelson Davis
Hill, The (1965) – Jacko King
Shock Treatment (1964) – Capshaw
Cardinal, The (1963) – Father Gillis
Gone Are the Days! (1963) – Reverend Purlie Victorious Judson
The Joe Louis Story (1953)
Fourteen Hours (1951) – Cab driver
DAVID ALAN GRIER
Instant Karma (2005)
Tiptoes (2003)
I Shaved My Legs for This (2001) – Strip Club Owner
15 Minutes (2001) – Mugger in Central Park
Return to Me (2000) – Charlie Johnson
East of A (2000) – Brother James
3 Strikes (2000) – Detective Jenkins
Damned If You Do (1999) – The Devil
Stuart Little (1999) (voice) – Red (Alley Cat)
Freeway II: Confessions of a Trickbaby (1999) – Mr. Butz
Top of the World (1997) – Detective Augustus
Goldilocks and the Three Bears (1995) – Spike (VO)
Tales from the Hood (1995) – Carl
Blankman (1994) – Kevin Walker
In the Army Now (1994) – Fred Ostroff
Boomerang (1992) – Gerard Jackson
Almost an Angel (1990) – Det. Bill
Loose Cannons (1990) – Drummond
I'm Gonna Git You Sucka (1988) – Newsman
Me and Him (1988) – Peter Conklin
Off Limits (1988) – Rogers
Amazon Women on the Moon (1987) – Don 'No Soul' Simmons
From the Hip (1987) – Steve Hadley
Beer (1985) – Elliott Morrison
Streamers (1983) – Roger
**NIA LONG**
Alfie (2005)
Big Momma's House (2000) – Sherry
Boiler Room (2000) – Abbie Halpert
Held Up (1999) – Rae
Stigmata (1999) – Donna Chadway
In Too Deep (1999) – Myra

**JOY BRYANT**
Haven (2004)
Honey (2003) – Gina
Kite (2002) – Shane's Mother
Antwone Fisher (2002) – Cheryl
Showtime (2002) – Lexi
PAUL RODRIGUEZ
Chasing Papi (2003) (uncredited) – Costas Delgado
Back by Midnight (2002)
Time Changer (2002) – Eddie Martinez
Ali (2001) – Dr. Ferdie Pacheco
The Shipment (2001) – Jose Garcia
Rat Race (2001) – Gus the Cabbie
Tortilla Soup (2001) – Orlando Castillo
Crocodile Dundee in Los Angeles (2001) – Diego
Mambo Café (2000) – Frank
Melting Pot (1997) – Gustavo Alvarez
Rough Magic (1995) – Diego
Rhythm Thief (1994) – Eladio
A Million to Juan (1994) – Juan Lopez
Made in America (1993) – Jose, Salesman at Jackson Motors
Miracles (1986) – Juan
The Whoopee Boys (1986) – Barney Benar
Quicksilver (1986) – Hector Rodriguez
The Best of the Big Laff Off (1983)
D.C. Cab (1983) – Xavier
The baadasssss success
of Melvin Van
Peebles

By Mel Gussow

His clothes look like remnants from a rummage sale, denim with barely a trace of blue, shirts that look slept in—and usually are. His hair is twisted in tight rolls of braids, like a frozen field, covered by a bright African skullcap. The bristle on his face is not a premeditated beard so much as an accidental accumulation by someone who simply does not have the time or interest to shave.

Around his neck is tattooed a circle of dots which he wears on a permanent necklace. On the left side of his neck, the circle is broken by Gene words in French. "Casper sur le ligne [not along the dotted line]." On the right side of his neck, the line is broken by the English word "Cut." This is crossed out and above it is printed "Lynch." "That's only part of it," says Melvin Van Peebles. He unbuttons his belt, drops his trousers and indicates words tattooed on his right buttock: in Boshone, a West African warrior language, it says, "Shade." Van Peebles translates: "If you can.


Melvin Van Peebles is a phenomenon. He is the first black man in show business to beat the white man at his own game. Advertisers and detractors—and Van Peebles is controversial among whites and blacks alike—give him high points as producer and businessman.

"He's a first-rate promoter," says Godfrey Cambridge, who starred in Van Peebles's movie "Watermelon Man." "We can count on anything."

