

COMING 2 AMERICA - An American Marvel!

Eddie Murphy reprises his role as the ever-charming Prince Akeem and leads an all-star cast for the much-anticipated sequel, COMING 2 AMERICA.

Three decades and three beautiful daughters later, Akeem prepares to take over the reigns of his homeland of Zamunda. As antiquated gender roles are being challenged within his home, he is also faced with a new dilemma on the outside. While tradition has always required a male heir to take the throne, Akeem feels torn between following custom and creating change. While considering his eldest daughter, Meeka, who is the strongest choice, his rival, General Izzi, is plotting a union of dynasties with his son, Idi, as Meeka's groom. Meanwhile, an ailing King Joffer delivers the shocking news that Akeem has a long-lost son, Lavelle, in Queens.

After an unexpected turn of events, Akeem, now the King of Zamunda, along with his trusted confidante, Semmi, return to New York to tend to this unfinished royal family business. Upon finding Lavelle, Akeem convinces him to travel to Zamunda in order to learn the customs of royal life in preparation for becoming the heir to the throne. While Akeem smooths tensions with his wife and three daughters, General Izzi decides that his daughter, Bopoto, will become Lavelle's wife. All the while, Lavelle is falling in love with his royal barber, Mirembe, who has dreams of owning her own barbershop.

Arsenio Hall returns as Semmi, alongside James Earl Jones as King Jaffe Joffer, Shari Headley as Lisa, John Amos as Cleo McDowell, Louie Anderson as Maurice and the legendary barbershop crew who sparked the laughs in 1988 for COMING TO AMERICA. Jermaine Fowler, Leslie Jones, Tracy Morgan, KiKi Layne, Wesley Snipes, Teyana Taylor, Nomzamo Mbatha, Bella Murphy, Akiley Love and Rotimi are all aboard for this new hilarious adventure, which features appearances by Vanessa Bell Calloway, Paul Bates, Garcelle Beauvais, Clint Smith, Luenell, Michael Blackson and so many more.

Amazon Studios presents, in association with Paramount Pictures and New Republic Pictures, presents COMING 2 AMERICA, an Eddie Murphy Production/Misher Films Production, directed by Craig Brewer. COMING 2 AMERICA releases globally on Prime Video on March 5, 2021.

REWIND: ONCE UPON A TIME, IN 1988

Where in New York can one find a woman with
grace, elegance, taste and culture...a woman suitable for a king?

– Semmi

Just over three decades ago, on June 26, 1988, to be exact, Eddie Murphy introduced moviegoers to Prince Akeem, the heir to the throne of the magical land of Zamunda. Having lived an ever-charmed existence, complete with rose bearers and a devoted team of royal bathers, Akeem awakens on his birthday, ready to embark on his 21st year of life.

Upon meeting his beautiful, dutiful, soon-to-be bride, Imani (Vanessa Bell Calloway), Akeem immediately realizes that unlike his parents, King Jaffe Joffer (James Earl Jones) and Queen Aoleon (the late Madge Sinclair), a traditional, arranged marriage is not what he wants.

Instead, he seeks a woman who thinks for herself and has a strong sense of self. Most important, he wants to fall in love. Eager to see the world and expand his horizons (or as his father believes, to “sow your royal oats”), he’s given approval to travel abroad for 40 days with his trusted confidante, Semmi (Arsenio Hall).

When Akeem informs Semmi that his intention for the trip to the United States is to find his queen, he flips a coin to decide whether to travel to New York (heads) or Los Angeles (tails). The Zamundan coin that bears Akeem’s image lands on heads. When they glance over a map to ponder where in New York he might find his royal match, they settle on the borough of Queens.

And so, began the fantastical comedy that was COMING TO AMERICA.

From the moment Akeem and Semmi touch down in New York – dressed head-to-toe in their African finest, with an overflowing mass of designer luggage – they’re determined to fit in.

“We are not rich. We’re ordinary African students,” Akeem tells their cab driver, who is among the first New Yorkers to give them the side-eye. The real fun begins when the royal duo arrives in Queens, starting with the handful of “real Americans” they encounter – the legendary, all-knowing My-T-Sharp barbershop crew, Clarence and Saul (Eddie Murphy), Morris (Arsenio Hall) and Sweets (Clint Smith).

