2) Green Book (2018):

It’s pure formula, of course. Two men—one white, one black—from polar opposite backgrounds with wildly contrasting personalities get thrown together under unusual circumstances. They learn from each other, change each other for the better and discover that—guess what?—they’re not so different after all.

Green Book is all that and more: It also takes place while the two men are driving across the American South during 1962, so it contains multiple formulas at once. It’s the mismatched-buddy road trip movie with a message about race relations, arriving in theaters at the height of awards season and the holidays, just in time to make us all feel better about the world—or at least give us a brief glimmer of hope during this period of political and ideological division. As an added bonus, it also happens to have been inspired by a true story.

But damned if it doesn’t work beautifully for nearly the entirety of its two hour-plus running time. Green Book is the kind of old-fashioned filmmaking big studios just don’t offer anymore. It’s glossy and zippy, gliding along the surface of deeply emotional, complex issues while dipping down into them just enough to give us a taste of some actual substance.

And its enjoyability comes almost completely from its starring performances from an excellent [Viggo Mortensen (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/viggo-mortensen) and [Mahershala Ali (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/mahershala-ali). Both actors imbue their roles with precision and pathos. They find nuance within their familiar types individually and share a spirited chemistry with each other. They are a joy to watch together from start to finish, even though you can tell from the beginning exactly how specific moments between them are going to play out by the end.

You may be surprised to learn that this conventional piece of classy, inspirational filmmaking comes from director and co-writer [Peter Farrelly (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/peter-farrelly), a longtime standard bearer of lowbrow comedy alongside his brother, Bobby. It’s a rare opportunity for him to direct solo, and it may seem like a departure. But the Farrellys’ woefully underappreciated bowling comedy [Kingpin (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/kingpin-1996) features quite a few of the same sorts of opposites-on-a-road-trip themes, as well as the possibility for unexpected friendship. An underlying sweetness—and the need to be decent to others—quite frequently exists beneath the gross-out gags and bodily fluids that have been the brothers’ bread and butter for decades. And that’s certainly at the heart of Green Book.

In a racial flip of [Driving Miss Daisy (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/driving-miss-daisy-1990), nearly 30 years after that film won a handful of Oscars including best picture, Green Book features a white man serving as a chauffeur—and valet, and muscle, and all-around problem solver—to a black man. (That’s not to say the film is entirely free of icky white savior moments, but it does offer instances of Ali’s character rescuing Mortensen’s, as well.) The title comes from the travel guide of restaurants and motels blacks were allowed to frequent in the segregated South.