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TYSON

A FILM BY **JAMES TOBACK**



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AND

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PRESENT

TYSON

A FILM BY **JAMES TOBACK**

USA / 88' / 35 MM / 1:85 / DOLBY SR / COLOUR / 2008

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SYNOPSIS

In TYSON, the former champion looks at his own life in and out of the ring with a candor and eloquence that is by turns shocking, funny, hair-raising and never less than brutally honest.

In other words, Tyson explores... Tyson.

James Toback's film portrait ranges from Tyson's earliest memories of growing up on the meanest streets of Brooklyn through his entry into the world of boxing under the stewardship of his beloved trainer Cus D'Amato, his rollercoaster ride through the funhouse of worldwide fame, his fortunes won and lost.

TYSON offers much more than a documentary about a former heavyweight champ. Through a deft mixture of original interviews and archival footage and photographs, a complex, fully-rounded human being emerges - a legendary and uniquely controversial international athletic icon... a figure conjuring radical questions of race and class... a man who arose from the most debased circumstances and soared to seemingly unlimited heights, followed by destruction generated by hubris, like a character out of classical tragedy.

CREW

DIRECTED BY	James Toback
DP	Larry McConkey
EDITOR	Aaron Yanes
ORIGINAL MUSIC	Salaam Remi
SONG "LEGENDARY" BY	Nas
SUPERVISING SOUND EDITOR	Byron Wilson
SOUND EFFECTS EDITOR	Brad North
ASSISTANT SOUND EDITOR	Joel Dougherty
RE-RECORDING MIXERS	Skip Lievsay Brad North
PRODUCERS	James Toback Damon Bingham
CO-PRODUCERS	Warren Farnes Salaam Remi Nas
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	Mike Tyson Harlan Werner Nicholas Jarecki Henry Jarecki Bob Yari

INTERVIEW WITH JAMES TOBACK

Q: *How long have you known Mike Tyson?*

JT: 23 years. Anthony Michael Hall brought Tyson to the set of *THE PICK-UP ARTIST* in the Museum of Natural History to meet Robert Downey, Jr., and everybody ended up together in my camper at 4 in the morning: Gary Hart, whom Warren Beatty had brought along and who was the frontrunner at the time for the Democratic nomination; Downey; Molly Ringwald; and Tyson and I.

Tyson had just been to Jim Brown's house, and wanted to know all about the activities there. I fed him a fair menu of detail and found his wide-eyed, innocent fascination amusing given his large size and incipient fame. He was actually about to sign a Pepsi contract, to be the black spokesman for Pepsi, and Gary Hart was trying to get him to be his liaison to the black community. But he was more fascinated by my description of my LSD flip-out at age 19, and was obsessed with the idea of madness: what did it mean, what did it mean to lose oneself, to have the "I" disintegrate, and to feel disembodied, as if there were a void inside? I went into the Heideggerian and Kierkegaardian notions of dread and nothingness, and I was waiting for him to lose interest but the more I talked about it the more fascinated he got. He kept saying, *"But what do you mean that you felt as if there were no 'I'?"* *How can there be no 'I' when there's still 'you'?"*

Finally, as we were walking through Central Park at 6 in the morning, because this had spilled over to a walk that we took from the camper, I said, *"Unfortunately, you have to experience this phenomenon to understand it. To go on endlessly with words trying to describe it is ultimately futile."*

He called me a lot over the next couple of years to discuss these questions, and I could see that they were clearly an indication of a sort of pre-dread consciousness in him. When I look at the movie and see how often he talks about fear... and, you know, that practical fear is the cousin to dread - it's different from it and much easier to manage, but he was no stranger to it - I feel how intensely this first

encounter between us was the beginning of a journey leading to this film.

Did the self-consciousness and the stab at an intellectual or philosophical exploration surprise you?

No, because it was clearly something that he was feeling viscerally. He has a very curious mind and he's interested in all sorts of things, but not obsessively so. And I think that when I described my own acid madness, I was in turn describing something that he felt brewing in him.

Did you see him through that period?

I saw him use his almost unparalleled fame and wealth and obsession with girls and the accoutrements of his fame as a way of avoiding the eventual crack-up into that madness. I know that those are the things that one can use to narcotize oneself. Temporarily. I think sooner or later, it tends to catch up with anyone who's prone to it.

