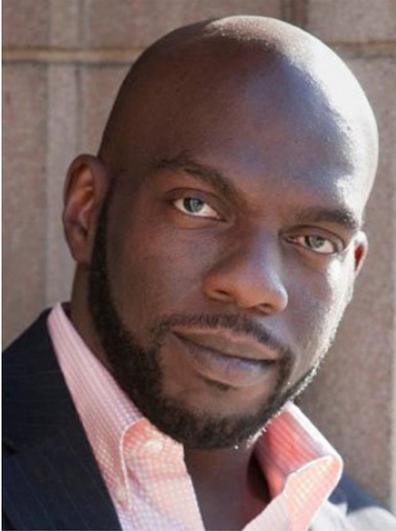


Omar Dorsey on new show 'Rake' and why 'Django Unchained' made him a better actor



By Brianna Gunter

Omar Dorsey has been very busy. Though the actor has been in the business for almost 20 years (he graduated from Georgia's Dekalb Center for the Performing Arts in 1994), appearances in TV shows like *Eastbound & Down* and movies like *Django Unchained* and *The Blind Side* have kept him more active than ever these past few years. And it doesn't look like things are slowing down anytime

soon. With his new show, *Rake*, premiering January 23 on FOX, Dorsey opened up to TheCelebrityCafe about working with Greg Kinnear, honing his acting skills on the set of *Django*, and why he wants to introduce more inner city kids to the arts.

TCC: So you are appearing in the upcoming Fox series, *Rake*. Since it is a brand new show, could tell us what it's about?

Omar Dorsey: *Rake* is about a lawyer played by Greg Kinnear, fabulously, and he's a guy who's a genius lawyer, but he has a lot of problems— he's in love with a prostitute. He often sees his ex-wife, but... he's just a degenerate. And I play his bookie, who's also his really good friend. So, you might see us just hanging out one minute, and the next minute I might have to beat him up. So, it's a really good concept, based on an Australian show by the same name.

TCC: So, it's interesting that you're working with Greg Kinnear. He's primarily been a film actor since the start of his career, whereas you have done a pretty consistent mix of television and movies. Once they were considered opposite worlds, but do you think there's still a big difference between film and TV actors since you've been a part of both?

OD: Not nowadays. A lot of film stars are actually coming to television. You know, the schedule is so good... You have a guy who wins an Oscar like Forest Whitaker, and the very next week he'll do something like [*Criminal Minds: Suspect Behavior*]. You have Idris Elba, who does, every year or so, these episodes for the BBC. But, you have people who are big-time movie stars who will go and do television, you know, even if it was just for cable or whatever. Now you have Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson doing a TV show for HBO— *True Detective*... Matthew McConaughey is a big-time movie star. So, you have a guy like that do television, and the lines are very blurred now. And the obvious is

that it makes for better television, but also, we have great actors, like [Kinnear] and others. And we have great storylines...

TCC: And since you've done both, do you have a preference? TV or movies?

OD: Well really, the nice thing about television is that you get to watch the characters grow as an actor. Like we're on episode seven of *Rake*, and I can see the tremendous growth in my character already. With film, it's already set in stone... We have 128 days, this is what we're going to do. You might see throughout the story, the character may grow, but you've already seen the growth as you wrapped those 128 days. With television, every week they bring in new storylines, and you're just seeing, "Oh okay, this is what it is. This is very interesting." That's what I like about television.

But what I like about film is, especially if you're shooting on location, you become a family. Everybody's staying there in a hotel or whatever, so the camaraderie and the energy and the togetherness is there, and it's always there. So, it's a little easier to work since you're always with each other.

TCC: Hmm. But speaking of television, you were recently on the last season of *Eastbound & Down*. What was it like working with Danny McBride?

OD: He is so good. He's the star of the show, but he's also a producer and primarily the writer. He's wearing so many hats for that show... And this is the guy who's been playing [the character, Kenny Powers] for four years. Once again, we've seen that character grow. I'm a huge fan of the show. I always loved it. I've been a fan of the show since the first time I watched the title... from the title all the way to the series finale. We saw... not a whole lifetime, but from the time he went out of baseball to the end of it, you know... when he has a wife and kids and they're living happily ever after, as happy as Kenny Powers can be. We saw that whole character arc. So, just to work with Danny McBride, man, it proved to me that I'm lazy. He does it so well.

TCC: Do you feel that [McBride] was a little more critical of the scenes you were working on, since he was wearing so many hats and looking at the writing and direction of each scene? Did he "cut" things more often or did he just kind of let things flow?

