

Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody

Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody is a 2022 American biographical musical drama film directed by Kasi Lemmons, from a screenplay by Anthony McCarten, based on the life and career of American pop icon and actress Whitney Houston. The film stars Naomi Ackie as Houston with Stanley Tucci, Ashton Sanders, Tamara Tunie, Nafessa Williams, and Clarke Peters in supporting roles.

An authorized biopic on Houston's life was announced in early 2020, with Ackie cast in the lead role that December, and the rest of the cast signing on later the next year. Produced on a \$45 million budget, filming took place in Massachusetts and New Jersey from August to December 2021.

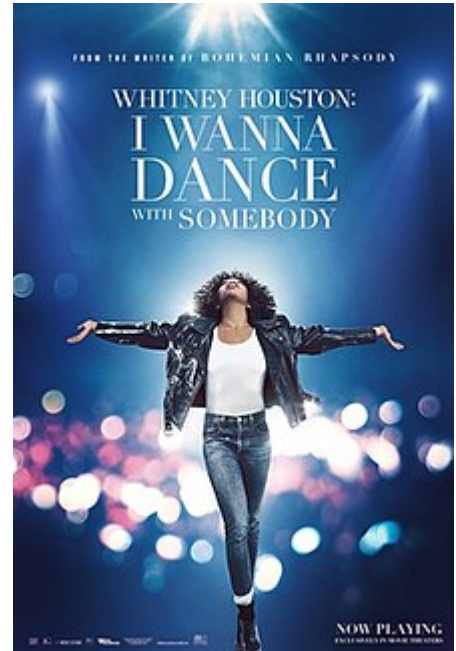
Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody was released in the United States on December 23, 2022, by Sony Pictures Releasing. The film received mixed reviews from critics, with praise going to Ackie's performance and criticisms for the film's hindrance to music biopic conventions. It grossed \$59.8 million.

Plot

In 1983, 19-year-old Whitney Houston is being coached by her mother Cissy while leading a church choir in New Jersey. A professional singer herself, Cissy pushes her daughter to be better, though being hard on her at times. Whitney finds solace in a friendship with Robyn Crawford, which turns romantic, and they later move into their own apartment, much to the chagrin of Cissy. One night, Cissy and Whitney are set to perform at the Sweetwaters nightclub. After spotting producer Clive Davis in the audience, Cissy feigns sickness and encourages Whitney to open the show. Whitney performs "The Greatest Love of All", which impresses Davis, who immediately signs Whitney to Arista Records.

He books her for her first major live performance on *The Merv Griffin Show*, where she gives a performance of "Home". Soon afterwards, Whitney releases a highly successful debut album, and sets up her production company, Nippy Inc., run by her

Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Kasi Lemmons
Written by	Anthony McCarten
Produced by	<div>Denis O'Sullivan<div></div>Jeff Kalligheri<div></div>Anthony McCarten<div></div>Pat Houston<div></div>Clive Davis<div></div>Larry Mestel<div></div>Molly Smith<div></div>Thad Luckinbill<div></div>Trent Luckinbill<div></div>Matt Jackson<div></div>Christina Papagijika<div></div>Matthew Salloway<div></div></div>
Starring	<div>Naomi Ackie<div></div>Stanley Tucci<div></div>Ashton Sanders<div></div></div>

overbearing father and self-appointed manager, John. When Whitney wants to hire Robyn as a personal assistant, John refuses due to their personal relationship and tells the pair to date men, to Robyn's dismay.

After recording a love song with Jermaine Jackson, the two start a sexual relationship, which angers Robyn. After a fight, Robyn breaks down and Whitney ends their romantic relationship, but remain close friends. In 1987, Whitney releases her second album and its leading single, "I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me)", which makes her a crossover success. However, she is accused by a radio show interviewer of selling out and not sounding "black enough", to which Whitney angrily defends herself.

Attending the 1988 Soul Train Music Awards, Whitney is met with protesters at the red carpet and her name is booed after singer Anita Baker announces her as one of the nominees for Best Music Video. Whitney meets singer Bobby Brown, who later proposes to her in their limousine, and she accepts. Shortly afterwards, Bobby informs her that he impregnated his ex-girlfriend, leading an enraged Whitney to storm out of the limousine, but they quickly reconcile.

In the early 1990s, Whitney is at her peak, performing "The Star Spangled Banner" at Super Bowl XXV and acting in the film *The Bodyguard*, and going on tour, performing "I Will Always Love You" at a stadium in South Africa for newly inaugurated president Nelson Mandela. Following a miscarriage, she later marries Bobby and has a daughter, Bobbi Kristina Brown. One night, Whitney returns home to find Bobby gone and her credit card missing. When he returns the following morning, the two argue, resulting in her throwing him out of the house and using drugs to cope.

In 1998, Clive meets with Whitney to discuss her not releasing a new studio album in over eight years, despite releasing seven major singles and starring in three films. Inspired by her tumultuous relationship with Brown, Whitney records the ballad "Why Does It Hurt So Bad", despite rejecting it several times before. Later, she confronts her father about spending too much of her money on expensive gifts, leaving her near broke, and then discovers that he has been negotiating a new \$100 million contract with Arista behind her back.