"As a basic business," says Gene Wolik, co-producer of Van Peebles's musical play, "Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death," "Melvin is in a class with Jean Paul Getty and the Rockefeller family." Some critics think of him as an important and innovative artist; others think he is at best a mimic and an affront to the audience.

He has reached his position of dominance by merging his roles as artist and entrepreneur. "There may be other people," Wolik says, "who are as good at promoting, but there are none else who is also a playwright, composer, director, film-maker, producer, actor, singer and novelist." By his own description, Van Peebles is a "one-man conglomerate." "If you're gonna have a high stall," he explained, "you gotta be buttressed." He already has a mountain of nerve and a million dollars' worth of buttresses.

The key to his success, besides his talent, is in his audience, what he calls his "constituency." He
has uncovered this audience, popularized its culture and broken racial barriers. The audience was always there, but until Van Peebles no one seemed to know exactly how to reach it. He proved that black could be beautiful, marginal could be mass and ethic would sell.

His third movie, "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song," which he wrote, directed, produced, scored music for and starred in, cost $500,000 to film and grossed around $10 million at the box office. It made $3 million before three white people had seen it," says Van Peebles proudly. "The real message of 'Sweetback' is that we have the key to our own box office. It's the black dollars, the disenfranchised dollars, that go to see those products." The success of "Sweetback" has spawned a long line of imitators. There is now a black film industry. "There are five [independent] sons of 'Sweetback' playing right now in movie theaters on Broadway," said Van Peebles recently. He is planning "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song, Part Two," starring, of course, Van Peebles.

This summer, Van Peebles has had two shows on Broadway, which is more than one can say for Neil Simon or David Merrick. "Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death," with music, lyrics and book by Van Peebles, opened last October and was the fifth longest running show on Broadway by the time it closed at the end of July. His new show, "Don't Play Us Cheap," not only has music, lyrics and book by Van Peebles. He produced it with his own money and directed it. He has also made three record albums on which he sings (in addition to albums of his scores and movies) and has written five novels.

To the outsider, Van Peebles' career is marked by its diversity. His first novel, "A Bear for the F.B.I.," was an almost elegant reminiscence about a black boyhood in the Midwest. His first movie, "The Story of a Three Day Pass," won a tender love story about a black GI and a French girl, a conscious attempt to make a "French movie." "Watermelon Man," made in Hollywood but a conscious (though unsuccessful) attempt to avoid making a Hollywood-style movie, was a farce about a white bigot who waken up one day as a black man. With its broad style, it seemed firmly rooted in television situations comedy.

"Sweetback" was a pious and vicious racial chauvinist, says Van Peebles, "the racialization of a fool." The plot was familiar—the innocent housewife forced to seek sanctuary among the lawmen—but Sweetback is black, and his blackness is the reason for the film. The scenes of violence are explosively effective, the amount of sex (of which there are many) is gassy and sometimes hilarious.

"Ain't Supposed to Die," his most forceful and fully conceived work, is a collage of song, soliloquies spoken to music, and dances in which blacks—one of the most dispirited circumstances—reveal their love, fears and aspirations in honkey and deeply felt poetry. The lyrics are reminiscent of the language of the street. A young black in jail remembers a girl named Lilly and a dance called Zambouche—"Zem-po-hoo!"—the word becomes a cry of sex and liberation. A Lushun lingers wistfully near the Woman's House of Detention and calls to her friend, "baby, in you green ever come back and dance with me?" The play ends with a Moors Mobley type of old women attacking the audience with "Put a Curse on You," in which she encroaches humanity for its injustices—although many have wrongly interpreted the curse as being exclusively anticzar.

As staged by Gilbert Moses in a gritty setting of fire escape and back alleys, "Ain't Supposed to Die" provides an unprepossessing but humane look at marginalized people. In contrast, "Don't Play Us Cheap" (Continued on Page 66)
Van Peebles

(Continued from Page 15)

Cheap! is a funny, good-natured Harlem comic. It makes no demands on the audience—or on its author. The artistic quality of these two varies as widely as the style. But the shrewdly artful—"Almost Supposed to Die" is superbly professional: "Don't Play Us Cheap!" looks as if it was slapped together on the way home from a party. But for Van Peebles there is no contradiction: "For me all the Liberal stuff has a direct arrow. I've always used my own voice." As he sees it, each piece demonstrates his main purpose—to criticize "false black images" white use in America "to confuse, drain and colorize our minds." As artist-entrepreneur he is embarked on a one-man reclamation project. "The first move for a disadvantaged people is a sense of self." One result of his work is that he has given employment to blacks in many areas of the theater and movies—not only as performers but as stage managers, wardrobe assistants, costume designers, technicians. As comedian Bill Cosby says, "Hundreds of black people are getting jobs because of Motown's steady "arms pushing doors open that were never opened before."