On his quest to find love, Akeem drags Semmi to local nightclubs and church functions, the latter is where he spots Lisa McDowell (Shari Headley). Determined to win her heart, Akeem decides that he can get closer to her by working at her family’s fast food restaurant, McDowell’s, owned and operated by her dad, Cleo (John Amos) and located on Queens Boulevard.

Between mopping floors and emptying the trash, he takes his time getting to know her, meanwhile, she has no idea that he is rich, royal and has his own currency, literally. The pair take long walks and talk for hours, which is how their friendship develops into love. And while Akeem was smitten from the start, he is overjoyed to learn that Lisa has fallen for him, not as a prince, but as a man.

After his parents arrive in Queens to summon him and Semmi home, Akeem confesses his love for Lisa, which his mother approves of and eventually convinces the King to follow suit. But Akeem makes it clear to everyone that even without the blessing of his parents, he’s ready and willing to relinquish his royal life to be with the love of his life.

In true fairytale fashion, Akeem and Lisa marry in a lavish ceremony and ride off into the Zamundan sunset.

ZAMUNDA, 2021

Today, we celebrate 30 years of Zamundan prosperity,
30 years of service to our great nation...
and 30 years of delicious fast food.

– Akeem

Akeem is awakened by his dedicated servant, Oha, with Lisa by his side. While the couple begin their day in a royal way, this particular day is very special for them as it’s their 30th anniversary!

One-by-one, their three daughters, Tinashe, Omma and Meeka, greet them warmly and everyone smiles. Along with celebrating the couple’s anniversary, the day marks 30 years of

Zamundan prosperity, service and fast food, by way of McDowell's Zamunda, so there is a lot to be happy about.

And so, begins COMING 2 AMERICA.

The much-anticipated sequel follows the ever-unfolding story of the Joffers, the royal family of the land of Zamunda. While the passage of time has resulted in a few changes in the country, some traditions, especially inside the palace, are stuck in the past. As King Jaffe Joffer nears the end of his life, the spotlight turns to Prince Akeem and the inevitable transfer of power. There's also the burning question of who will become his heir.

Akeem and Lisa have settled into a cozy life, but like most families, there are the occasional disagreements to settle. Akeem and Lisa's evolution as husband-and-wife, parents and soon-to-be elders is both relatable and universal.

"In COMING TO AMERICA, an African prince travels to America to find a regular girl and he brings her back to make her his princess. It's a modern fairytale that a lot of people love and also, it was the very first time they ever had a movie with Black folks, where you had kings and queens," Eddie Murphy says. "This film is a really cool continuation of that story and I want people to have a great experience while watching it."

Director Craig Brewer is among the many people who still love the first film.

"The real benefit of making a sequel to a classic like COMING TO AMERICA 30 years later is that you get into the territory of your characters having lived lives," notes Brewer, who saw the original film, which was his grandmother's favorite, in theaters as a teenager. "With Akeem, he's watching his kids grow up and have their own opinions and also, he now carries the weight of being the king of his own castle. I knew those were interesting elements that we could bring to the story, along with the laughter. What might surprise many people is that there's a lot of heart and soul to the movie."

In life, as in art, timing is key. According to producer Kevin Misher, the sequel came together when Murphy felt the time was right. "When taking on the sequel to a legendary property like the original COMING TO AMERICA, there's a certain obligation as a filmmaker because you have multiple generations of people who both revere it and regard it as their own," he says. "So, you can't think about doing anything related to COMING TO AMERICA unless Eddie Murphy decides that it's time to tell the story. And at this point, he decided that the time had come to revisit Akeem as an older man with a family."

The journey to bringing COMING 2 AMERICA to fruition began with a phone call from Murphy to screenwriter Barry W. Blaustein, who, along with his writing partner, David Sheffield, has collaborated with the actor since his early days on Saturday Night Live. In addition to COMING TO AMERICA, on which they served as co-producers, the duo also penned screenplays for Murphy's box-office hits including BOOMERANG, THE NUTTY PROFESSOR, THE NUTTY PROFESSOR II: THE KLUMPS. For COMING 2 AMERICA, Murphy created the characters, while Blaustein and Sheffield crafted the story and co-wrote the screenplay with Kenya Barris.

