



BLACK RODEO: A HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WESTERN

Posse

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Directed by: Mario Van Peebles

©: PolyGram Film Productions B.V.

A Working Title production

Presented by: PolyGram Filmed Entertainment

Released through: Gramercy Pictures

Executive Producers: Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner

Co-executive Producers: Bill Fishman,

Paul Webster

Produced by: Preston Holmes, Jim Steele

Co-producer: Jim Fishman

Associate Producer: James Bigwood

Unit Production Manager: James Bigwood

Production Supervisor: Debra D. Jeffreys

Production Co-ordinator: Susan D. Fowler

Production Auditor: Patricia Holmes

Location Supervisor: Tod Swindell

Post-production Supervisor: Graham Stumpf

2nd Unit Director: Bob Minor

1st Assistant Director: Joseph Ray

2nd Assistant Director: H.H. Cooper

Script Supervisor: Elizabeth Ludwick

Casting by: Pat Golden

Written by: Sy Richardson, Dario Scardapane

Director of Photography: Peter Menzies Jr

Camera Operator: Kirk R. Gardner

Additional Camera Operator: Randy Feemster

Steadicam Operator: Kirk R. Gardner

Gaffer: Dante Cardone

Key Grip: Tony Whitman

Still Photographer: John Harwood

Golden Bullet Effect by: Trio Visual Effects

Special Effects Co-ordinator: Thomas C. Ford

Film Editors: Mark Conte, Seth Flaum

Assistant Film Editors: Sean K. Lambert,

F. Scott Taylor

Production Designer: Catherine Hardwicke

Art Director: Kim Hix

Assistant Art Directors: Mark Worthington,

Simon Dobbin, Bruton Jones

Art Department Co-ordinator: Kristie Zoltowski

Set Decorator: Tessa Posnansky

Special Period Photography: Nels Israelson

Prop Master: Roger Pancake

Construction Co-ordinator: Bill Holmquist

Costume Designer: Paul A. Simmons

Costume Supervisor: Frank Perry Rose

Key Costumer: R.C. Stewart

Key Make-up: Alvechia Ewing

Key Hairstylist: Ted Long

Titles/Opticals by: Cinema Research Corporation

Colour Timer: Bob Kaiser

Colour by: Technicolor

Filmed in: Panavision

Music by: Michel Colombier

Music Score Performed by: Michel Colombier

Percussion by the 'Mocliksa' Tribe:

Michael Fisher, Efrain Toro

Music Score Conducted by: Michel Colombier

Choir Conducted by: Edie Lehmann

Music Supervision by: Karyn Rachtman

Music Editors: Tom Kramer, Terry Delsing

Scoring Mixer: Clark Germain

Sleepless Nights Provided by: Mario Van Peebles

Sound Mixer: Don Sanders

Supervising Re-recording Mixer: Jeffrey Perkins

Re-recording Mixer: Kurt Kassulke

Supervising Sound Editor: Bruce Stambler

Sound Effects Recordists: John Davis, Gary Blufner

Stunt Co-ordinator: Bob Minor

Weapons Specialist: Thomas C. Ford

Livestock Co-ordinator: Red Cloud Wolverton

Head Wrangler: Kip Lorren Wolverton

The screening on Monday 10 February will be introduced by Mario Van Peebles

Posse is a saga of the wild and untamed West about a tight-knit bunch of outlaws who ride together and fight together, seizing justice where it is not given and carving out their niche on the American frontier. This is the Wild West as it has never been portrayed in the history of film; for the cowboys in this wily posse who move across the screen with six-guns blazing, also happen to be Black.

For more than a century the African American participation in the opening up of the West has been obscured, though Black cowboys, lawmen, outlaws – even entire Black townships run and ruled by former slaves – are well documented. *Posse* opens a new chapter in the folklore of the Wild West.

Jessie Lee (Mario Van Peebles) is a sharpshooter who bands together with his fellow 'buffalo soldiers', Black infantrymen who survived the battles on the front line of the Spanish-American War, mopping up the enemy for Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders. Though deserving of heroes' welcomes, Jessie and his men return to the American West of 1887 as outlaws and deserters, hounded by their unscrupulous, corrupt and cruel commanding officer, Colonel Graham (Billy Zane).

Jessie Lee and Little J (Stephen Baldwin), his noble but discredited white lieutenant, and a handful of their fellow fugitives from the Cuban battlefield (Charles Lane, Tone Loc and Tiny Lister) team up with Father Time ('Big Daddy' Kane), a sassy and smooth Black riverboat gambler, to form the posse of the film's title.

In making *Posse*, director Mario Van Peebles wanted to avoid the mistakes of the past. 'The American cinema created more Westerns than any other genre but minorities – not just Blacks – were consistently left out of Hollywood's sanitised version of history. Rather than respond in kind by simply making an entire Black Western, I felt there was the potential to make an historically accurate movie. The American frontier was truly a melting pot that attracted settlers and cowboys, outlaws and explorers of all colours. The American dream held promise for all races.'