Later, dealing with insomnia, Whitney goes to Clive's hotel room and asks him to show her potential songs. Upon finding one she likes, a new studio album is released. She also informs Clive that she is going on tour (to stable her finances), and Clive warns her about burning out, but she dismisses his worries. The following tour is exhausting, and leads to Houston having a mental and physical decline in which she descends to drug addiction, damaging her voice and reputation. Davis urges her to enter rehab, but she refuses.

	<u>Tamara Tunie</u> <u>Nafessa Williams</u> <u>Clarke Peters</u>
Cinematography	<u>Barry Ackroyd</u>
Edited by	<u>Daysha Broadway</u>
Music by	<u>Chanda Dancy</u>
Production companies	<u>TriStar Pictures</u> <u>Compelling Pictures</u> <u>Black Label Media</u> <u>Primary Wave</u> <u>Entertainment</u> <u>Muse of Fire</u> <u>Productions</u> <u>West Madison</u> <u>Entertainment</u> <u>TSG Entertainment</u> <u>II</u>
Distributed by	<u>Sony Pictures</u> <u>Releasing</u>
Release dates	December 13, 2022 (<u>AMC Lincoln Square</u>) December 23, 2022 (<u>United States</u>)
Running time	146 minutes
Country	United States
Language	English
Budget	\$45 million ^[1]
Box office	\$59.8 million ^{[2][3]}

Near the tour's end, Robyn and Bobby argue, after the former attempts to get Whitney to return home and end the tour. In the end, she chooses to continue the tour, leading to Robyn leaving Whitney's life. Before leaving, she tells her that her father is dying in a hospital. There, Whitney is confronted with a \$100 million lawsuit from John's company. She cuts ties with her father, even refusing to attend his funeral. Cissy finds her daughter in a drug-induced haze and orders her to rehab by a police order. Eventually, Whitney sobers up, reconnects with daughter Krissy, and divorces Brown.

In 2009, Houston attempts a comeback with a new album and performs one of its tracks on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Following the performance, Clive visits Whitney and she tells him that she is interested in going back on tour, but Clive advises her to rest. Nevertheless, she goes on with the tour, which proves disastrous and prompts walkouts due to her performance.

In February 2012, Houston arrives at the Beverly Hilton in Los Angeles to perform "Home" at a pre-Grammy party. Her bassist Rickey advises her to call it off and rest, but she refuses. At the hotel's bar, she and the bartender reminisce. In her hotel room, a tearful Houston begins running bath water, with a bag of drugs bought earlier that day from her dealer, and sings "Home" to herself while reminiscing about her life and career before dying suddenly.

In a flashback to the 1994 American Music Awards, Houston sings a medley of "I Loves You, Porgy", "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going", and "I Have Nothing", which is met with a standing ovation.

Cast

- Naomi Ackie as Whitney Houston
- Stanley Tucci as Clive Davis
- Ashton Sanders as Bobby Brown
- Tamara Tunie as Cissy Houston
- Nafessa Williams as Robyn Crawford
- Clarke Peters as John Houston
- Dave Heard as Rickey Minor
- Bria Danielle Singleton as Bobbi Kristina Brown
- Jaison Hunter as Jermaine Jackson

Production

On April 22, 2020, Stella Meghie was set to direct a Whitney Houston biopic, titled *I Wanna Dance with Somebody*, with Anthony McCarten attached to pen the screenplay and produce the film along with Clive Davis, Pat Houston, Larry Mestel, Denis O'Sullivan and Jeff Kalligheri.^[4] McCarten, who self-financed an option for Houston's life rights, wrote the script on spec, and lined up rights and music.^{[4][5]} On August 4, 2020, TriStar Pictures acquired the film.^[5] On September 1, 2021, Kasi Lemmons took over directing duties from Meghie who eventually served as an executive producer.^[6]

On December 15, 2020, Naomi Ackie was set to portray Houston.^[7] In September 2021, Ashton Sanders was cast as Bobby Brown, Houston's husband of fifteen years.^[8] The same month, Stanley Tucci was cast as Clive Davis.^[9] In October 2021, Clarke Peters and Tamara Tunie were cast in the film, and Nafessa Williams was cast as Robyn Crawford, replacing Moses Ingram.^{[10][11]} Williams previously played another character in a 2015 television film entitled *Whitney*.^[12]

The film was expected to begin principal photography on August 9, 2021, in Newark, New Jersey and Boston, Massachusetts, according to one source.^[13] In August 2021, Compelling Pictures was in pre-production on the film at Marina Studios in Boston.^[14] In October and November, scenes were shot in Arlington, Massachusetts, as well as at Worcester Regional Airport, Wang Theater, Cutler Majestic Theatre and Gillette Stadium.^{[15][16]}

