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TCM THIS MONTH



SPOTLIGHT

The Bodyguard (1992)



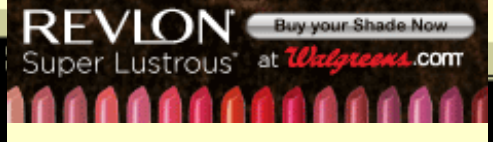
Imagine **The Bodyguard** (1992) with Steve McQueen and Diana Ross. How about Ryan O'Neal and Diana Ross? Well, both pairings were considered as possibilities in the long history of Lawrence Kasdan's (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, 1981) screenplay, reportedly rejected 67 times. When the film did come to fruition, it was with two celebrities at the top of their games. Whitney Houston was making her screen debut while ruling the "Top 40" pop charts and Kevin Costner was fresh off of *JFK* (1991), with *Waterworld* (1995) still years away.

Kasdan stuck with the film through its many casting concepts and must've been thrilled when a deal finally stuck. In 1975, **The Bodyguard** was the screenplay that got him an agent; in 1991 it was becoming a reality, with Costner attached as star and producer. Costner brought in director Mick Jackson (*L.A. Story*, 1991) and the team was rounded out with legendary music producer David Foster.

The Bodyguard's soundtrack became a legend in itself, one of the top-selling movie soundtracks of all time. "I Will Always Love You," which was written by Dolly Parton but performed in the film by Houston, was the biggest single that year and became one of the top-selling U.S. singles ever. "Whitney", as Randy Jackson likes to call her, is lauded as the quintessential pop star for which *American Idol* endlessly seeks, while judge Simon Cowell calls "I Will Always Love You" the perfect pop song. It is also the landing music Houston uses on her official Web site: the song that defines her career.

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The premise of **The Bodyguard** is not untried: a temperamental celebrity requires and resents the services of a no-nonsense bodyguard. Costner's Frank Farmer, former Secret Service, is inscrutable, with a scarred past. Attending his mother's funeral on the day that Reagan got shot, he has never forgiven himself for not being there to take one for the boss. Now he's operating in the private sector, but is reluctant to work for a celebrity when first approached about the job. Eventually, money, and perhaps the genuine danger facing Rachel Marron (Houston), draw him in, and he visits Marron's household, which is full of toadies and superstar opulence. They take an instant dislike to each other: Farmer likes a tight ship and Marron's is a sloppy luxury liner with an undisciplined crew. The star is easily accessible and she doesn't seem to mind. She thinks the new bodyguard is a killjoy. Eventually, the two come to terms -- and fall in love -- as the stakes get higher and Marron realizes that she and her 8-year-old son are in real danger. Before long, the hired gun and the diva have to sort out how their mutual attraction works with the roles and responsibilities they've taken on in life. It's not an easy fit. She was born to be in the public eye and he was born to protect, as he underscores to Marron when he takes her to see his favorite film, *Yojimbo* (1961), English title: *The Bodyguard*.

Much was made at the time that an interracial romance is at the **The Bodyguard's** core, but the film received as much criticism for not emphasizing that fact as it did praise for not making an issue of it. Similarly, its stars were applauded and skewered for the same performances. Houston was advised by the production team to just be herself and not try not "to act" so that her performance could ring true. Some saw the results as genuine, others as inadequate. Similarly, Costner steamed sex behind his impassiveness for some reviewers while others found him dull and wooden. Despite the mixed reviews, audiences loved **The Bodyguard**, and it is ranked number 88 on IMDB's list of top-grossing films, worldwide, of all time.

The film had two Oscar® nominations, one each for "I Will Always Love You" and "I Want to Run to You"; won MTV awards for Best Movie (in Europe) and Best Movie Song; and, in perhaps another nod to *Yojimbo*, took home Japan's Best Foreign Film award. **The Bodyguard** also won a substantial number of Razzies.

Today, it's impossible to watch **The Bodyguard** and not consider Houston's current circumstances. In the early 90s her star shone brightly and it was easy to see how Rachel Marron represented Houston's alter ego – adored by fans, celebrated by her peers. Costner's star, too, has largely faded. But in 1992, the stoic leading man and the top-of-the-charts diva seemed a perfect box-office match.

Producers: Kevin Costner, Lawrence Kasdan, and Jim Wilson
 Director: Mick Jackson
 Screenplay: Lawrence Kasdan
 Cinematography: Andrew Dunn
 Art Direction: Wm Ladd Skinner
 Music: Allan Dennis Rich and Alan Silvestri
 Film Editing: Donn Cambern and Richard A. Harris
 Cast: Kevin Costner (Frank Farmer), Whitney Houston (Rachel Marron), Gary Kemp (Sy Spector), Bill Cobbs (Bill Devaney), Ralph Waite (Herb Farmer), Tomas Arana (Greg Portman).
 C-130m. Letterboxed.

by Emily Soares



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