

# Herald Arts & Life



Cooking with wine

D3

## 5 SHOWS TO WATCH SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

### DR. WHO

New, Space  
10 p.m., Saturday

### THE GREAT BRITISH BAKING SHOW

PBS, 8 p.m., Sunday

### GALAVANT

Pilot, premiere  
ABC, 9 p.m., Sunday

### BOB'S BURGERS

Midday Run, Fox  
10 p.m., Sunday

### THE CELEBRITY APPRENTICE

NBC, 10 p.m., Sunday

## CBC MINI-SERIES

'I like his spirit.  
He really is Moses.'



Lou Gossett Jr. is Daddy Moses and Lyriq Bent is Chekura in the six-hour CBC mini-series *The Book of Negroes*, based on Lawrence Hill's 2007 bestseller. Parts of the epic story were shot in Nova Scotia including Louisbourg, Cole Harbour, Shelburne, Lunenburg, and Oakfield Park. **JOE ALBLAS**

# Book of Negroes shoot thrills Oscar winner

Gossett Jr. says his role imparts 'a lot of faith,' Hill story aids in effort to fight racism

**ANDREA NEMETZ**  
ARTS & LIFE EDITOR  
✉ anemetz@herald.ca  
🐦 @CH\_AndreaNemetz

Lou Gossett Jr. is sitting in his trailer on the set of *The Book of Negroes*, cheerfully eating a banana and discussing his addiction to oysters.

The sunny day in early May is his last on the set of the six-hour TV miniseries based on Lawrence Hill's 2007 bestseller.

Despite freezing temperatures the previous month at the Fortress of Louisbourg, "which made it hard to be macho," he says he loved the Nova Scotia shoot among friendly people who made him feel so comfortable and welcome that he can't wait to return.

And the cast and crew loved the Oscar winner right back. They greet the tall, slim actor, whose smile warms all around him, with hugs and words of affection as he steps out onto the meticulously recreated Shelburne waterfront of the late 1700s.

In *The Book of Negroes*, which won the 2008 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, Aminata Diallo is kidnapped as a child from her home in western Africa and sold into slavery in North Carolina. She makes her way to New York,

Nova Scotia and London as she seeks freedom.

Producer Damon D'Oliveira of Toronto's Conquering Lion Pictures remembers watching Gossett play Fiddler in the 1977 miniseries *Roots* and describes him as "smooth as old scotch." He says casting Gossett as preacher Daddy Moses meant a lot to the production.

If the material is strong, he continues, you don't need a blockbuster budget to attract a top-flight cast like Oscar winners Gossett and Cuba Gooding Jr., English actor Ben Chaplin, Canadian stars Allan Hawco and Lyriq Bent, and American actor and producer Aunjanue Ellis, who plays Aminata.

"Actors want to work on good things," says D'Oliveira.

Gossett, who won an Emmy for his turn as Fiddler and an Oscar as Gunnery Sgt. Emil Foley in *An Officer and a Gentleman*, read *The Book of Negroes* for the first time after he was cast.

He calls it an incredible story with a lot of good lessons.

He is excited to play Daddy Moses, musing the opportunity is "like a delicious sandwich."

"I like his spirit. He really is Moses. It's his responsibility to keep the spirits up, to make sure everybody continues to have faith.

## ON THE SET

Arts & Life editor Andrea Nemetz spoke to Lou Gossett Jr. on the set of the film in Shelburne in early May. *The Book of Negroes* begins airing on CBC on Jan. 7 at 9 p.m.

And here I am, getting ready to be 78 and I have the same job, to keep people's spirits up and have faith."

To play the role, Gossett drew a little bit on *Roots'* Fiddler, who teaches English to young Kunta Kinte, but more on his great-grandmother and his grandparents, and added a bit of his own sauciness to the role.

"Everyone thinks I'm blind, but I can see a little and I have a nice little relationship with Aminata," he says with a twinkle in his eye, noting Aminata and Daddy Moses bond when she sees him put a little alcohol in his tea.

Though it's his last day on the set, the ebullient actor is filming his first scene in the movie, the one in which he meets Aminata

when she arrives in Shelburne by boat from New York City on a cold winter day.

"I have to make an impression on her, and the audience. (Daddy Moses) is a charmer, but he can't see, he's made do, he's got a lot of faith. He's the inspiration for everybody."

The Brooklyn-born actor and Ellis, who starred on TV's *The Mentalist* and *NCIS: Los Angeles* and in movies *Ray* and *The Help*, worked together on the 2007 thriller *Cover*.

Before *The Book of Negroes* arrived in Nova Scotia in April to begin 19 days of shooting, the miniseries shot in South Africa.

Gossett recalls working there with a great international crew: "South African, black and white, Australian, Scottish, British, American and Canadian, all working successfully together and it's beautiful to see. I wish the world was like that. It can be. It's going in that direction."

He says his main job today is the Eracism Foundation he established in 2006 because "racism gets in the way of us being friends, neighbours and partners . . . Nobody is better than anyone."

A keen student of history who says "school is never out," Gossett thinks *The Book of Negroes*, like

*Roots* before it, will help people become interested in the subject.

"They have the same stories. It's time to put all those stories on the air so our children can see our history."

"Our children need to know about their history. They need to know our mistakes, our pluses and minuses. They have to know. If we don't teach them, you get what you get."

"That's why I have the foundation, to get these kids to learn how to co-exist at a young age. To create an interdependence on one another so when they grow up, the negative stuff is not there."

The actor says he has no preference between contemporary and historical movies — he just likes wonderful characters and relevant stories. He says one of his favourite roles was playing Anwar Sadat in the 1983 miniseries *Sadat*, for which he was nominated for an Emmy.

"I'm a humble student of information. I'm all ears and eyes and I apply what I've seen and heard. Sometimes I see an answer that people who are so close to it can't see. After travelling around the planet, we should concentrate on freshening up the air, putting fish back in the ocean, replanting the rainforest, get back into balance of the pristine earth."