The range of criticism has been astounding. Van Peebles has been accused and praised for the same work (constantly in the same review). Critics take him personally—menace as an offense to their decency. There is no predicting where his support will come from. Two of the most ardent fans of "Almost Supposed to Die" were the movie reviewers for Cue magazine and Easy, who reviewed the film and praised the black character. But in the final analysis, the film is an attempt to make a point. It is a film about the black man in America, and it is a film about the black man's struggle for freedom. The film is a call to arms for the black community. It is a call to action, a call to solidarity. It is a call to the world to recognize the humanity of the black man and to support his struggle for freedom.

A new audience

"Forty per cent of the people who come to my work have never been in the theater before," says Van Peebles. Broadway thesping is a chicken. For Van Peebles, Broadway is an experience for new black actors, including Van Peebles himself. When asked if he had ever seen any productions on Broadway other than his own, he replied: "I think I saw "Fiddler on the Roof"." And he added: "I think I saw "South Pacific" or "Damn Yankees!""

And black playwright Ed Bullins, author of 30 works for the stage in addition to being editor of the magazine Black Theater, declared: "Almost Supposed to Die a Natural Death" is the only Broadway play I've ever been in. It's a tragedy. The success of this film means that black theater will continue to grow. It means that the black community will continue to support and promote black theater. It means that black actors and actresses will continue to have the opportunity to tell their stories and to show their talent. It means that black theater is a viable and important art form that can and should be supported by all Americans, regardless of race or ethnicity. It is a film that speaks to the heart and soul of the black community and to the heart and soul of America as a whole.
Counting the house

Van Peslee checks the audience at “Don’t Play Us Cheap.”

that year at the time or
thought of it later, it is re-
vealing. In pursuit of his
new career, everything else
took second place. Everyone
thought he was crazy—an un-
known, untrained black man
making music. His Holly-
wood offers were limited to
elevator- operator jobs. In 1959,
he packed up his dis-
integrated household and
moved to Europe. In the Neth-
erlands on the G.I. bill he
studied astronomy and acted
with the Dutch National The-
ater. One of his roles was as
The Fella, the housewife hus-
car, in Brecht’s Behrens’s “The
Hedda.” His marriage final-
ly broke up and he moved to
Paris where he worked at a
variety of tailor-free sewing
and dancing outside of them-
to writing for French per-
iodicals. For nine years, his
average income was $600 a
year. Asked how he managed to
survive, he answers quickly.
“Off women.”

He moved in and out of aff-
airs and apartments. “The
trouble with conjugal
and barrenness,” he says, “is
that they don’t have any-
dos all day so they get you
splitting their pockets and
goin' to cocktail parties
and you can’t get any work done.
I always performed working
ladies. They put in 36 hours a
day and were tired when
they got home. I had all day
to write.”

Van Peslee published his
first novel in France, writing
“A Bear for the P.L.A.” in
English, the others in French.

They cover an even broader
time frame than the films and
plays. In Van Peslee’s words, “A
Bear for the P.L.A.” is the
story of “a good Jewish boy
hood in blackface.” It is his
“Goodbye, Columbus,” only
seven-years might say it wholeheartedly Americans. It is
not about a young boy’s
awakening to prejudice, edu-
cation and his freedom for
the Boy Scouts—strip-
ing, camping, winning merit
badges.

“The Checklist of the 14th
District” Van Peslee de-
scribes as a kind of contem-
porary French variation on
“The Canterbury Tales.” Dur-
ing an electrical workers’
strike, habitants of a French
café gather around an oil
lamp and each tells a story.
The “True American,” which
was also translated into
Spanish and published in
Mexico, is a give-away comic
about a black man and a
white man who meet in hell
and are involved “in a
series of very Candid-Famous
things.” Becauze wants to pub-
lish it here next spring.

