



Straight Outta Compton — Director's Cut

★★★★★

FROM JANUARY 14 / RATED MA15+ /

DIRECTOR F. GARY GRAY /

CAST O'SHEA JACKSON JR., COREY HAWKINS,

JASON MITCHELL, NEIL BROWN JR., ALDIS

HODGE, PAUL GIAMATTI

DVD BR UV 

L.A. STORY



BEING FORMULAIC isn't always a bad thing. *Straight Outta Compton* doesn't so much tear up the music-biopic sheet as hug it close... before scrawling its own "street knowledge" in the margins.

In a sense, F. Gary Gray's soup-to-nuts N.W.A. story is a virtual remake of Oliver Stone's *The Doors*. The era's changed and it's a very different musical genre, but both are epic accounts of ultimately tragic groups who rose up through the fissure of American political division, challenged the prevailing cultural agenda, embraced controversy over their lyrics, and apparently had a

moment when one of them noodled on a keyboard for a while before triumphantly coming up with an awesomely catchy riff.

And as if two-and-a-half hours weren't enough for Gray, who worked with producers Dr. Dre and Ice Cube, he's now put out this Director's Cut, which clocks in at 163 minutes. In interviews following the theatrical release, Gray had promised that the new version would better address the band's suspect treatment of women (both lyrically and personally), but all we have are a few additional scenes displaying tenderness between Dre and Eazy-E and their respective other halves. Otherwise, it is, frankly, all filler no killer.

It's fair to say the cameraman's joke hadn't gone down too well.

MAY THE BEST CUBE WIN

WORDS
JAMES JENNINGS

ICE CUBE'S SON, O'SHEA JACKSON JR., ON FIGHTING OTHER ACTORS TO PLAY HIS DAD

Were you up against other actors to play your dad?

Yeah, there were definitely a list of actors ahead of me. My father's job as a producer is to make sure the film is as perfect as it can be and he can't sabotage it in any way for personal gain, so there were actors ready to take the spot if I couldn't act, if I fell flat in my auditions. There was a chemistry test where I had to outperform three other Cubes. You can throw in the intimidation factor when you introduce yourself as O'Shea Jackson Jr. to somebody who's trying to play Ice Cube. *[Laughs]*

That's a great way to mess with the competition:

"I know more about the character than you, pal".

I walked into the building and I saw a jheri curl, so I walked up to the guy and said "Hey are you going for Eazy-E?", and he turned around and says "No, I'm going for Cube." In the back of my head I was like "Oh man, he's gonna love this", and I say "How you doin', I'm O'Shea Jackson Jr. and I'm going for Cube too, so, ah, good luck." *[Laughs]*

Your dad was on set every day. Did he coach you through scenes?

I would ask him things that were going through his mind. There were some incidents where he's thinking, "Everybody else is having a good time", but he would tell me "I'm thinking about the contracts, I'm thinking about the fact that I'm still living at my mom's house." Those are things that you can use.

Were there other great stories involving your dad that didn't make the film?

Yeah, there was the instance where they couldn't get into their own album release party. They tried to get in and security's like "Nah, y'all look like some gangbangers, I'm not gonna let you in", and they're like "You hear the music? You hear what's going on? It's us!" They gotta eat at a restaurant across the street while there's a club bumping their album release party that they can't get into.

What was your favourite scene to shoot?

The scene where Cube smashes up the record company office. That scene almost didn't happen and I had to fight to get it in the film. Could you imagine the film without that? Without that scene, everybody sees Cube almost get angry, but nobody's seen him at his boiling point, and dammit, the baby that I'm talking about *[in that scene]* is me! It's a personal scene, and it needed to be in there.



Not that it fundamentally damages a film which, deservedly, made \$200 million against a \$28 million budget, opened bigger than *Mission: Impossible — Rogue Nation*, and now stands proud as the most successful music biopic ever made. There were worries that Dre and Cube's close proximity would render it a vanity project — the former was, as the disc's making-of reveals, on set every day; the latter's own son was cast... as him! But, while it does skew massively positive, with an end-credits montage which leaves us in no doubt as to how hugely successful Cube and Dre have been, their involvement gives it a powerful sense of autobiographical authenticity. It's

something that's bolstered by astonishing performances from its mostly unknown cast (yes, including Cube's son, O'Shea Jackson Jr.), and the rooting of the shoot in real South Central locations. As the on-screen gang are told early on by one hilariously clueless naysayer, "Nobody wants to hear this reality rap shit." Well, it's the reality as much as the rap that makes this rise above the formula.

EXTRAS Commentary, featurettes, more.

DAN JOLIN