Music

The soundtrack was released by RCA Records on December 16, 2022. It includes two hours of remixed and original versions of Houston's songs, with guest features by BeBe Winans, Clean Bandit, Kygo, Lucky Daye, SG Lewis, Samaria, Jax Jones, Leikeli47, P2J, Oxlade, and Pheelz.^[17] Ackie lip-synched to Houston's songs, though she does her own singing in a few early scenes.^[18]

Release

The film had its world premiere at the AMC Lincoln Square in New York City in December 13, 2022,^[19] and was released theatrically on December 23, 2022 by Sony Pictures Releasing.^[20]

The film was released for VOD on February 7, 2023, followed by a Blu-ray and DVD release on February 28, 2023.^[21] It later released on the streaming service Netflix on April 22, 2023.^[22]

Reception

Box office

Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance With Somebody grossed \$23.7 million in the United States and Canada, and \$36.1 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$59.8 million.^{[2][3]}

In the United States and Canada, *I Wanna Dance With Somebody* was released alongside *Babylon*, and was initially projected to gross \$20–25 million from 3,625 theaters over its four-day opening weekend.^{[1][23]} The film made \$20 million on its first day, including \$3 million from Thursday night previews. It went on to debut to \$55.3 million in its opening weekend (and a total of \$81 million over the four days), finishing second behind *Avatar: The Way of Water*. *Deadline* cited the threat of a tripledemic surge in COVID-19 and flu cases and the nationwide impact of Winter Storm Elliott as reasons for lower-than-expected theater attendance.^[24] The film held well in its second weekend, dropping just 16 percent to \$64 million, finishing in second.^[25]

In the United Kingdom, *Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody* debuted in second place, behind *Avatar: The Way of Water*. The film grossed £3.3 million (\$3.9 million) in its opening weekend.^[26] It held its place of second the following week, grossing £1.3 million for a total of £6.2 million (\$7.5 million).^[27]

Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 44% of 132 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 5.3/10. The website's consensus reads: "Another wiki-biopic for posterity's sake, the relatively watchable *I Wanna Dance with Somebody* leaves you feeling like you were on stage with Whitney Houston, but didn't really get to dance with her."^[28] Metacritic, which uses a weighted average,

assigned the film a score of 51 out of 100, based on 44 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews.^[29] Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A" on an A+ to F scale, while PostTrak reported 88% of audience members gave the film a positive score, with 68% saying they would definitely recommend it.^[24]

Ackie received praise for her performance.^{[30][31][32][33]} Critics commended Lemmons for not putting the focus on Houston's downfall, and instead foregrounding who Houston was before fame, particularly her relationship with Robyn Crawford.^[31] Stephanie Zacharek of Time commented, "Lemmons is more interested in the root of Houston's tragedy than its expression, anyway. At one point, Whitney laments that it's her job to 'be everything to everyone.'"^[32]

Zacharek said the film succeeds in its display of "Houston's exuberant contradictions, and the joy she both took and gave in performing. The movie isn't a melodramatic tell-all, or a total downer. But it manages, even while being unapologetically entertaining, to feel like an honest reckoning with all the things we didn't want to know about Houston at her fame's height. It's a film that takes our failings into consideration, rather than simply fixating on hers, a summation of all the things she tried to tell us and couldn't."^[32] Others, like Michael Talbot-Haynes of Film Threat, believed the film should have shown the full scope of Houston's struggles with substance abuse.^[33]

Michael Phillips of the Chicago Tribune reviewed the film positively and said: "A sexually fluid superstar with deep roots in Christianity and the bad luck of falling prey to manipulators and users within her family circle never had a fighting chance at inner peace. 'I Wanna Dance with Somebody' manages to suggest some nuance and ambiguity in Houston's key relationships, and within her own ambitions. The actors and director Lemmons accomplish what the screenplay does only partially: make us believe the circumstances and the behavior. Ashton Sanders' Bobby Brown gives us the weasel but also the man. In a role slightly larger than required, I think, Arista legend Davis has the bonus of being played by ever-wry, ever-winning Stanley Tucci."^[31]

Criticisms included those of the screenplay, with some contending it felt like it was ticking off boxes on a music biopic checklist.^[34] Brian Truitt of USA Today opined the film felt like a "Wikipedia entry come to life."^[30] Another criticism was that some characters did not feel fully fleshed out.^{[30][34]}

Accolades

The film was nominated for Outstanding Supporting Visual Effects in a Photoreal Feature at the 21st Visual Effects Society Awards.^[35]

Naomi Ackie was nominated for the EE Rising Star award for *I Wanna Dance with Somebody* at the 76th British Academy Film Awards.^[36]

The film was nominated for Outstanding Achievement in Music Editing – Feature Motion Picture at the 70th Motion Picture Sound Editors' Golden Reel Awards.^[37]

Kasi Lemmons was nominated for Outstanding Directing in a Motion Picture for *I Wanna Dance with Somebody* at the 54th NAACP Image Awards.^[38]

In 2023, the film was nominated for Best Movie at the 23rd BET Awards 2023. ^[12]

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External links

- Official website (<https://www.sonypictures.com/movies/iwannadancewithsomebody>)
- *Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12193804/>) at *IMDb*
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