When Tyson got out of prison after that 3-and-a-half year stint for the false rape conviction, I was walking down Columbus Avenue and I saw him in the City Grill. I went in and he said, *"You know, I now know what you meant. I was about halfway through my solitary, and when I was lying in my cell I thought, 'This is what Tobeck was talking about.' The difference is you got an injection and it ended, but mine is still going on."*

So there's always been that bond, which I think is probably the deepest and most powerful one people can feel. Then there are all these corollaries of it, because of the way you live, the way you handle life, money, the recklessness. If you know you're doomed in some way and that you're ultimately going to lose yourself - your inner self, your identity, and then ultimately your physical self - and die, really know it, not just as a fact that's happened to other people and that you secretly think may not happen to you, but as the central truth and destiny of your life, once that knowledge is in you, there is

an almost cult-like connection with others who feel intimate with their own mortality.

At what point did the possibility of making a film like this emerge?

It jumped into my mind right then standing there in the City Grill. I was about to start BLACK AND WHITE, and I thought, *"I'm not going to derail those plans, but maybe I can use this new dimension of Mike in the film."* So I created the role for him and gave him the leeway to riff on the abyss of prison misery - which he does with great power. People always talk about the choking scene with Downey, but there's also that harrowing description of prison guards pinning you down and sticking the noses of German Shepherds up your ass and playing with your balls. He sort of circles around it, getting into the external misery without the void and dread.

It wasn't quite the essence of the real thing. I said, *"We really have to do a whole movie,"* and he said, *"That's what I want, let's do it."* We kept saying it over several years. Then when my mother died a year and a half ago, I thought, *"The only way I'm going to be able to deal with this at all functionally, as opposed to just going completely psychotic, is to start a movie right away."*

You were thinking of a few different things.

Yeah. The reason this emerged above the others is [1] the fact that I could do it, because I was going to finance it, which meant that I didn't have to wait for anybody else's approval, and [2] even more importantly, at the same time, he had crashed. He'd been arrested again, he could possibly have gone to prison, then it turned out he went to rehab and things started to change. We just became aware that if we were ever going to do it, this was the time.

As I watched it, I imagined that every step of the way must have been enormously painful for him.

Absolutely. He was committed to going all the way... there was no point in doing it otherwise.

He keeps saying in the movie that he's an extremist by nature, and that people who aren't extremists don't understand the mind of an extremist, where it's always everything or nothing and nothing in between. And I think that once he decided to do it, there was no way he was going to be calculated and think of what he should or shouldn't say or how he would come across.

Did he put up any resistance about time?

None. He just showed up and went on as long as the camera would allow.

Did he balk at the moments where he started crying?

No, he understood that that was part of it. I didn't have to say anything. The good thing was that there were only a couple of people around, nobody obtrusive. The first five or ten minutes of each day he would be aware of the environment, and then he would slip into his own zone. I was speaking to him in a kind of quiet, hypnotic voice. At least I thought it was hypnotic. I tried to lull him into a state. I remember when I was in psychoanalysis, with my octogenarian Polish analyst Gustav Bychovsky, he would spend the first 3 or 4 minutes just kind of throwing out a few phrases, and that was all that was needed.

How much was he involved in the editing process?

He didn't want to see anything until I was done. When he saw it, he was... quiet. He was wearing a white t-shirt, white pants, white sneakers and white socks, and sitting on the floor in the corner of the screening room. There were a few other people there. When it ended, they kind of talked a little and left - it was almost as if they hadn't been there. And he finally said, *"It's like a Greek tragedy. The only problem is that I'm the subject."*

Had he recorded the written material at that point?

He recorded most of that when we were shooting, but I had him come in to do the Holyfield fight, for instance, and the Barbara Walters interview.

Did you have any legal obstacles?

We pretended that there weren't. When we finished, the movie was, to use Hillary Clinton's favorite word, vetted sufficiently, in order to insure that no one was going to crawl out from under a rock and try to cause trouble.

In the end, does it feel to you like a Greek tragedy?

It does. The only mitigating circumstance is that there's a mystery about what's going to happen in the future. But it does in the sense that you have somebody who starts with nothing, from very humble origins to put it mildly, who goes on to reach heights that are inconceivable, and then crashes through his own hubris. Then, of course, it's a double Greek tragedy because he comes back, and reaches the heights again and crashes again, again through hubris. It reminds me of my grandfather's favorite proverb: *"The man who makes the same mistake twice is like the dog who returns to eat his own vomit."*

What makes it moving is that Tyson has an awareness of what he's doing.

Absolutely. From that first night when I met him, it was very clear that he had a self-analytical consciousness. When you hear him talking in the movie about what was going on in his mind when he was at Cus D'Amato's, you see that he was always a very cunning character with a lot of complex thoughts going on - most of which no one around him would have been aware of.