"I got a call from Eddie, out of nowhere, and he said, I think I have a way of doing the sequel," remembers Blaustein. "After he gave me a brief synopsis of the idea, I was interested, and he said, 'I want you and David to write it.'" That was four years ago.

David Sheffield remembers their initial conversations with Murphy, about shaping the story. "Early on, we talked about how everyone would want to see what's going on with Akeem

and Lisa and we decided that they should be happily married, and we gave them three daughters,” he notes. “We also planted the seeds about there being a feminist statement with the oldest daughter assuming her rightful place and Kenya Barris took that and ran with it. He did such a great job and we’re honored to share a credit with him.”

Barris recalls his fondness for the first film. “Eddie was one of the biggest stars in the world when *COMING TO AMERICA* came out and he took the opportunity to create a land where Black people were grand,” Barris adds. “The film is a Black fairytale and it pays tribute to our lineage, our heritage and the royalty and realness of who we are, which means a lot. Then, of course, there’s the fact that it was one of the funniest and most beloved movies of all time.”

The goal was to expand the story, yes, but also bring back as much of the original cast as possible. “For Eddie and Arsenio, I think the film just builds off of the friendship they’ve had forever. It was also fun trying to figure out how to put all the different characters back in there and we tried to include everybody. If you were in the original movie for five seconds, we thought, ‘We’ll try to get you in there,’” laughs Blaustein.

Speaking of the original cast, Murphy reteams with Arsenio Hall and is joined by James Earl Jones, Shari Headley, John Amos and Louie Anderson, as well as Vanessa Bell Calloway, Paul Bates and Garcelle Beauvais.

“Of the countless roles I’ve played, King Jaffe Joffer remains one of the most enjoyable and iconic characters I’ve had the pleasure of portraying,” notes James Earl Jones. “With his regal and commanding presence as the ruler of Zamunda, I reveled at bringing King Joffer to life for *COMING TO AMERICA* in 1988. And now, over 30 years later, I am honored to reprise my role for *COMING 2 AMERICA*. It means the world to me to be a part of this beloved franchise.”

He continues: “Working with Eddie Murphy has been an indelible experience. This powerful cast, both reuniting the original and welcoming the newcomers, represent the essence of Black royalty.”

As Hall notes, not much has changed for his character, Semmi. “The thing I love about playing Semmi is that he’s so totally different from me. We have different egos and dispositions toward life,” Hall says. “Semmi is that guy who’s always around and even though he’s a pain in the ass, no one ever thinks about getting rid of him. Everybody’s definitely on his case, though.”

For Shari Headley, reprising her role as Lisa left her full of emotion. “For decades, I’ve lived with this character and this film that fans love so much,” she begins, “and I can’t think of another movie that after 30 years, has come up with a sequel with the original cast. This is history, it’s iconic, and I feel so blessed to be a part of it. It was great to see everyone together.”

As fans of the original film remember, Lisa worked for her dad, Cleo (John Amos), at their family-run fast food spot, McDowell’s, so it would only be fitting that Cleo move to Africa to launch McDowell’s Zamunda.

“It’s very rare in this business that you get a chance to work with actors you respect,” Amos notes, “but then to work with those actors again, after thirty years, is beyond belief – it’s just a blessing.”

Admittedly, the veteran actor had to focus on maintaining a straight face when sharing scenes with Murphy. “Part of working with Eddie Murphy is controlling your emotions so you can play the moment as it should be played without cracking up at the wrong time,” he notes. The two actors shared a dramatic exchange in the film as well. “Cleo has to help Akeem continue on as the ruler of Zamunda, despite his losses and the pain he might be feeling. That moment enhances the story appreciably.”

As for Maurice (Louie Anderson), after decades of putting in work, he's finally graduated from washing lettuce to frying fries and now, serves as assistant manager at McDowell's Zamunda. And though he's earned his stripes, he's pretty much the same ol' guy, thanks to comedy great, Louie Anderson.

And there certainly could not be a sequel without Reverend Brown (Hall), Randy Watson (Murphy) and his legendary band, "Sexual Chocolate", or the My-T-Sharp barbershop crew, who are still cutting up and clipping hair on the same block, in the same spot, despite all of the gentrification in Queens. Seeing Soul Glo hair products displayed around the shop makes it seem as though time has stood still for Clarence and Saul (Murphy), Morris (Hall) and Sweets (Clint Smith), but they're not short on sharing their flagrant opinions about current events.

