

Cuba Gooding, Jr., The 'Red Tails' Interview

Oscar-Winner opines on playing Tuskegee airman



CELEBRITY INTERVIEW

by Kam Williams

Cuba Gooding, Jr. was born in the Bronx, New York on January 2, 1968, to Shirley and Cuba, Sr., the lead singer of the R&B group The Main Ingredient. But after his deadbeat dad abandoned the family in 1974, Jr. and his siblings were raised in L.A. by his struggling single-mom. He ended up attending four different high schools, but was still popular enough to be voted class president at three of them.

Cuba's showbiz career began in 1984 as a breakdancer during the closing ceremonies of the Summer Olympics. He subsequently landed several bit roles on TV and in movies before enjoying a meteoric rise after his spellbinding performance as Tre in *Boyz n the Hood*.

In 1997, he won an Academy Award for his memorable outing as Rod "Show me the money!" Tidwell in *Jerry Maguire*, and was named one of the 50 Most Beautiful People in the World by *People Magazine* the same year. He has also earned two NAACP Image

Awards (for *Radio and Gifted Hands*), a Screen Actors Guild Award (for *Jerry Maguire*), and he even has his own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

A born-again Christian since the age of 13, Cuba married his childhood sweetheart, Sara Kapfer, whom he started dating in high school. They have three kids, Spencer, Mason and Piper. Here, he talks about his latest outing as Major Emmanuelle Stance in *Red Tails*, a World War II epoch about the legendary Tuskegee Airmen.

Kam Williams: Hi Cuba, thanks for the interview.

CG: Anytime, brother, how are you?

KW: Just fine. How're things with you?

CG: I'm good. It's easy when you're talking about a movie you're passionate about.

KW: What made you so passionate about *Red Tails*?

CG: Well, I had first heard this story of the Tuskegee Airmen back in 1992 when I did that HBO movie. At the time, I was a young man just finishing his education, and it frustrated me that I hadn't learned anything about these African-American pilots who had escorted bombers during World War II. It was one of those things where I was going, "What the hell! Why didn't I already know this?" So, to tackle that subject-matter for HBO was monumental in my



life. Of course, I moved on in my career and did other things, but when I heard that George Lucas was going to make a blockbuster about the Tuskegee Airmen, I was all over it. How often do we in Hollywood get an opportunity to tell a black tale on a scale like this, an action adventure? I knew it was going to be visually stunning, so, I told him, "Hey, I have to be involved even just to coach the actors or if I have to do Kraft Services." When I met with [director] Anthony Hemingway, we just connected. It was the longest dinner, with tears and everything. He recognized that the passion I had to be a part of the movie was the same passion that these men had to do their part for their country. George even called and asked me to narrate his new documentary for the History Channel called "Double Victory" which chronicles both the

Tuskegee Airmen's triumphs in the skies over Europe and the racism they had to deal with back in the States. So, it's been a fun ride, and I've been blessed to be involved in something that not only I'm passionate about but so is the man financing it.

KW: Larry Greenberg points out that you've played pilots and military men before, both real-life heroes like Carl Brashear in *Men of Honor* and Dorie Miller in *Pearl Harbor*, and also fictional characters in *A Few Good Men*, *Judgement*, *Outbreak* and other movies. He asks: Is this something you have a passion for?

CG: I guess so. I used to say, "No, no, I just got lucky being cast." But the older I get, the more I ask myself, "Cube, what's

See CUBA on page 8

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