



in celebration of Black History Month
and the 45th Anniversary of the release of
Sweetback's Baadasssss Song

presents the first HD release of

HOW TO EAT YOUR WATERMELON IN WHITE COMPANY (AND ENJOY IT)

A film by JOE ANGIO

85 min | USA | 2005 | Not Rated



Official Website: www.musicboxfilms.com/howtoeatyourwatermelon
Press Materials: www.musicboxfilms.com/howtoeatyourwatermelon-press

Publicity Contact

MSophiaPR | Margarita Cortes | margarita@msophiapr.com | p. 917-474-7292

Music Box Films Contacts

Marketing & Publicity

Lisa Trifone | ltrifone@musicboxfilms.com | 312-508-5360
Yasmine Garcia | ygarcia@musicboxfilms.com | 312-508-5362

Home Entertainment Sales

Lisa Holmes | lhomes@musicboxfilms.com | 312-508-5368

FESTIVALS AND AWARDS

Official Selection – Full Frame Documentary Film Festival

Official Selection – Tribeca Film Festival

Official Selection – Chicago International Film Festival

Official Selection – Los Angeles Film Festival

Official Selection – San Francisco Black Film Festival

SYNOPSIS

Multi-talented and prolific, Melvin van Peebles defies categorization, boasting a life and career as diverse and unexpected as the art he's best known for creating. A trailblazer of the tallest order who has at turns made his living as a filmmaker, a pilot, a novelist and a stockbroker, van Peebles was never deterred by opportunity that failed to knock; he'd simply build his own door and get on with it. After Hollywood rejected his early filmmaking efforts, his self-produced 1971 feature film, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, earned more than \$10 million at the box office and indelibly changed independent cinema forever.

A pioneer of rap music, a Tony-nominated playwright and a civil rights activist then and now, van Peebles' remarkable life story is playfully and candidly chronicled, illuminating an artist and a man whose groundbreaking impact on art, politics and pop culture remains, forty-five years after the release of *Sweet Sweetback*, as relevant as ever.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Melvin van Peebles boasts a life and career as diverse and unexpected as the art he's best known for creating. A trailblazer of the tallest order, he has at turns made his living as a filmmaker, a pilot, a novelist and a stockbroker. His self-produced 1971 feature film, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, indelibly changed independent cinema forever. Van Peebles' remarkable life story is playfully and candidly chronicled, illuminating an artist and a man whose groundbreaking impact on art, politics and pop culture remains, forty-five years after the release of *Sweet Sweetback*, as relevant as ever.

LOGLINE

Melvin van Peebles' remarkable life story reveals an artist and a man whose groundbreaking impact on film, politics and pop culture remains, forty-five years after the release of *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, as relevant as ever.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My introduction to the work of Melvin Van Peebles came through an unlikely source: via one of his colleagues on Wall Street in the mid-'80s. He told me about this remarkable options trader on the American Stock Exchange who had written novels, recorded albums, staged Broadway musicals, and starred in and directed a bizarre film, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*. In a serendipitous coincidence, that same week I was talking with a friend who is a film editor. When I asked him what drew him to editing, he replied without hesitation, "A film called *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* by Melvin Van Peebles." I immediately went out and rented *Sweetback*, and like most people who see it for the first time, was blown away by the film's tone, style, and most important, by the *balls* its creator exhibited (not literally, though he does expose those too) in putting this story on the screen.

After learning more about Melvin's hard-to-believe personal story—and discovering that scandalously few people had either heard of him or had a full appreciation of his work—I set out on what has been a decade-long labor of love to document the story of his life.

The long and varied list of Melvin's accomplishments—while impressive—doesn't begin to reveal the full measure of the man. Painter, sculptor, Air Force pilot, cable-car operator, astronomer, novelist, filmmaker, recording artist, actor, playwright, marathon runner, Wall Street trader—yes, he's been all of these. But what's more astonishing is that Melvin has been a pioneer in most of these fields—and a self-taught one at that. While living in Paris in the early '60s, he published five novels—in French—as a way to get his French director's card. Unable to afford a composer for his first film, he taught himself to play piano—by numbering the keys of the piano. Not hearing songs that he felt "mirrored the black experience," he recorded three seminal albums—with a voice his own son describes as sounding like "a frog on crack." He wrote, produced, financed, directed, scored and starred in *Sweetback*. He became the first person in forty years—and the first black author ever—to have two musicals run simultaneously on Broadway, earning nine Tony nominations in the process. And as the result of a lost bet, he became the first black options trader on the American Stock Exchange (where he devised his own numerical code to help him trade).