"It's like getting a chance to step into a time machine, but like the best time machine, ever," Barris says of watching Murphy and Hall slip back into the multiple characters that are so beloved by fans. "Knowing that they're friends in real life and actually seeing them work together again, you can really feel all of that energy in their scenes."

Along with the characters fans know well, COMING 2 AMERICA features a plethora of new faces from Leslie Jones and Tracy Morgan, to KiKi Layne, Jermaine Fowler, Nomzamo Mbatha and so many more. "We're reintroducing the audience to Akeem and Semmi," says Misher, "plus their trip to America is about bringing a whole new generation of characters back to Zamunda. It's a mix of younger and older, famous and breaking actors, all of whom the audience is going to be thrilled about and laugh like they've never laughed before."

LAVELLE, THE PRINCE FROM QUEENS

My time has come, my son...
You must heed my words before I'm gone.
The throne is passed to a male heir.
It appears that your shortcomings in masculinity have turned out to be unfounded.
It is true...you have a son, Akeem.

– King Jaffe Joffer

It is a long-standing Zamundan tradition that the throne be passed to a male heir. With assistance from the all-knowing Baba, advisor to King Joffer and a welcomed new character played by an unrecognizable Arsenio Hall, it comes to light that Akeem has, indeed, sired a male child. Ironically, Semmi doesn't seem so surprised.

Enter Lavelle Junson of Queens, son of Mary and Akeem, nephew of Uncle Reem.

Lavelle is introduced to the story on his 30th birthday. Having grown weary of side-hustling as a ticket scalper for his Uncle Reem (Tracy Morgan), Lavelle is seeking stable employment, by way of Mr. Duke, heir to the Duke & Duke empire (a nod to TRADING PLACES and COMING TO AMERICA). We find him also searching for his life's purpose with ambitions of his own. Lavelle meets his father outside of Madison Square Garden and much to his surprise learns that he is royalty, which is news that makes his family quite happy. But before he can get a taste of royal life, he has to travel to Zamunda to take the intense, three-part princely tests.

“One of the things about COMING TO AMERICA was that it was a classic fish out of water story,” says Misher. “With Akeem and Semmi coming back to America 30 years later and Lavelle and his family dropping into the wonderful and picturesque world of Zamunda, we now have two fish out of water stories happening in this movie.”

For Jermaine Fowler, portraying Lavelle is a dream come true. “To say that the original COMING TO AMERICA had an influence on me feels like an understatement,” he says. “That first movie is such a milestone in cinema and it inspired me so much, but not just me. There are many generations of actors, comedians and make-up artists who were inspired, too. And now, to be in this film, playing the son of Eddie Murphy, who is my favorite comedian, is just surreal.”

When describing his character, Fowler is thoughtful. “What’s interesting is that Lavelle has always been this guy who wanted something more out of life,” he notes, “but he just wasn’t sure what that thing was until his estranged dad tells him, ‘You’re the Prince of Zamunda.’ It all happens so quickly for him. Even though some people think that reaching a certain status changes you, I think it only emphasizes who you really are. Lavelle is a sweetheart who wants to help other people and what he learns is that money isn’t the answer. I think audiences are going to enjoy seeing who he really is.”

When Lavelle meets the royals, he has to put in work to win them over, starting with his three younger sisters, all of whom are regal, whip-smart and can spar with their dad like pros. It’s from Meeka that he catches the most heat. After all, she has trained her whole life to be heir to the throne.

“I love how passionate she is,” says KiKi Layne of Meeka. “I love the fight she has within her, both physically and spiritually. Meeka is a young woman who is not willing to accept traditions, but instead, she seeks to expand the assumptions about what women are capable of in the world. I think that’s a message a lot of people will connect with.” And about flexing Meeka’s physical prowess, Layne was all for it. “You know, getting in there with Eddie Murphy was a lot of fun,” she says of their sparring scene. “I got to whoop him – a lil’ bit!”

Omma, the middle daughter, played by Bella Murphy (daughter of Eddie), is calm, cool and as she notes, “royal, but not too stuffy. Omma is the type of person who analyzes a situation before she reacts.”

