



LAST EXIT AT FRUITVALE STATION

A brilliant and nuanced film about the life, and senseless death, of Oscar Grant III

FRUITVALE STATION: Written and directed by Ryan Coogler. Cinematography, Rachel Morrison. Editing, Claudia Castello and Michael P. Shawver. Music, Ludwig Göransson. Starring Michael B. Jordan, Melonie Diaz, Octavia Spencer and Kevin Durand. Significant Productions, 2013. R. 85 minutes. ★ ★ ★ ★ ☆

Against my strongest instincts, I will resist saying too much, or anything too fancy, about *Fruitvale Station*, the excellent new movie based on the 2009 New Year's shooting of a young black man by a security guard on San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit line. When a critic encounters anything of this rarefied quality, it's best just to get out of the way. The film is that good. It is art of the highest caliber. It speaks for itself. It has the power to break your heart.

Fruitvale Station is the story of a senseless death foretold: It is not a murder mystery, nor is it a suspense film. Even though you know the outcome (it opens with actual bystander footage of the shooting), you will not be expecting it, nor will you be edgy in your anticipation of gunshots and death.

Michael B. Jordan (of the excellent TV series *The Wire* and *Friday Night Lights*) plays Oscar Grant III, the doomed 22-year-old man. Jordan's performance is a miracle of humor, aggression, compassion and natural understatement; if he doesn't get an Oscar nomination, there truly is no justice in Hollywood. Melonie Diaz plays his girlfriend, Sophina, and she is equally impressive: Here we have a fully fleshed-out female character, imperfect and conflicted and in love, a character written and performed with wrenching depth. That's too uncommon these days.

One of the strengths of this movie is that, against all base tendencies, it immediately wraps you up in Grant's day, which just happens to be his last. There are forebodings, but they do not ring false; they are the forebodings of fate. Grant, an ex-con, recently fired from his job for chronic lateness, is a drug dealer going straight, a man recommitting to his girlfriend, contemplating marriage, and a father who loves his daughter. He is neither hero nor victim. Grant is a fragile, flawed-but-searching man, a young black man on the cusp of life.

Writer and director Ryan Coogler, who is 27, draws absolutely zero attention to anything that does not organically occur in the course of Grant's day — meaning, he pulls no dramatic chains, refuses to exploit Grant's story for coarse causes, whether those issues relate to racism in the U.S., police brutality, poverty, etc. Rather, Coogler allows the story to unfold in all its rough, edgy, natural rhythms.

In the hands of a lesser director — or a more didactic one like, say, Spike Lee — the horrific story of Grant's death might have become just the latest cause célèbre or call to righteous indignation instead of the moving and humane and complicated work that it is. A lesser filmmaker, for instance, might have wanted to turn the screws on Grant's murder, might have made his moral statement with a hammer, using pounding music, kaleidoscopic angles and other obvious cinematic statements.

Not so with *Fruitvale Station*. The film does not end with Grant's shooting, an obvious choice for a director wanting to incite the blind fury of riot. Instead, it ends with a daughter asking her mother where her dead father is. This puts new meaning to abstract ideas about social justice. *Fruitvale Station* does not treat Grant's death as a statistic. It treats his murder as a tragedy, and because of this, the answers to his daughter's question do not come easily. ■

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2 GUNS (DIGITAL) (R)
10:50AM 1:35PM 4:40PM 7:15PM 9:55PM

BLUE JASMINE (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
11:45AM 2:20PM 4:55PM 7:55PM 10:20PM

DESPICABLE ME 2 (DIGITAL) (PG)
11:10AM 2:15PM 5:00PM 7:50PM 10:25PM

ELYSIUM (DIGITAL) (R)
11:05AM 1:45PM 4:25PM 7:05PM 9:50PM

JOBS (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
1:20PM 4:15PM 7:25PM 10:20PM

KICK-ASS 2 (DIGITAL) (R)
10:55AM 1:30PM 4:30PM 7:35PM 10:30PM

LEE DANIELS' BUTLER, THE (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
11:30AM 3:10PM 7:00PM 10:05PM