It's amazing that he's able to articulate that incredible moment when he says that he realized that no one was ever going to beat him up again.

"...ever going to fuck with me again." And then he can barely breathe, and he says, *"Oh, I can't even say it."* And then he waits another 30 seconds, and says, *"Because I would fuckin' kill 'em."*

That's the moment around which the whole movie pivots.

Absolutely. It's the moment that explains him. Because you see someone consumed with fear and humiliation and doubt, who overcomes it by stirring up the homicidal rage that's been provoked by it.

On another level, the movie is an aria: there's a rhythm of language and a delivery of language that's heartbreaking, unexpected and new.

Tyson has a completely poetic sense of language, and a physical sense of language. The thing that is true of almost all famous people - athletes, actors, politicians - is that they have this programmed, functional speech, or academic speech, which has its own predictable structure. But this is speech that comes from some inner sense of rhythm. Here and there he's reaching for a word that he thinks will express his intended meaning better, and sometimes it does, or sometimes it does inadvertently, because even though it's the 'wrong' word, it makes you feel what he meant better than if he'd chosen a different word. He uses 'skullduggery' twice in the movie, once accurately and once inaccurately, and it works both times.

Why did you choose to end the film with his breathing?

I felt from the beginning, it was central to his life - his respiratory problems as a child, the fact that he had to combat it as a fighter because he couldn't go long distances in a boxing match without the breathing becoming a problem. And it was very clear to me from the way he was breathing throughout the shoot that respiration was a particular burden for him. I believe breathing disorders come from an underlying sense of panic, usually from when you're very small. He gives evidence of that, and at a certain point I knew that when he gives his last statement in the movie - *"The past is history, the future is a mystery"* - the coda to that would be his breathing. The breathing, and the breathing problems, seem to be fundamental to the whole sense of who he is.

As in: *"I'd better get this over with quickly or else I'll be in trouble, because I can't breathe."*

It's a perfect existential moment.

Right and it's all unexpected, given who he is. None of these things would be remotely predictable. If you looked at his history or the particulars of his almost completely distorted image, it becomes even more fascinatingly contradictory. Which is one of the side benefits of the movie, a sort of ongoing shock, disabusing the viewer of expectations. It's almost the opposite of what most movies set out to do, which is to satisfy expectation. This is a movie that starts with the assumption that the audience has a preconception and then attempts to invert it, distort it and discard it.

BIOGRAPHIES

MIKE TYSON

With nicknames such as *"Iron" Mike*, *Kid Dynamite*, and *The Baddest Man on the Planet*, it is no surprise that Mike Tyson was considered one of the greatest and most feared boxers in the sport. Making his professional debut on March 6, 1985, Mike stormed into the boxing world, winning his premier bout by first round knockout - the first of many similar victories that would ensue during his career. Both the public and the media began to take notice of this rising champion who dominated his opponents in the ring with unparalleled brute strength, speed, coordination, and timing.

November 22, 1986 marked the date of Tyson's first title bout against Trevor Berbick for the WBA Heavyweight title. In a 2nd round knockout, Tyson secured an unprecedented record, becoming the youngest ever heavyweight champion at the age of 20 years and four months. With his unique peek-a-bow style and massive strength, Tyson continued to fight his way to success, boxing with an undefeated record in his first two years.

In the 1980s, *Tyson Mania* swept the boxing world as Mike fought and defeated some of the best heavyweights of the time including James "Bonecrusher" Smith, Pinklon Thomas, and Tyrell Biggs. Most argue that the pinnacle of Tyson's career came with his victory over the then undefeated Michael Spinks, a boxer considered to be Tyson's most legitimate opponent. On August 13, 1987 Tyson took the IBF title from Tony Tucker, becoming the *"undisputed heavyweight champion of the world"*.

Tyson powerfully re-emerged on the boxing scene in 1995 to obtain the WBC title from Frank Bruno in March 1996 as well as claiming the WBA title in September from Bruce Seldon in an astounding 93 seconds. In the late 1990s, Tyson fought Evander Holyfield in the much publicized fight coined as *Sound and the Fury*. In his 20 years of boxing, Tyson had a career record of 50-6 with 44 wins by knockout.

Mike resides in Las Vegas, the city that he helped

electrify on so many fight-nights over the past two decades. He is actively involved in his corporate relationships and continues to work on the Tyson brand through various media and business opportunities. Mike also enjoys lending his celebrity to working with youth organizations across the country and is offering sound advice to children on how to live upright and healthy lives. Mike himself is working hard at bettering his own life and recently reached 15 months of sobriety. When he's not working, Mike spends a majority of his time with his children.

