

Joseph Fiennes 'shocked' to be cast as Michael Jackson

28/01/2016



The actor plays the singer in the comedy about a supposed road trip taken by Jackson, Marlon Brando and Elizabeth Taylor after the 9/11 terror attacks.

Some fans have reacted angrily to the casting, but Fiennes said he thought Jackson was "probably closer to my colour than his original colour".

Sky Arts said producers had "creative freedom" in the casting.

Fiennes said he believed Jackson - who died in 2009 - had a "pigmentation issue" with his skin, so the issue of race should not come into play.

'Not malicious'

But [he told Entertainment Tonight](#): "I'm a white, middle-class guy from London - I'm as shocked [about the casting] as you might be.

"It's a light comedy look. It's not in any way malicious. It's actually endearing. And the more I actually looked at Michael - it's great, as an actor, to have so much to copy and look at in interviews - the more I kind of fell in love with him."

Describing the plot of the 30-minute programme - titled Elizabeth, Michael and Marlon - Fiennes said: "Michael and two of his best buddies, Elizabeth Taylor and Marlon Brando, happened to be in New York the night before 9/11.



Elizabeth Taylor and Michael Jackson were close friends

"It was [a concert Michael was giving](#), and Brando was introducing him on stage.

"I don't know if this is an urban legend or if it's true, but the three of them couldn't get out because air space was shut down, so the three of them jumped in a car and went on a road trip."

Stockard Channing, who is best known for her roles in TV drama *The West Wing* and musical film *Grease*, is playing Taylor in the comedy with Scottish actor Brian Cox starring as Brando.

There has been a backlash on Twitter to the casting, with some using the hashtag #whitewashing and others claiming they thought the story was actually from satirical magazine *The Onion*.

CNN entertainment reporter Chris Witherspoon [posted a 1993 Jackson interview](#) with Oprah Winfrey, in which he discussed rumours he had wanted a white child to play him in a TV commercial, telling the presenter: "Why would I want a white child to play me? I'm a black American (...) I am proud of my race. I am proud of who I am."

Angela Bassett, who played Tina Turner in biopic *What's Love Got to Do With It*, [joked on Twitter](#) she had "ordered violet contacts" and was "ready" to play Taylor after *Sleepy Hollow* star Orlando Jones suggested she play the actress.



Angela Bassett ✓
@ImAngelaBassett

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BRILLIANT! Ordered my violet contacts & bathed in White Diamonds this morning, so I'm READY! Let's do this! xo! Ang

Orlando Jones @TheOrlandoJones

I'm TOTALLY on board with Joseph Fiennes playing Michael Jackson IF AND ONLY IF Angela Bassett is cast as Elizabeth Taylor

RETWEETS

2,434

LIKES

2,910



12:27 PM - 27 Jan 2016

Angela Bassett tweeted she would be happy to play Elizabeth Taylor

The story about the road trip first came to light in [a 2011 Vanity Fair article](#), which quoted a former employee of Jackson as saying: "They actually got as far as Ohio - all three of them, in a car they drove themselves!"

Brando was said to have annoyed his friends by wanting to stop at nearly every fast food restaurant they passed on the way.

But one of Taylor's assistants dismissed the claims, saying the star had actually stayed in New York and visited Ground Zero in the days after the attack.

The comedy will be broadcast later this year as part of a series on unlikely stories from the history of arts and culture.

A Sky Arts spokesman said: "Sky Arts gives producers the creative freedom to cast roles as they wish, within the diversity framework which we have set."
