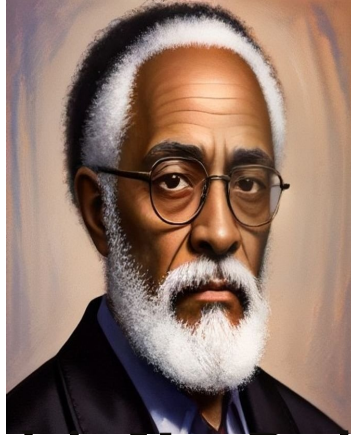




Melvin Van Peebles

August 21, 1932 - September 21, 2021

New York, New York

Melvin Van Peebles - American filmmaker, playwright, novelist, and musician often called a godfather of modern Black independent cinema, died at his home in New York City on September 21, 2021. He was eighty-nine. Born August 21, 1932, in Chicago, he served in the Air Force, lived and worked in Europe, and returned to make films on his own terms when Hollywood offered only narrow roles.

Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song (1971), which he wrote, directed, scored, and starred in, became a commercial earthquake financed outside the studio system and helped open the 1970s wave of Black-centered popular cinema. Earlier work in France and later Broadway pieces such as Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death showed a restless multi-hyphenate who treated film, theater, and music as one toolkit. Son Mario Van Peebles carried the craft into another generation; Melvin remained a fierce advocate for ownership and risk.

He died at home on the night of September 21, 2021 - his death announced the next day - after a long life of inventing doors when none were offered. Manhattan was both workplace and final address.

He died in New York on September 21, 2021. Sweetback remains assigned viewing for anyone who wants to understand how independent Black cinema seized the box office.

Van Peebles's gift was entrepreneurial defiance - making the movie the industry said could not be made, then proving audiences were waiting. Notice Nearby keeps the death date so September 21 remembers the Chicago-born filmmaker who forced American cinema to widen its frame.

Services

Died in New York City, September 21, 2021. Filmmaker, playwright, and musician; director of Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song (1971); U.S. Air Force veteran.

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