

# Love, violence and generations collide in new urban drama "Baby Boy"

## MOVIES ON THE REAL

By JANEL L. PERRY  
Showtime  
Writer

Babies raising

live-in boyfriends and baby mama drama all come together to form a volatile mix in John Singleton's new film "Baby Boy."

Singleton returns to South Central Los Angeles to complete what he calls his "hood trilogy" and to tell a tale that for far too many inner city African Americans, is a way of life.

The coming of age tale stars R&B singer Tyrese as Jody, a misguided 20-year old, who because of

his unwillingness to grow up and face the commitments of life, is really just a 'baby boy.' Streetwise and jobless, he has not only fathered two children by two different women - Yvette (Taraji P. Henson) and Peanut (Tamara LaSeon Bass) - he still lives with his own mother.

Tyrese shines in the role originally written for the late Tupac Shakur.

Singleton said "It was important for me to have someone like Tyrese in this role, even though he's a bad guy, you still like him at the same time."

Singleton said he is trying to bring out the fact that most of us seem to be at war with each. And war is exactly what happens when Jody's 36-year old mother, Juanita, (A.J. Johnson) finally starts to live her life again and begins dating Melvin, portrayed by Ving Rhames. Now Juanita wants Jody to take responsibility for his life and his children. Once Melvin moves in, there is little room in the nest for a man-child who has overstayed his welcome.

First time actor, Tyrese had a unique way of preparing for the onscreen tension.

"The first two and a half weeks on the set, I couldn't stand Ving Rhames, he said. "I didn't even know who he was before we started filming. I wasn't trying to get to know him because I knew I was going to have to hate him in the film."

Now that the film is set to be released, Tyrese and Rhames have become good friends.

"He's the only one on the set the whole time that's a real true actor," Tyrese said.

The young singer/actor, whose "2000 Watts" project is steadily climbing the charts, has never had any formal acting classes. "I relied on music to get me through the film. Emotionally, when I had to go somewhere that I couldn't go, I went to my trailer

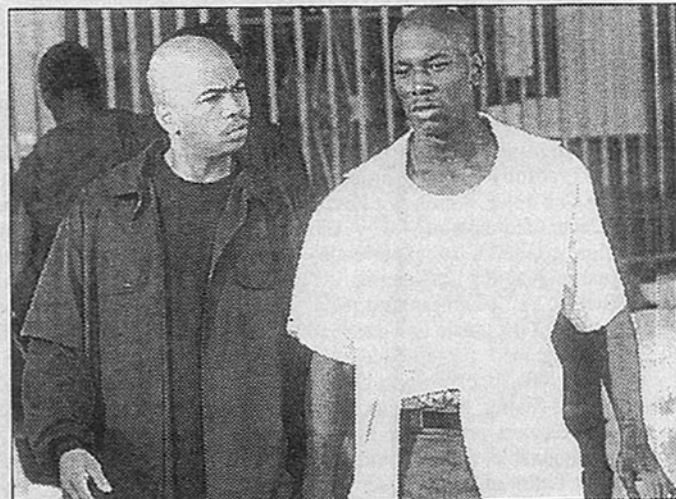
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and listened to music - especially this guy," he said, holding up a Luther Vandross CD.

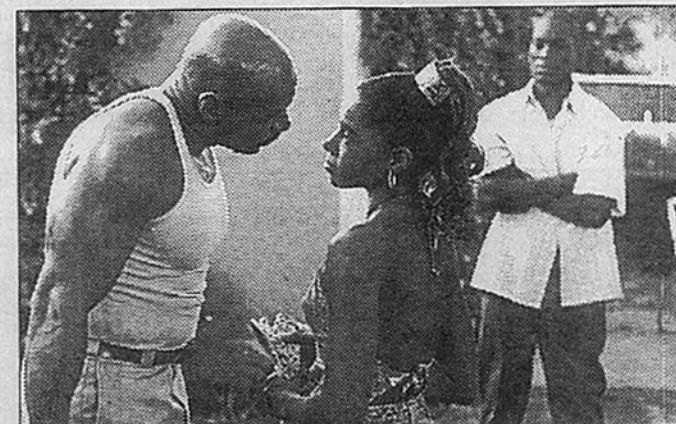
Tyrese also said he learned a lot from the film's Academy Award nominated writer/producer/director.

"John Singleton is like a Kindergarten teacher, he said. "He's worked with so many first-time actors, there's a nurturing side to him. If you ever start questioning yourself, he is going to say or do something to remind you that you are the man for the job."

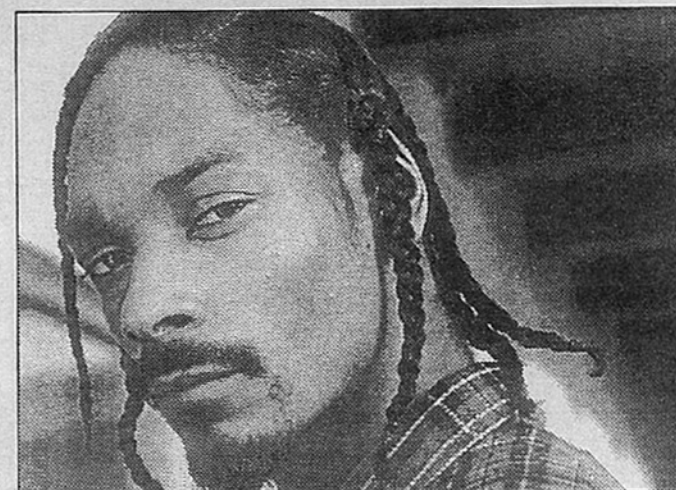
Shooting the nude scenes was Tyrese's biggest challenge. "I'm very private, but I like to keep it



Omar Gooding and Tyrese take a stroll through South Central L.A.



Trouble at the crib when mom gets macked by Ving Rhames.



Snoop stars as the menacing Rodney

real," he said. The hell with stunt doubles - they were unemployed when it came to my scenes." He draws many parallels between his own life growing up and Jody's.

"I am Jody," he said. I've been underestimated all life - people from Watts are not supposed to do anything. I'm just blessed. I can't believe I'm here."

Omar Gooding, the younger brother of Cuba Gooding, Jr. also makes an impressive big screen debut as Jody's troubled best friend Sweetpea. The film also stars Snoop Dogg.

Singleton, so far, is pleased with the feedback. "It funny," he said. "Couples are coming out of this movie debating."

Rhames said he hopes "Baby Boy" will evoke deeper conversations like "young women looking for love from baby boys." "It also deals with issues of a matriarchal household," he said. "How does a Black woman raise a Black man? It deals Black machoism, and the fact that a boy will look for a father figure somewhere."

"Baby Boy" ® opens nationwide on June 27.

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