MORTAL INSTRUMENTS (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
11:35AM 3:15PM 7:05PM 10:10PM

PARANOIA (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
11:00AM 1:40PM 4:35PM 7:15PM 9:55PM

PERCY JACKSON: SEA OF MONSTERS (3D) (PG)
11:20AM 2:10PM 4:50PM 7:30PM 10:10PM

PERCY JACKSON: SEA OF MONSTERS (DIGITAL) (PG)
12:50PM 3:30PM 6:10PM 8:50PM

PLANES (3D) (PG)
10:00PM

PLANES (DIGITAL) (PG)
11:50AM 2:25PM 5:05PM 7:40PM

SMURFS 2 (DIGITAL) (PG)
11:15AM 1:50PM 4:20PM

WE'RE THE MILLERS (DIGITAL) (R)
11:25AM 12:45PM 2:05PM 3:25PM 4:45PM 6:05PM 7:20PM 8:45PM 10:05PM

WOLVERINE, THE (DIGITAL) (PG-13)
7:00PM 10:00PM

WORLD'S END, THE (DIGITAL) (R)
10:45AM 1:25PM 4:10PM 7:10PM 9:45PM

YOU'RE NEXT (DIGITAL) (R)
11:40AM 2:00PM 5:10PM 7:45PM 10:15PM

MAN OF STEEL (PG-13)
11:10AM 2:40PM 6:05PM 9:30PM

MAN OF STEEL (3D) (PG-13)
12:30PM 3:35PM 7:15PM 10:20PM

NOW YOU SEE ME (PG-13)
11:05AM 1:45PM 4:25PM 7:00PM 10:05PM

R.I.P.D. (PG-13)
11:40AM 2:25PM 5:05PM 7:30PM 9:50PM

STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS (PG-13)
11:15AM 2:05PM 4:55PM 7:45PM

WHITE HOUSE DOWN (PG-13)
11:45AM 2:45PM 7:35PM 10:30PM

BEFORE MIDNIGHT (R)
11:20AM 1:55PM 4:40PM 7:25PM 9:55PM

CROODS, THE (PG)
11:50AM 5:10PM 10:35PM

EPIC (PG)
11:35AM 2:00PM 4:35PM 7:05PM 9:35PM

FAST & FURIOUS 6 (PG-13)
2:10PM 7:50PM

INTERNSHIP, THE (PG-13)
11:25AM 2:15PM 5:00PM 7:40PM 10:25PM

IRON MAN 3 (PG-13)
11:30AM 2:30PM 5:20PM 8:35PM

IRON MAN 3 (3D) (PG-13)
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AMOUR (OSCAR WINNER) 5:10

THE PLACE BEYOND THE PINES
7:25

ARMY OF DARKNESS
9:50

WHAT MAISIE KNEW
5:10

OLYMPUS HAS FALLEN
7:25

OBLIVION
9:50

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FRIDAY—SUNDAY
12:15, 2:30, 4:50, 7:10, 9:30
MONDAY—THURSDAY
4:50, 7:10, 9:30

FRUITVALE STATION (R)
FRIDAY—SUNDAY
1:25, 6:00
MONDAY—THURSDAY
6:00

THE WAY WAY BACK (PG-13)
FRIDAY—SUNDAY
3:30, 8:00, 10:10
MONDAY—THURSDAY
8:00, 10:10

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THE WALL (NR) Mon-Thurs 6:00

THE TO DO LIST (R) Mon-Thurs 9:50

BIG STAR: NOTHING CAN HURT ME (PG-13)
Mon 4:00 Tues-Thurs 4:00, 9:30

CRYSTAL FAIRY & THE MAGICAL CACTUS (NR)
Mon-Thurs 8:25, 10:30

20 FEET FROM STARDOM (PG-13)
Mon 7:50 Tues-Weds 4:00, 7:50 Thurs 4:00

THE KINGS OF SUMMER (R) Mon-Thurs 1:45

BLACKFISH (PG-13) Mon-Thurs 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30

BEFORE MIDNIGHT (R) Mon-Thurs 1:45

DANCING SALMON HOME (NR) Mon-Thurs 12:00, 2:10, 6:05

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