Starring in the film is a first for the budding actress, who saw the original film when she was just 11 years old. “I remember it being really funny to watch,” Murphy notes, “and it shaped a lot of my humor, too. I’m really passionate about pursuing acting, so when my dad told me about this part, I was excited about auditioning and also, training for the role. It was fun to do it all with him.”

Then there’s the baby of the Joffer bunch. “I’m kind of the smartest child in the family and am always the one who’s having a little bit more fun than I’m supposed to,” says 12 year old Akiley Love of Tinashe, who assists her new brother with learning about their shared ancestry. And while the young performer makes her big screen debut in the film, she’s no stranger to the camera. In fact, she’s hosted her own YouTube show, Do It Yourself Girl! – DIYG with Akiley, which she also wrote, produced and directed.

Though the new prince needs some time to adjust to royal life and the dynamics of his new family, someone who settles right in is his mother, Mary. When it came time to cast the role, screenwriters Sheffield and Blaustein had the ideal person in-mind.

“We said, ‘What about Leslie Jones?’” remembers Sheffield.

Blaustein laughs in agreement. “Yes, it was the only time we’ve ever written a casting suggestion!” he says.

“It’s been thirty years since the first film, so I thought the sequel could only be good with the whole original cast,” Leslie Jones admits. “When I heard that everybody was back, I was like, ‘Oh it’s going to be so good because we want to know what happened with Akeem and Lisa, like did they live happily ever after...are they still rich?’ All of that! So, I thought it was a great idea and I’m excited to be a part of it.”

Mary is all about her family, especially her son, who she wants to be happy in his life. When she discovers that he’s royalty, she makes it her mission to ensure that he’s treated as such, even if it means ruffling a few feathers. As for what she and her crew, including her sister-friend, Olivia (standup comedian Luenell) and cousins played by Rodney Perry and Navv Greene, add to the storyline, Jones notes, “We’re bringing the energy of Queens, where it all started. I feel like Lisa has missed Queens, so bringing Queens to Zamunda was an element that was needed.”

Tracy Morgan, who, like Murphy and Jones, is a SNL alum, is appreciative of the opportunity to realize a professional dream. “I’ve been waiting my whole career to work with Eddie and now, I have a brick in the wall of the COMING TO AMERICA franchise,” he says. “When I look at the first film and then, to be a part of this one, yeah, I have a brick in this wall.”

While Lavelle is trying to find himself, he also finds unexpected love. “With the original film, there were a lot of firsts,” notes Sheffield. “It was one of the first major Black romantic comedies and also, it was the first where an African royal family was depicted on film. It was such a warm romantic comedy, so we definitely wanted to keep that sweetness with the sequel, so it had to be about young lovers this time.”

“Their chemistry is built around him learning what it means to be a man of Zamunda and her determination to pursue the bigger dreams she has for herself,” says Nomzamo Mbatha. “When I found out that I was going to be in the film, it was the most incredible moment and feeling because it was literally ‘coming to America’ for a girl like myself, coming all the way from South Africa.” As for what the original film meant to her, Mbatha adds, “When the first film came out, I would say that Africa wasn’t that visible to the American culture. If anything, it was a thought like, ‘This is what we imagine Africa to look like. Since then, the internet has literally opened up the world, so we know what Africa looks like, but now we want to know what it would feel like if it was home.’”

THE CLASH OF TWO DYNASTIES

It’s better to be bound by blood and marriage,
than be divided by blood and war.

– General Izzi

For movie fans who have come to know Wesley Snipes for bringing the drama and the action to the big screen, it will be surprising to see him in COMING 2 AMERICA. As General Izzi, the fearless leader of Nexdoria, Snipes definitely holds his own alongside an ensemble cast of comedians.

As the changing of the guards unfolds for the Joffer family, their seemingly never-ending rivalry with neighboring nation, Nexdoria, continues to flare, complete with heavy doses of

humor, suspense and even, dance. With his devoted army in tow, General Izzi stirs the pot at each and every opportunity.

Tensions between the two countries were sparked over 30 years ago, back when Akeem left General Izzi's sister, Imani, at the altar and jetted off to America to find his true love. Since that time, there has been mayhem, with the General becoming laser-focused on uniting the dynasties through marriage somehow, someday or else.

