

A Tête-à-Tête with the César Winner multilingual actor Omar Sy

Written by Kam Williams

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[Omar Sy](#) is an award-winning actor, comedian, comic writer and television personality who has established himself as an international star. With over 30 screen credits on his impressive resume, [Omar Sy](#) became a household name after the smash hit *The Intouchables*, his third collaboration with directors Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano.

His performance in that film earned Omar a César for Best Actor in 2012, and the movie went on to gross over \$425 million worldwide (the second most successful movie in France). And he subsequently re-teamed with Nakache and Toledano in 2014 for *Samba*. This December, he will be seen in Hugo Gélin's *Demain Tout Commence*.

Over the last several years, Omar Sy parlayed his success in Europe into Hollywood productions, starring in *X-Men: Days of Future Past* with Hugh Jackman, Jennifer Lawrence, and Michael Fassbender, as well as Colin Trevorrow's *Jurassic World* with Chris Pratt. Both films went on to achieve the highest worldwide box office grosses in their respective franchises.

More recently, he's starred in John Wells' *Burnt* with Bradley Cooper, Sienna Miller, Lily James, and Alicia Vikander, as well as in Roschdy Zem's French-language period piece *Chocolat*.

. Here, Omar Sy talks about playing Christoph Bouchard opposite Tom Hanks in Ron Howard's

Inferno

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[The following interview is the first one posted in Canada]

Kam Williams: Hi Omar [Sy].. I'm honored to have this opportunity to speak with you.

Omar Sy: My pleasure, Kam [Williams]...

KW: What interested you in *Inferno*?

OS: It was the fact that I would have an opportunity to work with a wonderful and amazing director in Ron Howard, and with a legendary actor in Tom Hanks at the same time. Also, I don't want to spoil the story, but I liked the script and the idea of playing a character without a smile for the first time.

KW: Especially since you started out as a comedian.

OS: Yes, as actors, we're always looking for some challenges, and playing a character like Christoph, with a twist, in a very dark thriller, was a big challenge for me. And on top of everything, it was in English.

KW: I enjoyed this film more than the first two in the franchise, primarily because it had more action and less talk..

OS: Ron [Howard] made *Rush* prior to *Inferno*. *Rush* had a lot of action scenes. Maybe he learned from that experience. Also, perhaps because so many people are interested in the issue of overpopulation, we needed less dialogue explaining it, since they were already familiar

with the topic.

KW: What would you say is the movie's message?

OS: The movie explores the issue of overpopulation, and the fact that there are several ways to solve it. Each character has his solution. I think the movie's message is that to solve the problem, the humanity community needs to unite and find a global answer.

KW: Editor/Legist Patricia Turnier [of megadiversities.com] says: I consider you to be the Sidney Poitier of France. How did you feel when you won the Best Actor César in 2012 for *The Intouchables*, which made you the first Black French actor to achieve the honor?

OS: When I won, it was really a special moment in my life, and I knew it would change everything after that. But I never thought about being the first Black actor to win, even though everybody else talked about that. If I stop to think as a Black actor, people will see me differently. If I play as a Black actor, people will only see that. I think my key was to perform as an actor, not as a Black actor. And after winning the César, I was an actor with a César. there are many more adjectives to describe who I am. I'm not only Black. When I won the César, I was, first of all, an actor. I have to say, it's humanity first. That's the future. We have to stop seeing the skin color. I believe that's the most powerful way to change mentalities and behavior. I had to stop seeing myself in such a limited way. I started doing that as a teenager, and here I am today, because of that. I believe that's the best way to change things for Black people.

KW: Patricia [Turnier] also says: You probably met naysayers at the beginning of your career. How did you manage to stay focused and not be deterred by their negativity? In addition, what message do you have for aspiring actors who want to achieve a successful longevity like you?

OS: It's not difficult to move forward when you have nothing to lose. Right? At the time, I had nothing to lose. So, even when people were trying to degrade me, I couldn't let them take the only thing I had, which was my dream. I had to move forward and, thank God, I kept trying.

KW: Finally, Patricia [Turnier] says: You have the great ability to play in movies in different countries, given that you speak several languages. The late Senegalese director [Ousmane Sembène](#) was one of my favorite African [filmmakers](#) . Would you be interested in the future to perform in Wolof and play a historical figure such as [Léopold Sédar Senghor](#) or [Cheikh Anta Diop](#) from Senegal?

OS: Of course! [Cheikh Anta Diop](#) is not a Wolof. He is Fula, and I am Fula. I am fluent in Fula, so it would be easier for me to play Diop. As I said, actors are always looking for new territory, and playing an African figure would be really a great symbol for me because of my Senegalese roots. It would make my parents proud, so of course I'd do it.

KW: Ling-Ju Yen asks: What is your earliest childhood memory?

OS: Eating, singing and dancing at a family reunion. I remember a lot of people celebrating in a very small space. When I think of my parents' home, that is the ambience that comes to mind. I loved that, and it will always be a part of my life

KW: Was there a meaningful spiritual component to your childhood?

OS: Yes, because of my African roots, my parents raised us with a philosophy to always believe that there was something bigger than us, beyond.

KW: When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

OS: [Laughs heartily] It's difficult to describe yourself. You will always be wrong. Only your family or friends can describe you properly. We all have a wrong idea of ourselves. I am always changing, and I will continue to change. So, I never try to describe, define or judge myself.

KW: If you could have one wish instantly granted, what would that be for?

OS: To stay happy!

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

OS: No. Everything's been asked. I've been interviewed by so many journalists from many different countries.

