



## JOHN AMOS A Man of Character(s)

John Amos. His face is easily recognizable. You may have seen it on the silver screen in co-starring roles in the blockbuster *Die Hard II* with Bruce Willis as the good man gone bad, the box office smash *Coming to America* with Eddie Murphy as the father of the bride, and in *Lock Up* with Sylvester Stallone and Donald Sutherland as the mean captain.

Or you may be more familiar with his roles on the small screen, where his best known works include his Emmy nominated portrayal of the adult Kunta Kinte in the epic mini-series, *ROOTS*. His television credits are too numerous to mention, although he considers his role as Gordy the Weatherman, on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, as being among his favorites; although not so much his role as the father, James Evans, in the hit-series, *Good Times*, when his rebuffed attempts to use his experiences as a writer to make the show less stereotypical eventually led to his departure. Other tv roles include his portrayal of Mayor Ethan Baker on *The District* on CBS; his role as Anthony Anderson's father in *All About The Andersons*, on the WB; and his appearances in *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* starring Will Smith, and *In the House* starring L.L. Cool J, and his recurring role with Emmy Award Winning *The West Wing* as Admiral Percy Fitzwallace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on NBC.

Or you may have seen him on stage, where his thought provoking roles in works created by Shakespeare, August Wilson, and Eugene O'Neill, among others, have received acclaim in England and America alike. John Amos made his theatrical debut in the Los Angeles production of *Norman, Is That You?* and was nominated by the Los Angeles Drama Critics for Best Actor.

But multitalented John Amos the man has accomplished so much more both stateside and abroad, where not only is he a respected movie, television, and an award winning stage actor...

John Amos is a director, with credit for two productions of the Bahamian Repertory Company, *Twelve Angry Men* and Zindel's tragic comedy *And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little*. He also served as Artistic Director in New Jersey, and his own eighteen year old Halley's Comet which as toured the world, and has received standing ovations from Washington, D.C. to Bermuda.

John Amos is a playwright and television writer. He started in the business as a writer for television on the *Leslie Uggam's Show*, a one-hour variety show, as a result of the Watts riot in 1968. Other credits include the Emmy Award-winning *Loman and Barkley Show*. And of course Halley's Comet, which will be performed this year during the W.C. Handy Music Festival.

John Amos is a philanthropist who has devoted much his time to his Halley's Comet Foundation, which provides positive alternatives to at risk young people through its nautical and maritime programs, often in conjunction with the United States Coast Guard, to expose children to sailing. He says the mission of his foundation is "a passion that comes from being both a father and a grandfather." He has a "68ft vessel that looks like a pirate ship...and captures children's imagination." Amos's goal is just that, to grab the attention and interest of the at-risk child. By at-risk he means, "those kids that society says you have one last shot to clean up your act, or it's going to be some type of penal situation. That's the kind of kid I want...society has just about had enough of him and he has just about had enough of life." He hopes by engaging them in teamwork and making them responsible for the hard work of a successful sail, that it will, "instill knowledge in that kid of who and what he/she can be...prove to them that their potential is unlimited."

He is a family man. The New Jersey native is the proud father of a daughter, Shannon, and son, K.C., and grandfather of Quiera Noel. K.C. is a director with a masters in live action film who was nominated for a Grammy for best direction of a country music video, while Shannon is an independent producer and vice president of marketing at Sony. Sharing the same passions, Amos and his children produced and released a film together called *The Watermelon Heist*, a story passed through generations of his family.

He is humble and giving. Mr. Amos considers himself one of the most fortunate people on earth. "I love my work, and I am grateful to GOD to have a profession that brings joy to so many". He has said, "The Halley's Comet Foundation is what really drives me in my life at this point... I have had a blessed career and have made my living doing drama, comedy and more. I do not wish to pursue an Oscar or other type of award. What drives me now is using my celebrity status and my love of sailing to change the lives of young people. This is not an original idea, there have been many programs like this since sailing began. What makes this different and personal for me is that the flagship for the foundation is a boat, the first sailing vessel I bought that I donated to the foundation. It is called Halley's Comet... The whole experience is very therapeutic."

The Handy Festival in cooperation with the University of North Alabama Summer Theatre Program proudly presents the critically acclaimed "Halley's Comet", written and directed by John Amos himself, which tells the funny, but moving story of an 87-year-old man who shares a lifetime of memories with the comet he had first seen over three quarters of a century before. The piece is described as follows:



*the show takes the audience on a journey from the turn of the 20th century to present day (while) Amos transforms himself into a variety of characters to show how the world has changed (during) the past century, including the advent of fast food, television, man on the moon, women's lib, air travel and technology.... Amos based the show on a personal experience. "As I was watching the comet in 1986, I was struck by the sight of an elderly man standing near me who kept chuckling to himself as he stared into the sky," he said. "It was as if he had found a long-lost friend, and I guessed that he had seen the comet when it appeared the last time in 1910... There were his kids and grandkids all around him, and it looked like he was telling the comet all about them. That's when I thought, wow, why can't I do a piece about a man telling Halley's Comet everything that happened since its last visit?" "From that brief encounter, Amos started to imagine all that the man must have lived through in the intervening years. So, borrowing from his own experience, he created characters for the production that has charmed audiences around the world. (reviews courtesy of John Amos bio packet.)*

Performances of *Halley's Comet* are dedicated to Alex Haley, a close friend of Amos who is perhaps best known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Roots*, a powerful human view of slavery. Says Mr. Amos, "Alex said that each time an elderly person dies, it's like a library burning down and that information is lost for all time." Through his central character, Mr. Amos preserves the voice of an African *griot* (an elder who recites history), who reminds mankind of the lessons, dreams, and values of the past, and guides him to a future filled with hope.

For this special presentation of Halley's Comet, Mr. Amos will be joined by very talented musical guests, Eric Kirkman and the Heart & Soul of Handy Choir. Tickets for the performance are \$23.00 for adults, \$18.00 for senior citizens, and \$13.00 for students, and are available at the Handy Headquarters, located at the Kennedy Douglass Art Center Annex in Florence, Alabama.

Tori Bailey, W.C. Handy Festival Chair