"General Izzi is a man who is diplomatic in his own way," Wesley Snipes says of his character. "He finds ways of convincing you to do something and he can make it easy or he can make it hard. What he wants is to unify Zamunda and Nexdoria so that all of Africa can prosper."

Being a part of the film is an experience the actor has looked forward to for a long time. "Oh man, I've wanted to do this since the first film. Actually, I auditioned for COMING TO AMERICA (for the character of Daryell, which eventually went to Eriq La Salle) and made it to the final callbacks," he recalls. "It just so happens that we came full circle and I am overjoyed to be a part of this production and the legacy of this iconic film."

As Snipes notes, finding his comedy groove was pretty seamless, especially with Murphy, with whom he co-starred in DOLEMITE IS MY NAME. "I'm such a fan of Eddie and have seen so much of his work that I have some familiarity of his tones and his paces. I tried to find some harmony with that and not laugh while we were shooting our scenes."

Craig Brewer can be credited with creating some of that harmony. "Craig is special and a very gifted filmmaker," Murphy says. "To be able to direct DOLEMITE IS MY NAME and COMING 2 AMERICA, back-to-back, and have both movies, which are so different, turn out so good is a pretty neat trick."

Along with flexing his comedic chops, Snipes makes sure that whenever General Izzi and his army enter a room, it feels like a major event. That was by design, so says choreographer Fatima Robinson. "As a director, Craig is very musical and thought that when you see Wesley and his soldiers, you should get a little dance number as well," she says. "So, the music department came up with these sounds, so that there is a special effect to accompany their movements. Wesley was 100 percent into it and even came up with his own moves to throw in there, to make it more fun."

It's true, the General's sister, Imani, remains scarred by the experience of being left at the altar by Akeem 30 years ago. Back then, she tried her best to demonstrate her devotion to him by barking like a dog and hopping on one foot, at his request. Needless to say, Akeem and Imani were not a match and she has harbored a bit of resentment throughout the years. Vanessa Bell Calloway reprises the now-infamous character and plays up/embraces the long running joke that fans of the original are sure to appreciate.

Recalling her audition for the first film, directed by John Landis, Bell Calloway notes, "I remember reading the sides and when it said, 'bark and hop,' I told myself, 'Just try to sound different from how you sound, Vanessa.' So, I went in and just winged it and John busted-up laughing. The next thing I knew, I'd gotten the job and was meeting Eddie."

Always ready with a jab targeted at Akeem for his lack of a male heir, General Izzi offers up his son, Idi (Rotimi), to marry Meeka, an idea which is immediately shut down.

Rotimi feels a great sense of pride about being a part of the film. "It means so much for me, but also for my family," he says. "Being first generation Nigerian-American, I grew up watching the first film every four months, at least, for the last 10 years. It was so unreal to be so close to Eddie Murphy and Arsenio Hall and just have them there on set, learning from them and

watching how they work. This is going to be one of the best movies, and probably best sequels, of all time.”

When word spreads about Lavelle’s existence, General Izzi presents his daughter, Bopoto (Teyana Taylor) to be his bride. Their meeting is as amorous as a first-time meeting can be, complete with a surprise performance.”

“The song (Bopoto and Lavelle sing) has the perfect lyrics for the scene and it was fun to do something that was a different style than African, but also rooted in African moves,” says Robinson. “I love when I can choreograph a dance along with the story to create something really magical. Teyana took the moves and just heightened it all with the sensuality she brings to the table.”

Teyana Taylor’s description of Bopoto is spot-on. “She is very quiet, reserved and sexy, but still a warrior,” she says. “Bopoto has some toughness in her and you can definitely tell she knows how to use a gun and get it poppin’ if she needed to. She’s a fashionista, too – her hair stays on-point and her outfits and jewels are lit.”

Though Bopoto serves face, body and confidence, she actually turns out to be rather docile, just like her aunt, Imani. As a result, Lavelle’s interest quickly fades, just as Akeem’s once did when he was set to marry Imani 30 years ago.

Taylor, who was just a toddler when the original film was released, was excited to dive into her character, but first, she had to meet Snipes. “He was in character the whole time and when he walked into the trailer where I was getting my hair and make-up done, he was like, Bopoto!” she laughs. “I was just stuck, like, ‘This is Wesley Snipes talking to me. Let me just keep my cool.’”