KW: Harriet Pakula-Teweles asks: With so many classic films being redone, is there a remake you'd like to star in?

OS: Yes, but I'm not prepared to share it in the papers. I will do it. it's just a matter of time.

KW: Judyth Piazza asks: What key quality do you believe all successful people share?

OS: Yes, they're all dreamers. A dream becomes an idea and then something concrete. I think it all starts with a dream.

KW: What's the craziest thing you've ever done?

OS: I can not say in a newspaper. [Laughs out loud]

KW: Larry Greenberg asks: Do you have a favorite movie monster?

OS: The shark in *Jaws*. That was the first monster that really, really scared me. After seeing it, I learned how to swim, because I wanted to be able to escape.

KW: The Anthony Mackie question: Is there anything that you promised yourself you'd do if you became famous, that you still haven't done yet?

OS: No, because it was really simple. My goals were to be happy and to make things easier for my parents, which I think I did.

KW: The Viola Davis question: What's the biggest difference between who you are at home as opposed to the person we see on the red carpet?

OS: Maybe I'm a little more serious at home because I want to instill good values in my kids. At home, there is often no time for jokes. On the red carpet, I'm always joking.

KW: The Tavis Smiley question: How do you want to be remembered?

OS: I just want to be a good memory, especially for my kids.

KW: How do you juggle five kids and your career?

OS: I have a wonderful wife. [Laughs]

KW: Finally, what's in your wallet?

OS: My California driver's license and a credit card. That's it!

KW: Thanks again for the time, Omar [Sy], and best of luck with the film.

OS: Thank you so much, Kam [Williams].

Filmography

2000 *Granturismo*, Role: Voice

2001 *La Tour Montparnasse Infernale*, Role: Taxi

La concierge est dans l'ascenseur

Omar et Fred

2002 *Le Boulet*, Role: A Malian

Asterix & Obelix: Mission Cleopatra, Role: Painter

Samourais, Role: Tyson

The Race, Role: UNO Sergeant

Ces jours heureux, Role: Brice

Si j'étais lui, Role: Gabriel 2003 *La Beuze*, Role: Michel Dembélé 2004 *Le*

Carton

Role: Lorenzo

Coming-out, Role: Max 2005–12 *SAV des émissions* □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ 2006

Those Happy

Days, Role:

Joseph

Les multiples, Role: Jimmy 2007 *Garage Babes*, Role: Hamidou

Moot-Moot, Role: Isidore 2008 *Seuls two*, Role: Sammy Bouglioni 2009

Micmacs

, Role: Remington

Arthur and the Revenge of Maltazard, Role: Snow

Lascars, Role: Narbé

Tellement proches, Role: Bruno

King Guillaume, Role: Jean Peter

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Safari, Role: Youssouf Hammal
Envoyés très spéciaux, Role: Jimmy
La Loi de Murphy, Role: Father Joachim Ortega 2010 *Allez raconte!*, Role: Voice
Le pas Petit Poucet, Role: Grand Poucet
Histoires de vies, Role: Mo 2011 *Les Tuche*, Role: The Monk
The Intouchables, Role: Bakary "Driss" Bassari
Fish'n Chips, Role: Fish 2012 *De l'autre côté du périph*, Role: Ousmane Diakhaté
Les Seigneurs, Role: Wéké N'Dogo
Mais qui a retué Pamela Rose?, Role: Mosby
Crazy Pink Limo, Role: The Philosopher
Bref, Role: Himself 2013 *Mood Indigo*, Role: Nicolas
Good People, Role: Khan 2014 *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, Role; Bishop
Samba, Role: Samba Cissé
Mune: Guardian of the Moon, Role: Sohone 2015 *Jurassic World*, Role: Barry
Burnt, Role: Michel 2016 *Chocolat*, Role: ☐ Clown Chocolat
The Angry Birds Movie, Role: Red
Norm of the North, Role: Norm
Inferno, Role: Christoph Bouchard
Demain tout commence, Role: Samuel 2017 *Knock* 2018 *Arctic Justice: Thunder Squad*

Source: Wikipedia.org

About the author of this interview: Kam Williams is a syndicated film and book critic who writes for 100+ publications around the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean. He is a member of the ☐ *New York Film Critics Online*, the *NACCP Image Awards Nominating Committee*, and *Rotten Tomatoes*. He is a contributor to TheLoop21.com, eurweb.com and so on. He is also a columnist for our webmag www.megadiversities.com. One of his interviews made the cover of *Heart and Soul* magazine last fall. One of Kam Williams' interviews with Spike Lee is included in the 2002 book entitled *Spike Lee: Interviews (Conversations with filmmakers)*

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. This book collects the best interviews of Lee. Some of Kam Williams' articles are translated into Chinese and Spanish. In 2008, he was Voted Most Outstanding Journalist of the Decade by the

Disilgold Soul Literary Review

. In addition, he has been honored at the U.N. (for BMORENEWS GLOBAL FORUM ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT) on June 15th 2012 by the Foundation for the Support of the United Nations (FSUN). Williams is an erudite Attorney who holds a BA in Black Studies from Cornell University, an MA in English from Brown University, an M.B.A. from The Wharton School, and a J.D. from Boston University. Recently, he was featured on this website:

<http://www.caribbeanlifeneews.com/stories/2015>

. Kam Williams is a member of the Bar in NJ, NY, CT, PA, MA & US Supreme Court bars. He lives in Princeton, (New Jersey) with his wife and son. Kam Williams can be reached at

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