

## Critical Review of a negotiation in the movie Green Book, by Tamás Trombitás (BCSRVQ) for subject International Negotiations at Corvinus University of Budapest, Aizhamal Muratalieva, 12.04.2023.

### Introduction

The movie Green Book is a 2018 drama-comedy that is based on the true story of Dr. Don Shirley, and his driver Tony Vallelonga. The previous one is played brilliantly by Mahershala Ali, while the latter is portrayed by Viggo Mortensen, who could not have been better for the role. Among the makers we can find the original Tony Vallelonga's brother, Nick, as well as Brian Hayes Currie and Peter Farrelly, who also directed the piece.

We follow the main characters on their journey right from before Don (an extraordinary person of color pianist) hires Tony (an over-40 Italo-American bouncer) to be his driver on his trio's tour to early 60s America's Deep South. Said trio he leads on the piano. There is an initial conflict between the two main characters as Tony is by miles less educated, sophisticated, smokes all the time and – to say the least – has his well-embedded stereotypes about African Americans (as well as a handful of other ethnicities, minorities, and nationalities). Needless to say, Don does not share these views a single bit, though in other parts of life he seems to be way more conservative or traditionalist than Tony, which gives their characters the real taste. For example, he plays and listens to classical music only, while Tony likes the hits of their time that the radio plays. On their journey they slowly start to understand each other and get closer, accept and even take on some of the other's characteristics – Don also wears down some of his mannerism. They both, but especially Tony tends to finally realize in the Deep South how strong segregation still is and participate in many conflicts because of that (and other reasons).

### Summary of the scene

At one of these situations, Don, Tony, and the other car with the two members of the trio arrive to the next concert hall to perform at in Hanover, Indiana. It is a part of the job for Tony to check at every venue if they prepared a Steinway piano, which is stated in the contract, as Don only wishes to play on Steinways. The problem that arises is that the venue did not fulfill that part of the contract, and Tony explores that, on his regular walk to check if everything is alright. Not only that, but the piano that is there is one full of litter, and overall, in a way worse condition than what could be expected as a star of the era is coming to play. Meanwhile, the other two

members of the trio are already there rehearsing, seemingly satisfied with the surroundings. (It is important to know that the Russian member continuously has a conflict with Tony, so he must think twice before doing anything in front of him).

Tony looks through the piano and does not believe his eyes. He starts to look for someone who works there, while simultaneously starting to clean the piano's top of the litter. As one worker shows up, he is immediately held accountable. Tony begins in a manner that is suitable for his position, polite, but before he could finish his sentence, the worker interrupts him with a short "You're all set up" and turns back to continue doing what he came for. Tony gives him a chance, and asks, "This isn't the piano, right?", to which he replies in the same manner "That's it." and would turn his attention back to what he was doing. But Tony continues almost immediately, now slowly dropping his politeness, saying "That ain't a Steinway!", to which the worker, now turning towards him and gesturing with his hands like he does not care, replies "So what?". By now we can start to feel the (rightful) tension building from Tony's side, as well as the worker's side as he could think "here's this nobody causing me problems". At this point, Tony, still trying to keep his manners explains that Dr Shirley only plays on Steinway grand pianos, mentioning as this is in his written contract. From now on, the camera gives us closer angles as well, and the two characters start to get physically closer, although tensions only rise with the worker being ignorant. He asks who Dr Shirley is, to which Tony can only answer in disbelief once again that it is Dr Shirley, of the Don Shirley trio, who are playing there tonight. Here, the worker asks if it really matters, and when Tony says it does, and once again mentions that it is in contract, the man changes his behavior a little bit, takes a few steps towards Tony, and tries to get some sympathy as a fellow lower-class person, even showing a little grin and a short laugh, as he says "Come on man, these coons will play on anything you put in front of them". The other two members of the trio, seemingly just getting the sense of what is happening, stop rehearsing, and start to look at the two men.

Tony here does let go of the politeness, and tries to level with the man as well, saying "But it's a piece of shit", and "There's garbage in there", to which the man trying to show his power over Tony, says "So take it out!", and turns around to get back to what he was doing. Now Tony gets tensious, asking "What did you say?!", but the man does not withdraw, and replies "You heard me.", to what we can see Tony being reluctant about the situation he feels will follow. To advert from that, he takes a step closer and tries to be familiar, saying "Hey, you got two-three hours, get a clean Steinway in here", to which the worker immediately replies stating "There ain't a Steinway in campus". Here, Tony says "Not my problem", which we can really feel through.

Now the worker looks in disbelief, and says he bets there are no two Steinways in the whole state of Indiana, to which Tony, topping the whole situation says “I guess you better move your ass then”. This adds to all the tension, and the worker breaks out in “Who do you think you’re talking to, greaseball?!” , to which Tony replies with slapping him hard. We can see the worker not believing his eyes and in pain, taking a step to the side and retreat a bit from the argument, while Tony takes a step towards him. And the next shot is already a close-up of Dr Shirley’s hands playing on a Steinway – the negotiation was successful.

### Critical analysis – external factors

External factors play a very important role in the negotiation process, for example, the whole negotiation process is rather quick, a handful of sentences, interactions, and just around a minute. The time constraint itself determined the negotiation, would they have different constraint, they would have had a completely different negotiation. The event’s closeness (it is held that evening, Tony points out just in a couple of hours) makes both Tony and the worker itchy about the situation – Tony knows they only have a short time to sort out the problem, while the worker knows if he has to do the job, it seems almost impossible, that is why he tries to advert from the whole thing in the first place, he would rather make a “good as it is” point. The factor that they are on stage and not in some small room in the concert hall is important, as there are higher-in-hierarchy people there. Tony’s goal is to get a Steinway there, no matter what, to do his job, while the man’s only goal is to get back to his job and get over this “minor problem” – in his sense. The Russian member also seems to approve Tony’s way now.

### Conclusion

They both try to level with each other at some point, but it never works as intended, and we can feel changes of power as well – as we could see though, it only matters who gets out on top. The movie makes us root for Tony, so having had a successful negotiation (getting there the piano on time) is important; if we want to feel with the worker, he did hassle more than he intended to, but at least could provide the piano in time, so probably will not be fired, semi-successful on his part.

They could both have done differently, Tony was initially quite polite, if the worker had been as well, and considerate, tensions would not have risen. Although for Tony, slapping someone once was still okay in this new job, as he was “right” for doing it, he still had to give up a bit from his position. Obviously had the worker(s) gotten a Steinway initially, the argument would

not have even risen. Trying to level/accommodate with each other also did not work out as thought it would. We could learn that Tony makes things happen quick, no matter what, he can be trusted. We learned as well just how much change in power can come in a single minute.