Despite her nervousness, the onscreen duo formed a bond during filming. “We had father and daughter conversations over text and I can still hear General Izzi’s ‘voice’ over the text. I loved all of that. It was a true honor to work with Wesley.”

And about portraying a member of the legendary Izzi family, she adds, “Oh, we’re dysfunctional, but we make it work!”

FROM ZAMUNDA TO QUEENS...CREATING THE LOOK AND FEEL

Hear me now...
I am King Akeem Joffer,
I am bestowed with great power.
I shall bring Queens to Zamunda

– Akeem

COMING 2 AMERICA was filmed in Atlanta, Georgia, on the Tyler Perry Studio sound stages beginning in August 2019. And whether the setting was the Joffer palace, the My-T-Sharp barbershop or General Izzi’s compound, creating an authentic look and feel was a collective effort.

From the opening scene, to when the Rose Bearer Priestess (Garcelle Beauvais) tosses her first pedal and every moment in between, it's the costumes that capture the eye. That's the magic of Oscar-winning costume designer, Ruth E. Carter.

"She was the first person I spoke with about the film and I remember us talking about how King Joffer literally wore a lion 'rug' over his shoulder, with the animal's face sitting right there on his chest," says Brewer, who also collaborated with Carter and Murphy on DOLEMITE IS MY NAME. "Since Akeem has three daughters, I imagined they wouldn't be for killing these great, noble animals, so I wanted us to find a way to give a nod to what that symbolized and do it in a high-fashion way. Later, she came in with this wonderful ceramic lion's head that she said would be covered in gold leaf, with a mane-like cape that could be wrapped around the king. That's the world of COMING 2 AMERICA, interpreted by way of Ruth E. Carter. She's an incredible artist."

Carter notes, "I have a great respect for the first film and its influence on culture. It was the first time in cinema that we'd seen African royalty in such a grand way and there was a lot to draw from (her colleague, Deborah Nadoolman Landis, designed the costumes for COMING TO AMERICA). "I realized that we could take Zamunda from 30 years ago and bring it into the 2020's, so that's what I tried to do. I knew there were going to be a whole lot of costumes, which was exciting to me."

Immediately, she was in contact with some of her favorite designers from around the world and began working out her ideas about color, fabrics, silhouettes and the like. Among the designers she collaborated with were Maxhosa Africa by Laduma Ngxokolo and Palesa Mokumbung from South Africa, as well as JJ Valaya of India.

"We combined lots of different cultures," she says. "We borrowed from East Indian culture and combined it with African culture. We also came up with very avant-garde hairstyles and geles and headpieces. So, a headwrap may incorporate flowers or a hairstyle might have some kind of 3-D affect to it. It's all Zamundan style."

Carter was also in tune with who the characters were. As such, she approached her work with the actors as a collaboration. "A lot of times, actors don't have an idea about what their characters might wear, so I show them sketches and research, and they point out things that they like and then we start the process of trying on costumes," she says. And she's learned a great deal from Murphy.

"When you're working with Eddie Murphy, one thing is for sure – you're not dressing the person, you're dressing the character," says Carter. "With Akeem, it's 30 years later and he's much more mature, with a family, so I wanted to give him more royal fabrics, like velvets and silks. You'll also see this swirly, leafy pattern on his clothes, too. I also created an embroidery pattern that is the family crest."

Along with creating custom looks for the royals – "Every, single piece of wardrobe was beautiful, every single time," KiKi Layne says about her costumes for Meeka – Carter captured the essence of the everyday man – like Uncle Reem, for instance. While Tracy Morgan surely infused his energy into the character, he tips his hat to her for making sure his look was just right. "Ruth got him down pat," Morgan says. "Uncle Reem is from Queens and she knew what to do."

Creating the worlds that the characters inhabit was the job of production designer, Jeff Sage. "The sets are just incredible," Brewer says. "Jeff did a fantastic job of not only taking the original source material, but also finding a way to interpret it into modern day so it still feels like it's within the world we all watched in COMING TO AMERICA, but of higher quality, with

richer colors.”

Sage notes, “We didn't set out to recreate the first palace, so much as reinvent it. We referenced it in certain exterior scenes and used digital effects to create specific looks that might be familiar to fans. And inside, we created the statue of the King and each of the paintings on the walls that represent past leaders. Producer Kevin Misher had a great idea to make some of the paintings look like Eddie, as Akeem, too, so the lineage is clear.”

