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Entertainment // Movies

# Review: 'Good Hair' an intriguing documentary



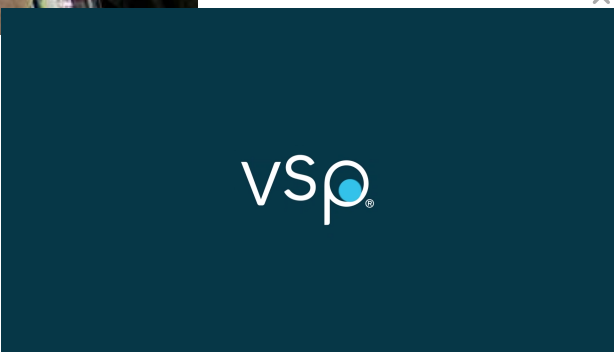
Peter Hartlaub, Chronicle Pop Culture Critic

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Chris Rock in Good Hair.  
Photo Courtesy of Roadside Attra

Good Hair



Documentary. Starring [Chris Rock](#), [Nia Long](#), [Al Sharpton](#) and [Maya Angelou](#). Directed by [Jeff Stilson](#). (PG-13. 95 minutes. At Bay Area theaters.)

Here's some trivia for [Salt-N-Pepa](#) fans: Sandra "Pepa" Denton's hairstyle in the "Push It" video was the result of a horrible product-related accident. A mishap involving a hair-straightening agent burned her roots so badly that she had to shave one side of her head.

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If popular culture minutiae like that isn't what you're looking for in a documentary, then avoid "Good Hair." Chris Rock's movie about hair in the black community takes itself seriously for maybe one-tenth of its 95-minute running time. But it's funny, clever and marginally educational. You can tell your friends you went to a documentary without having felt as if you saw one.

Directed by longtime Hollywood comedy writer Jeff Stilson, "Good Hair" offers a few minutes of history, but mostly goes all over the place, always choosing a laugh over any semblance of structure. There's a loose narrative thread involving an over-the-top hairstyling contest at the Bronner Bros. Hair Show in Atlanta, narrator-ringmaster Rock investigates the hair trade in India and then visits a factory that makes chemical hair relaxer. ("This will last Prince for about a month," he quips, looking at a vat that contains 10,000 pounds of relaxer.)

But mostly it's a series of interviews, with testimonials by celebrities including Nia Long, Ice-T and Al Sharpton, who deservedly gets the most screen time, at one point reminiscing about hair care tips he got from [James Brown](#).

This is the kinder, gentler "Everybody Loves Chris" Rock, and although he's a surprisingly strong interviewer. If nothing else, he's more than willing to ask you questions. You'll never see [Steve Kroft](#) asking Maya Angelou, "How old were



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The weakest part is the coverage of the styling contest, which wears thin once the initial ridiculousness of the scene wears off. There's very little dramatic punch, mostly because it's hard to care about any of the egotistical stylists, and Rock is no longer front and center.

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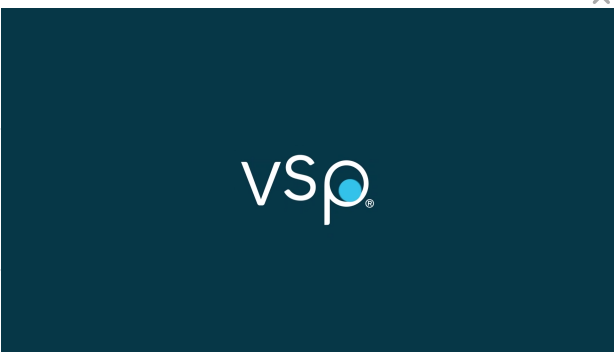
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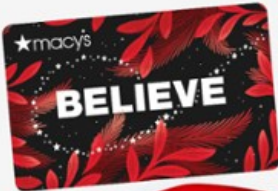
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But then he returns and all is right with the movie again. "Good Hair" is a mostly forgettable but very enjoyable time.

-- Advisory: This film contains strong language and hair-themed performance art.

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Reach Peter on

Peter Hartlaub is The San Francisco Chronicle's culture critic and co-host of Total SF. The Bay Area native, a former Chronicle paperboy, has worked at The Chronicle since 2000. He covers Bay Area culture, hosts the Total SF podcast and writes the archive-based Our San Francisco local history column. Hartlaub and columnist Heather Knight co-created the Total SF project and event series, engaging with locals to explore and find new ways to celebrate San Francisco.

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