In the casting of the film, Van Peebles saw the posse as a band of outlaws not unlike the *Magnificent Seven*, with a mission and a sense of values. 'Sort of like a Robin Hood posse,' he says. He put together his 'bunch' from a dynamic mix of experienced actors like Stephen Baldwin (*The Young Riders*) and director/actor Charles Lane (*Boomerang*) and performing artists previously associated with the music world and the sports arena like New York rapper 'Big Daddy' Kane, LA hip-hop artist Tone Loc and Tiny Lister, a member of the World Wrestling Foundation and a spokesman for Gold's Gym.

While the leading roles have a decidedly youthful bent, *Posse* also features Black personalities from many generations. 'There's a sense of history to the casting. Isaac Hayes and Pam Grier rose to fame in the Seventies. Nipsey Russell has been a fixture in the comedy world since the Sixties, and Woody Strode, well, Woody can trace his film origins back to the early Forties.'

Cast:

Stephen Baldwin (*Little J*)
Lawrence Cook (*Cook*)
Richard Gant (*Doubletree*)
Pam Grier (*Phoebe*)
Isaac Hayes (*Cable*)
Robert Hooks (*King David*)
Richard Jordan (*Sheriff Bates*)
'Big Daddy' Kane (*Father Time*)
Charles Lane (*Weezie*)
Tiny Lister (*Obobo*)
Tone Loc (*Angel*)
Sallii Richardson (*Lana*)
Nipsey Russell (*Snopes*)
Woody Strode (*old man*)
Blair Underwood (*Sheriff Carver*)
Mario Van Peebles (*Jessie Lee*)
Melvin Van Peebles (*Papa Joe*)
Reginald Veljohnson (*Preston Van Steele*)
Billy Zane (*Colonel Graham*)
Paul Bartel (*Mayor Bigwood*)
Stephen J. Cannell (*Jimmy Love*)
Richard Edson (*Deputy Tom*)
Reginald Hudlin (*reporter 1*)
Warrington Hudlin (*reporter 2*)
Vesta (*Vera*)
James Bigwood (*Walker*)
Mark Buntzman (*Deputy Buntzman*)
Ismael Calderon (*Spanish soldier*)
Tracy Lee Chavis (*Susan*)
James E. Christopher (*town drunk*)
Thomas Stephen Hall (*Deputy Errol*)
Clabe Hartley (*Klikai*)
Sandra Ellis Lafferty (*Big Kate*)
Jeffrey Lloyd Layne (*Little Joseph*)
Robert May (*John the blacksmith*)
T.J. McClain (*Monty*)
Christopher Michael (*Izzy*)
Bob Minor (*Alex*)
Aaron Neville (*railroad singer*)
Steve Reevis (*Two Bears*)
Sy Richardson (*shepherd*)
Dario Scardapane (*photographer*)
Frank A. Soto (*Aaron*)
David Jean Thomas (*head rower*)
Mark Twogood (*Wallace*)
Karen Williams (*Dilsey*)
Geo Cook, Michel Cook, I. Keith Cunningham,
Andrew J. Gregory, Wil 'Nahkohe' Strickland
(*iron brigade*)
B.B.O.T.I. (Badd Boyz of the Industry)
(*street performers*)
Netherlands-USA-UK 1993©
111 mins
35mm

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Find Mia Mask's book *Black Rodeo: A History of the African American Western* in the BFI Shop

While Van Peebles both directed and starred in *New Jack City*, in *Posse* he also has the leading role. 'Obviously, there are advantages in being able to concentrate solely on your work as actor or as director. But in this kind of film, in which there was a lot of "physical" on-location shooting, I think it helped that the director was right there with the other cast members riding a horse in freezing cold, or alternately, blazing hot weather. It was like Schwarzkopf being on the front line – it sends a message to the troops.'

One of the main settings of the film, the fictional town of Freemanville, is modelled after the real Black townships of the old West like Boley, Oklahoma, formed and populated by former slaves. In *Posse*, the town's average citizens are portrayed by some well-known faces of today's African American cinema and music worlds, like Van Peebles' father, Melvin, and Isaac Hayes, Pam Grier, Nipsey Russell, Aaron Neville and Woody Strode.

The story is built on the twin poles of Black American History and the legends of the West. Screenwriter Sy Richardson's grandfather, the Reverend King David Lee, founded a Black township like the one in *Posse*, and 'my other grandfather lived to be 100 years old,' says Richardson. 'They told me about the Black cowboys like Jessie Lee. These people were part of the country's past, and a part of our African American heritage that our young people don't know anything about. I needed to write a story about something they did not know but needed to know.'

Screenwriter Dario Scardapane was intrigued by Richardson's story and worked with him to shape it as a revenge tale for the motion picture medium. He sees *Posse* as 'a classic western in the Sergio Leone sense, but with Black faces. This is the real West, not the whitebread West we've seen, which is a bunch of white guys running all over everybody on horses. The real West was much more integrated than any film has ever shown. What really intrigues me about this is that we were very true to the historical facts and that there were Black townships like this. There were black cowboys. For me it was a real revelation when I got into the books on this period and started working on the screenplay. This world did not exist in the history books I had in high school.'

Production notes

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