“The Party in Havre,” is
inspired by an actual party
Van Peslee attended in Havre,
later formed the basis for
“Don’t Play Us Cheap,” and
“La Permante,” about black
white love in Paris before,
in 1967, “The Story of a
Three-Year Plan.”

Obtaining a subsidy from
the French Government, he
wrote the first installment,
directed it, supervised the
editing, wrote half the mu-

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THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE
AUGUST 30, 1975

BAADASSSSS production notes p. 54 of 58
See our Florida golf condominiums and the hotels on us.
Buy one, and the air fare’s on us too.

Executive

At his office desk, Van Peckle gets a report from Wisner Moses of his production staff.

Nic and took the picture to the San Francisco Film Festival as the French debacle. "That was a kick," he remembers. "Nobody believed it. You're the French cachet?" The movie was a hit with the critics and Hollywood began making overtures.

One of the first things he realized on his return to the U.S. was that "black music didn't mirror the black movement forward." He began writing songs and lyrics that were indigenous to the music in the streets. He made three albums, beginning with "Free Food." The songs—sometimes raucous, sometimes serious—were about the inner lives of the dispossessed. The records, says Van Peckle, "were exactly a racket." Later, they formed the basis of "What Happened to Dick?" Finally, he signed a contract with Columbia Pictures to make "Watermelon Man," a film by Herman Raucher, who later wrote "Summer of '42." "Highly per- cent of the energy on "Watermelon Man" was spent on the set but it failed to live up to the considerable promise. One of the first battles was over casting. They were looking for a white guy to play in blackface. Three-quarters of the film the guy is black. I said, "Let's have a black guy in white face." Their reaction was, "Is that possible?" The king can play a valet but can the valet play a king? They didn't understand the racist implications of this question." Godfrey Cambridge played the role, the first part in his career. Van Peckle spent conflicts with the author, the producer and the actors. He rewrote the ending so that Cambridge stayed black instead of switching back to white. As Van Peckle recalls, the producer was incensed and protested: "You lied to me from a black point of view!"

Van Peckle learned several lessons from this experi- ence. "People deal in compromise," he says. "I wasn't trying to do a commercial. I was trying to do a good black film. The studio had the power in Hollywood. One morning, I was shaving and I looked in the mirror and I said, 'You think you're a studio. Therefore you are a sto- nker.'

To produce his next picture independently, he said, 60,000 he had earned making "Watermelon Man" and borrowed the rest. The film was "Sweetback," shot on the set in Watts, with a largely non- union crew. "I had an agreement with the producer. I don't know you" and a cast filled with amateurs. For the role of Sweetback—"no gigolo, a pimp and a stilt—I needed someone who wouldn't give me a difficult time with the terrific shooting schedule, someone with enough experience who hadn't been suffoc- cated by the media. Add that all up and ran it through and it came out well." There was one occupational hazard. An unwary singer, Van Peckle carried some of the love notes past the point of simulation, and for his off- form contractual reasons, "I applied for工作室's com- pensation—and got it," he la- ughts.

He studied and scored the picture and then sent it to distributors. "Only two theaters in the entire United States would take it—a bingo house in Detroit called the Grand Circus and a little theater in Atlanta, Ga. The Grand Circus usually drew about 5,000 a week. We did $7,500 the first month. The picture set records in both theaters. With the help of Cineam, a company that distributes films exploiting sex and violence, it turned into a blockbuster and was playing all across the country."

"I didn't go out expecting en- any support from the media," he says. "It made the film critical-proof by giving me facade." His initial appeal to that audience was in his title. Reportedly he was urged to change it but he refused: "If I called it "The Ballad of
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BAADASSSSS production notes p. 56 of 58
Opening night

Van Peebles opened a TV review of "Am I Supposed to Die in a Natural Disaster?" Most reviews were positive, but word of mouth built an audience. A party was fast going on the stage when the show opened, and the audience was raucous. The producer, Melvis Van Peebles, was overheard saying, "I want to make a black movie that will make people laugh, and I want to make them think." He continued, "I want to make a movie that will make people feel good about themselves." He went on to say, "I want to make a movie that will make people think. I want to make a movie that will make people laugh. I want to make a movie that will make people feel good about themselves." He ended by saying, "I want to make a movie that will make people think. I want to make a movie that will make people laugh. I want to make a movie that will make people feel good about themselves."
in to 'Don't Play Us Cheap!' and they don't feel intimidated. 'That's not, man! I'm here to the party.' It is very different from Seven and Andy. Those people have their dignity. They aren't snowflakes.

