

# Film Review: ‘Green Book,’ a road trip peppered with hilarity and humiliation



CHENNAI: Peter Farrelly's latest work, "Green Book," which had its Middle East premiere at the Cairo International Film Festival last week, captures the agony and angst of African-Americans at a crucial time in US history.

Farrelly presents a deeply moving snapshot of a biased society, but narrates it with delightful humor, in this story about African-American pianist Don Shirley (Mahershala Ali), who embarks on a concert tour in the Deep South in 1962. Armed with a Green Book — a guide for black travelers with information on safe hotels and other public places — the prosperous Shirley hires tough-talking Italian-American bouncer Tony Vallelonga (Viggo Mortensen) as his driver-cum-muscle and the pair set out on an eventful journey into the heartland of racial prejudices.

While Vallelonga is uncouth in his ways, Shirley is a thoroughbred and takes pains to teach his driver social etiquette. When Vallelonga steals a precious stone from a wayside store, Shirley insists that the gem be returned. Vallelonga gets even by forcing

his boss to eat Kentucky Fried Chicken, something he has never done before. These lighter moments are neatly woven into a patchwork with the humiliating, difficult to digest incidents that Shirley faces. While he is welcome to play at some of the poshest theaters and hotels in the Deep South, he is not allowed to use their conveniences — not even their restaurants — due to the color of his skin.

Based on a true story — interviews with the real-life Shirley and Vallelonga's accounts of the concert tour were reportedly the primary sources for the original screenplay — the film was co-written by Vallelonga's son, Nick. It is a departure from Farrelly's most famous films, "Dumb and Dumber" and "There's Something About Mary," as it provides a serious study of racism in the US, along with a healthy dose of humor.

It is saddening to see Shirley suffer through the torturous trials he is put through, incidents that serve as a reminder of what was a daily reality for so many not so long ago. While Mortensen shines in his role, it is ultimately Ali who steals the show as a trailblazing pianist with a point to prove.

---