"When Mike Tyson gets mad, you don't need a referee, you need a priest."

- Jim Murray

JAMES TOBACK - Director

James Toback is an American screenwriter and film director whose cinematic explorations of sports, crime, sex and the complex vagaries of human relationships have resulted in a host of provocative, seminal and celebrated films.

After graduating from Harvard, Toback intended to become a novelist but turned to journalism. Given an assignment for an article in *Esquire* on football legend Jim Brown, Toback moved into Brown's Hollywood mansion and ended up writing an autobiographical memoir *JIM: THE AUTHOR'S SELF-CENTERED MEMOIR OF THE GREAT JIM BROWN*. In 1974, his semi-autobiographical original screenplay *THE GAMBLER* was directed by British filmmaker Karel Reisz and starred James Caan as Axel Freed, an English professor and death-obsessed compulsive gambler.

Toback used his experience on the *THE GAMBLER* as preparation for his directorial debut *FINGERS*, a dark psychological drama starring Harvey Keitel. It was remade twenty-eight years later as *THE BEAT THAT MY HEART SKIPPED* by Jacques Audiard.

FINGERS remains the only original American movie ever to be remade as a French film and will be shown

in the Cannes Classics section at this year's Cannes Film Festival.

Toback followed *FINGERS* with *LOVE AND MONEY* (1982), which marked legendary Hollywood director King Vidor's acting debut at the age of eighty. During the 1980s, Toback also wrote and directed *EXPOSED* (1983) with Nastassia Kinski, Rudolf Nureyev, Harvey Keitel, Bibi Andersen, and Pierre Clementi. The film was photographed by *New Wave* cinematographer Henri Decae and scored by *New Wave* composer Georges Delerue. He also wrote and directed *THE PICK-UP ARTIST* (1987) with Robert Downey Jr., Molly Ringwald, Harvey Keitel, and Dennis Hopper.

In 1989, Toback created *THE BIG BANG*, a documentary exploring the connections between orgasm, sex, love, madness, murder, crime, death, and the origin and fate of the cosmos. It featured a philosopher nun, an Auschwitz survivor, a gangster, a cosmologist, a jazz saxophonist, a basketball star, a concert violinist, and two six-year-old children.

In 1991, Barry Levinson directed Toback's original screenplay *BUGSY*, produced by Warren Beatty, who also starred as the infamous gangster. The film co-starred Harvey Keitel as Mickey Cohen, Ben Kingsley as Meyer Lansky, and Annette Bening as Virginia Hill. *BUGSY* won the Golden Globe for Best Picture and was nominated for ten Academy Awards, including Best Original Screenplay. Toback won the Los Angeles Film Critics' Award for Best Original Screenplay and a similar award from the readers of *Premiere Magazine*.

More recently, Toback wrote and directed *TWO GIRLS AND A GUY*, a comic rumination on the incompatibility of romantic monogamy and sexual curiosity. It starred Robert Downey, Jr., Heather Graham and Natasha Gregson Wagner as friends and lovers. He then wrote and directed *BLACK AND WHITE* (made in collaboration with Power, Raekwan and Method Man of Wu-Tang Clan). The film also starred Robert Downey Jr., Ben Stiller, Mike Tyson, Claudia Schiffer, Brooke Shields,

Jared Leto, Bijou Phillips, Elijah Wood, Toback himself, and Allen Houston. It explores the phenomenon of hip-hop from the inside, and its corollary phenomena: identity, music, madness, murder, drugs, crime, race and sex. He also wrote and directed the semi-autobiographical *HARVARD MAN*, starring Adrien Grenier, and *WHEN WILL I BE LOVED*, an exploration of the psyche and sexuality of a driven, curious, articulate young woman, Vera, played by Neve Campbell. Dominic Chianese and Fred Weller portray men who imagine themselves - with fatal consequences - to be capable of toying with Vera when they are in fact in well over their heads.

In 2006, documentary filmmaker Nicolas Jarecki directed *THE OUTSIDER*, a cinematic excursion into Toback's world, which includes excerpts from much of his work, visual observation of his directing *WHEN WILL I BE LOVED*, and self-revelatory as well as revelatory interviews with Norman Mailer, Robert Downey Jr, Mike Tyson, Brooke Shields, Neve Campbell, Brett Ratner, ICM chairman Jeff Berg, Bijou Phillips, Roger Ebert, former Sony chairman John Calley, Jim Brown, Woody Allen, Barry Levinson, Power of Wu-Tang Clan, and Harvey Keitel.