The show doesn't laugh at their blackness. I'm trying to re-capture our homeliness. There can be humor with dignity. It doesn't have to be eye-rolling and maudlin. I love those Saturday night parties. People love 'em too, but they feel guilty about loving 'em. There is a certain inarticulate sense of inferiority, and blacks feel about many things very differently from whites. I don't see any reason for not enjoying your watermelon in white company.’

As if Broadway ticket prices aren't too high for his constituency, Van Pekhals assures: ‘That's a white liberal attitude. Do you know what the “black” record album costs, which the Mohammed All-Joe Frazier fight costs, what it costs to go to the Congo? We have the cheapest seats on Broadway.

The phone rings. It is a black theater owner in Portland, Ore., who wants to know whether he can give a sneak preview of “Don't Play Us Cheap!” It is coming out. Van Pekhals punches for the phone. ‘Hey, how ya doin'? This is Melvin. That's me, man. . . . I had to begin editing it. Write me in September. Big one. . . . ’No sweat.’ He hangs up the phone and says, 'Girls are raving and groaning, but the little people on the street aren't calling in.'

At the Elgin, every scene in the theater, he checks backdrops, baristas with the cast, then peppedly stopped by friends, associates, admirers. He walks into the Regency Restaurant and Dancelattston. It is like Tennessee Williams going into life’s. The hostess greets him affectionately. He sees the Shubert harem sitting in the back of the restaurant. He walks over to them, says hello, sits down, chooses their table. ‘Mud, you’re a one-man drama,’ says Gerald Schoenfeld, the Shubert attorney.

Later, in a booth, Van Pekhals sits in the hospital. ‘I would like a note of a brothel. Tell him; he knows how to do it for me. For Melvin. I like it with fat, I like the cheaper cuts of the brothel.’ A piece of fatty brookston arrives. He admires it. “That’s got character, I’m not a great fan of straight meat. I like the home and the gentle, the mild, each one. The rest, terrible, greasy restaurant—I love them.” With great relish he eats the broth. “How is he healthy? Foe. Does she smoke, drink, chew, feet with girls that do.”

Wednesday matinee at ‘Don’t Play Us Cheap!’ It is 2:30 and the theater is almost empty. The curtain is being held. A bus comes in and it is late. Van Pekhals casually settles himself in the back row. Nobody seems impatient. Suddenly the house arrives and young people, all of them black, walk down the aisle, snapping their fingers, looking slightly from side to side. They sit down, across filling the entire orchestra.

“Those are kids who have never been in the theater before,” says Van Pekhals. At 2:37 the house lights go down, the stage lights go up. The play begins with a maniacal rat emerging from a hole in the wall. He is soon joined by a slightly smaller cockroach and the two of them sing, “I Don’t Make No Sound.” Van Pekhals talks on the telephone to his sound engineer. ‘Bring the two back up front. Give me more on the right. Give me a left.’

He adjusts his sound until he has it exactly as he wants. Laughter and applause. Everyone helps. By the time that George (Oopsey) McGee stage “Quitter Time,” the audience is having a party.

A small dressing room high above the Shubert, Van Pekhals sits at a dressing table. ‘People assume I’m trying to copy traditional and make a bad copy,’ he says. ‘Different when it happens to come from black Americans is not considered different. It’s considered a mistake if it was from Pakistan or China, they would say, maybe there’s something about it that we don’t know, maybe it is recognizing something indigenous to his culture. Does he see himself as a revolutionary? “In this million, survival panic you immediately in confrontation with politics. I don’t really talk about things like, “What’s the beauty in the money sector?” He decries that his reluctance to talk about politics expresses his tidiness. “It has nothing to do with being black. It has to do with winning. You don’t call a general trend against it unless you give the battle plan for a march.”

He refuses to discuss his political beliefs, but suggests: “The artistic and sometimes the political and sociological ramifications of the political sector in direct terms in the amount of class I have.”

Now that he has enormous clout, what will he do next? ‘I can’t say because I don’t want to be involved in it. They are in so many things it’s like to do. Working on a project from one end to another takes about a year every time. After such one of these things, there’s big council meeting inside my head. The council is convening these days. Everyone is screaming, “We need!”’