Sage found a way to transport New York to Atlanta, too. “There’s enough of a complex of streets and buildings in Atlanta that gave us the core of what New York would be,” he says. “Because we don’t spend a great deal of time in Queens in this movie, we had enough infrastructure to do some street setups. And when we created interiors on stage, we were careful about finding views out of the windows that were New York-oriented.”

Cinematographer Jody Williams kept the director’s words in mind during filming. “Craig wanted to make sure we paid homage to the original film and elevate what was already there,” he says. “So, of course, Ruth elevated the wardrobe, Jeff weaved in new details at the palace and visually, it was about doing the best to accentuate the landscapes, the colors outside of the palace, even the safari elements.”

For the barbershop scenes, which were shot over five days, Williams’ focus was on making sure the actors had room to move around, so remote control cameras were used and every shot was storyboarded. Also, it was his first time working with Murphy in prosthetics, which was a learning experience.

The prosthetics – skin, noses, teeth, you name it – were the creation of make-up artist, Mike Marino, for whom working on *COMING 2 AMERICA* was both a dream realized and an opportunity to honor to his childhood idol, Rick Baker, who did the make-up for Murphy and Hall’s variety of characters in the first film.

“Duplicating the make-up for all of those characters that are so famous was almost impossible, like trying to paint a replica of the Sistine Chapel,” notes Marino, “but we were up for the challenge.” Part of that challenge was factoring in how the barbershop crew, Reverend Brown and Randy Watson might have advanced in age over 30 years. That required testing colors, selecting sizes and shapes of facial features and experimenting with silicone, which is a departure from the foam latex that was used back in the day. “Silicone allows the actors the flexibility to really move their faces around and make different expressions.”

At his studio is where Marino conducted the testing and also, photographed makeups. After taking mental notes and sending in photos, he saw where some tweaking would be required. “There were minor things that we changed, like making a nose bigger or smaller or even making a character’s hair darker,” he says. “We’d immediately go back and make those adjustments and when we felt that everything was right, we’d come to set and glue makeups on Eddie and Arsenio to make sure everything looked good.

Along with the barbershop crew, Marino also created the look for the new character, Baba, brought to life by Hall. “Baba is sort of a shaman, wizard kind of guy, a psychic, and Eddie had this idea to make him look like the witch doctor from *Shaka Zulu*. A fellow artist, Mike Fontaine, and I came up with a way that Arsenio would not only not look like Arsenio, but we’d push him to look like a weird crypt keeper kind of guy!”

Hall chimes in. “Craig is great for creativity and I was lucky enough to talk him into letting me play Baba,” he says. “Overall, the set was a laugh-off and everybody was funny. It was like a competition. I wish I was Craig Brewer because he was sitting in the best seat, just watching all of us comics being ourselves, with no censors, every single day!”

As much as COMING 2 AMERICA is a comedy, with a few dashes of drama, it's most definitely a celebration. Brewer felt that energy, even from behind the camera. "I've had some memorable moments in my career, but looking at the monitor and watching Eddie Murphy play Randy Watson and singing next to Arsenio Hall, playing Reverend Brown, was just one of the most incredible moments of my adult life," he says.

The dance sequences bring that feeling home, too. "Dance has the ability to move a story along and I love when I'm able to make something really magical happen," notes Fatima Robinson, who paid homage to the big dance scene at the beginning of the first film. "It was daunting to recreate something that still stands up 'til this day and I think we did a great job of hiring dancers, of difference sizes and amazing skill, who feel like they are of today."

Bringing Zamunda and Queens to life on the big screen once more required the talents and dedication of many, both in front of the camera and behind the scenes. Brewer offers up a simple recipe for how it all came together. "The best thing a director can do is hire incredible people, ask them what they need to do their best work and then, get out of the way," he says.

As for why this is the perfect time to take movie goers back to Zamunda and Queens, Eddie Murphy sums it up in a few words.

"This movie is funny and it also has sweet, emotional moments, too," he says. "It's escapism, it's entertainment and everybody needs a good laugh. I'm really proud of how this picture turned out. COMING 2 AMERICA is a breath of fresh air."