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Peele unleashes serious cinematic skills in 'Get Out'

A thoughtful, timely and seamless horror flick should break comedian out of funny-guy mold

Jordan Peele, the writer and director of the horror-suspense thriller "Get Out," is half of the comedy duo Key & Peele, best known for sketches featuring Peele as President Barack Obama and Keegan-Michael Key as the president's anger translator, Luther. Peele's flawless Obama impersonation is the silken background for the animated, attention-grabbing Luther. Peele has been the Dean Martin to Key's Jerry Lewis. The Keith to his Mick.

Those days are over.

Now comes "Get Out," with no Key in sight. Years from now, this film will be studied for its sociological significance at this transitional time in the nation's social and political history. Today, it is pure entertainment.

Despite Peele's day job as a comedian (and the somewhat misleading marketing of the film), "Get Out" is not a fright-film parody. It has a classic setup in which the lead character, Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), must rely on his wits to escape a community of folk whom

he gradually realizes are not just peculiar, but diabolical. The movie is a chilling update of "Rosemary's Baby" with the moon-faced Allison Williams ("Girls") perfectly cast as Chris' girlfriend Rose, and Catherine Keener channeling Ruth Gordon as Rose's alternately

stern and embracing mom, Missy.

Peele takes a situation already fraught with tension and anxiety — spending the weekend with a new girlfriend's family — and uses racial tension to ratchet it up.

"Do they know I'm black?" Chris asks Rose.

"It won't be a problem," she responds.

Brooklynites Chris and Rose have been dating for three or four



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months when they plan a weekend at her family's estate in a woodsy suburb. To Chris' surprise, it is also the weekend of an annual family gathering. Several carloads of friends and relatives, whose dark limos roll into the driveway like hearses in a funeral proces-

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sion, mill about during his stay.

The family presents itself as progressive on race issues — they love Tiger Woods and would have voted for Obama a third time — and commits predictable cringe-inducing gaffes. Three other black people on the estate are stiff and creepy, like automatons.

Rose's father, Dean (Bradley Whitford), is a neurosurgeon. Missy is a psychiatrist who special-

izes in hypnosis. Chris, a smoker, has some repressed guilt from his past which makes him vulnerable to suggestion and Missy puts Chris under without his consent.

Then the weekend takes a tumble.

Chris' dog-sitting friend Rod (Lil Rel Howery) provides comic relief. Rod, an over-the-top conspiracy theorist, is also the voice of reason.

"Don't go," Rod tells Chris, when he learns that Rose hasn't briefed her parents. "Get out," he urgently advises when Chris calls in to share his misgivings.

Rod is immensely proud of his quasi-constabulary status with the Transportation Security Administration. In his mind the agency is as formidable a force as a police department full of detectives. In the film, as in life, the TSA is a running punchline.

The brilliance of the movie is that race is used by Peele as an instrument of misdirection. This is the first film I've seen that assumes the racial sophistication of audiences from every demographic.

It's not difficult for any one of us to put ourselves in Chris' shoes.

Much of the movie's tension comes just when we think we see an uncomfortable situation taking an ugly racial twist, then true terror tips in from the opposite direction.

"Get Out" is not the kind of horror flick that has you climbing up the back of your seat; it has you on the edge. Jordan Peele has crafted a strong seamless story that stays ahead of its viewers — right up until the satisfying ending.

With "Get Out" Jordan Peele has emerged as a full-fledged, bulging box-office, Hollywood director — no hyphens, no asterisks.

Attention must be paid.