OD: He just let things breathe. Like, he's not verbal at all. He'll let it breathe. We'll have a scene, especially in a show like that with so much comedy and so many great comedic actors and comedians, period... It's amazing to me. He's not critical about anything at all, man. He's really good at what he does, especially on that show.

TCC: Did you know [McBride] prior to working with him?

OD: I'd met him a bunch of times. I met him when I was doing *Django* and he was doing *This is the End*, in New Orleans. We sat down and we talked a little bit. And I didn't know him the way I know him now. It wasn't like "hey!" But he knew who I was... but we weren't like really good friends or anything.

TCC: Right.

OD: But I'd met him a couple times, actually, you know, just to say "what's up" to him. Because I'm a really big fan of him, always have been. And one day I just told him that.

TCC: So, you did work on *Django*, and that's drastically different from *Eastbound & Down* just in tone and concept. But it also generated a lot of controversy when it came out. I mean, it was critically acclaimed, *Django Unchained*, but there was a certain level of controversy with it. Did you find that you had to face any of that? Did people make comments to you about it? Just how did you deal with that?

OD: Well, you know, when I met [Quentin Tarantino], when I met with him and he offered me the role, we sat and talked for 30, maybe 45 minutes. And he warned me. He was like, "Listen, it's going to be a great ride, but there's going to be a lot of criticism... are you up for the fight?" I was like, "Definitely. I'm definitely up for it."

You know, Quentin is my idol. I'll tell anybody this. I was just excited to be in *Django* because Quentin is my favorite director. He's the reason I'm working today...

But you know, any time you do anything of that subject matter and that point in history, it can become controversial. You know, especially with Quentin Tarantino's perspective, in Quentin Tarantino's world, is what it is, it can become controversy. So we already knew it, and I didn't get any of that [negative feedback] from anybody I talked to... but it was critically acclaimed, like you said, and it made a lot of money. You know, the audience loved. People who thought they weren't going to like it—like my friends said, "Hey man, thought I wasn't going to like it, but I loved it". And a lot of the criticism came from people who said, "I will never go see that movie."

TCC: Right. So you had a positive experience with it then? Working with Tarantino?

OD: It was the best experience of my life. I'll tell anybody that.

TCC: Great!

OD: But I worked hard. When you're talking about working with Jamie Foxx, Leonardo DiCaprio, Christoph Waltz, Walton Goggins, Kerry Washington, and working that caliber of actor every day for five months— if you don't get better, you're not alive. Just to watch those men and women act, it changed a lot of things with me, you know, and knowing what I'm doing is sitting there and talking with DiCaprio or Washington, or talking to Walton Goggins every day, and he's telling me his process, what I need to do to become a better actor. And listening to Tarantino himself, you know, we sat back at two or three o'clock in the morning just

talking film and all of that, that was the best experience I've ever had as an actor... and it wasn't the stardom of the movie, it was the learning from those people. And [Samuel L. Jackson], he's a god, know what I'm saying? He always has been... And I just took advantage of what I was doing, and I knew exactly what company I was in. And I was saying to myself, "Man, if I can't become a better actor after doing this movie, then I'm not doing it right."

TCC: So, if you weren't acting right now, if acting wasn't an option, what would you be doing?

OD: I'd probably be in the inner city. I'd be just coaching football, teaching music, teaching something for inner city kids, man. That's something I'll probably end up doing later on in life. I'll open up a charter school or something, probably in Atlanta, Georgia. Something with inner city kids so they could have—especially with funding for the arts being taken out of schools. I would love to, if I have the money someday, open up a charter school or one of those. I come from an arts school, so I would love to bring that back.

TCC: Does a performing arts school make all the difference then, in the lives of young people who want to act?

OD: Well, it's a different life. It's something different. I was 12 years old when I first heard a Beatles song, you know. This was in Decatur, Georgia, and there wasn't nobody playing the Beatles. And the day that I heard the Beatles was the day my life changed. It was like "Oh God! It's something else!"... or the day that I first went to the [DeKalb Center for the Performing Arts]. It's just something else that's out there that a lot of people don't ever get a chance to see. I mean, I'm out here in Los Angeles, and I talk to kids a lot of times when I go to inner city communities, and they don't even go to Hollywood. They're like, "It's not for me. I'm not going anywhere. There's nowhere for me to go." If you go to Brooklyn in New York, you know, they don't ever go to Manhattan because they don't have to. But when you see that there's a whole world out there, man, that could change everything in a kid. It could change their opportunities.