The quality of Melvin's artistic output is uneven, and he's made as many enemies as he has friends, yet that's ultimately beside the point. What's more important—and lasting—is how one man has continually defied odds stacked high against him, and done so on his own terms.

- Joe Angio

JOE ANGIO, Director

Joe Angio is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and magazine editor. *How to Eat Your Watermelon in White Company (and Enjoy It)* (2005), screened at numerous international film festivals, including Tribeca, Los Angeles, Chicago, Melbourne and the Biografilm (Bologna) Festival, where it received both the Jury and Audience awards for best film. Angio also co-produced and -directed (with Joel Cohen) the short docs *More than a Game* (1991; SnagFilms) and *A Feast of Fools* (1987). His latest film, *Revenge of the Mekons*, chronicled the perennial punk band and premiered at DOC NYC before screening at numerous festivals around the country. It is now available on DVD.

He is the former editor-in-chief of *Time Out New York* magazine, nominated for three National Magazine Awards by the American Society of Magazine Editors and awarded a gold medal for cover design by the Society of Publication Designers. Prior to *Time Out*, Angio was the articles editor at *NBA Inside Stuff* (1996–98), the managing editor of *Vibe* (1995–96), and an associate editor at *Men's Journal* (1993–95).

Angio was born in Chicago and graduated from Marquette University. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.

CREDITS

Director	Joe Angio
Producer	Michael Solomon
Executive Producers	Kiki Goshay
Editor	Jane Rizzo
Music	Jeremy Parise
Cinematography	Joe Angio, Michael Solomon

FEATURING

ST. CLAIR BOURNE, filmmaker, *Paul Robeson: Here I Stand*

SPIKE LEE, filmmaker, *Inside Man*, *Malcolm X*

ELVIS MITCHELL, host for KCRW radio and former film critic for The New York Times

GORDON PARKS, late photographer, author, musician and filmmaker, *Shaft*, *Shaft's Big Score*

MARIO VAN PEEBLES, actor and filmmaker, *New Jack City*; Melvin Van Peebles' son

MAX VAN PEEBLES, assistant director, *Le Conte du ventre plein*; Melvin Van Peebles' son

MEGAN VAN PEEBLES, Melvin Van Peebles' daughter

MARY MCCALL, Melvin Van Peebles' high school colleague

GÉBÉ, co-founder and chief editor of [Hara Kiri](#)

GEORGES WOLINSKI, co-founder of [Hara Kiri](#)

JANINE EUVRARD, film critic and editor

CHRISTIAN THIVAT, film producer, *La Permission*

MADELEINE MARTINEAU, co-owner of Maritneau Press

TIMOTHY WHITE, late journalist and magazine editor, *Billboard*

GIL SCOTT-HERON, musician, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*

HERSCHEL DWELLINGHAM, composer, arranger and producer, *Roadkill*, *Dont Play Us Cheap*

BILLY "X" JENNINGS, former Black Panther

TEDDY STEWART, casting director, *Greased Lightning*

EMANUEL AZENBERG, theater producer, *Private Lives*, *Biloxi Blues*

SHELLEY BONUS, astronomer at the Mount Wilson Observatory

MARVA ALLEN, owner of Hue-Man Bookstore in Harlem

JERRY WEISSMAN, film producer, *Dont Play Us Cheap*

WOODIE KING, JR., founder of NYC's New Federal Theatre

RICHARD MILNER, anthropologist and contributing editor, *Natural History Magazine*

BRENT NICHOLS, former Wall Street colleague

DR. HENRY JARECKI, founder of Mocatta Metals and former Chairman of Moviefone

JEFF SHAW, former Wall Street colleague

GLORIA JARECKI, former magazine editor, *Time*

JOHN ROLAND, former news anchor, *Fox News*

ABOUT MUSIC BOX FILMS

Founded in 2007, Music Box Films is a leading North American distributor of acclaimed international, American independent and documentary features along with the best in international television. Recent releases include Pawel Pawlikowski's *IDA*, the 2015 Academy Award®-winner for Best Foreign Language Film, the acclaimed French TV series "Maison Close," and the Golden Globe-nominated Israeli film *GETT: THE TRIAL OF VIVIANE AMSALEM*.

Upcoming releases include *THE CLUB*, Pablo Larrain's taut black comedy about exiled priests, winner of the Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize at the 2015 Berlin International Film Festival. Music Box Films is independently owned and operated by the Southport Music Box Corporation, which also owns and operates The Music Box Theatre, Chicago's premiere venue for independent and foreign films.