Toback has been a subject of retrospective tributes at Deauville, Torino, San Francisco, New York among other cities.

SALAAM REMI - *Original Music*

Salaam Remi is a prolific and eclectic music producer whose influences range from rap to R&B, from England to Senegal. He segued into the movies in 2004 when he executive produced the soundtrack for Brett Ratner's *INTO THE SUNSET*, which introduced him to the director and to composer Lalo Schiffrin. He went on to become the music supervisor on Ratner's *RUSH HOUR 3*, starring Chris Tucker and Jackie Chan. Working alongside Schiffrin, Remi designed the comedic *kung-pao* sequences, among other things. Born in Queens, New York, Remi is part of a profoundly musical family - even his name is musical. His father, Van Gibbs,

a well-regarded music industry producer and musician, named him Salaam, the Arabic word for *peace*, and his middle name, Remi was derived from the second and third tones of the octave scale (*Do Re Mi...*). Remi received his first drum kit from Elvin Jones, the legendary jazz drummer who played with the John Coltrane Quartet and so began his lifelong passion for timing and rhythm. By his teenage years, the prodigy would add bass, keyboard, guitar, and percussion to his repertoire.

Remi's experience creating hip-hop remixes and productions for reggae artists Supercat, Ini Kamoze, Shabba Ranks and Patra in the early 90s would lead to his production on The Fugees album *THE SCORE*, the highest selling hip-hop album of all-time, which sold over 20 million copies worldwide. He went on to remix and produce songs for The Fugees, NAS, Ludacris, Wyclef Jean, Toni Braxton, Santana, Sade, Sting (featuring Mary J. Blige), Lauren Hill, Jurassic Five, Doug E. Fresh, Biz Markie, and Chrisette Michele. He has also created tracks for Kevin Lyttle, Supercat, Ini Kamoze, Jamiroquai, Senegalese hip-hop band Positive Black Soul, and most recently U.K. vocalist, Amy Winehouse. Remi produced ten songs on Winehouse's debut, *FRANK*, released in 2003. The critically acclaimed single, *STRONGER THAN ME*, which he co-wrote with Winehouse, went on to win the coveted Ivor Novello Award for Contemporary Song Of The Year. The work Remi did on *FRANK* led to songwriting and production on her second album, *BACK TO BLACK* (*TEARS DRY ON THEIR OWN*, *ADDICTED*, *ME AND MR. JONES*, *JUST FRIENDS*, *UNHOLY WAR*) and helped catapult Winehouse into the spotlight and become one of the top music stories of 2007. To date, *BACK TO BLACK* has since sold more than three million copies worldwide.

The camaraderie between Salaam and NAS has resulted in their collaboration on five albums. In addition to executive producing the double CD, *STREETS DISCIPLE*, Salaam has also produced tracks on *STILLMATIC*, *GOD SON*, *HIP-HOP IS DEAD*, and NAS' forthcoming albums, the greatest hits collection and the new solo album.

AARON YANES - Editor

Aaron Yanes' recent credits include Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner *PADRE NUESTRO* directed by Christopher Zalla, and *ZARIN* by internationally acclaimed artist Shirin Neshat, as well as her Carnegie Hall video installation *FROM A FAR OFF COUNTRY* in collaboration with cellist Maya Beiser and composer Eve Beglarian.

LARRY McCONKEY - DP

The legendary Larry McConkey has been the Steadicam operator on many films, including *IRONWEED*, *THE MOSQUITO COAST*, *MILLER'S CROSSING*, *GOOD FELLAS*, *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*, *RANSOM*, *THREE KINGS*, *FINDING FORRESTER*, *SHALLOW HAL*, *VANILLA SKY*, *THE HOURS*, and *KILL BILL: VOLUMES 1 & 2*. He has worked three times with Spike Lee, on *MO' BETTER BLUES*, *JUNGLE FEVER* and *THE SUMMER OF SAM*, and with Brian DePalma and cinematographer Stephen H. Burum on *CARLITO'S WAY*, *MISSION IMPOSSIBLE*, *SNAKE EYES* and *MISSION TO MARS*.

McConkey operated Steadicam and also served as camera operator on *THE GOOD SHEPHERD* and *AMERICAN GANGSTER*. He moved up to second unit DP on *CONFESSIONS OF A TEENAGE DRAMA QUEEN* and made his debut as DP on James Toback's *WHEN WILL I BE LOVED*.