



Idris Elba is ready for his close up

By **Lisa Respers France**, CNN
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COURTESY SCREEN GEMS

Actor Idris Elba, third from left, appears in the soon to be released action film "Takers."

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Idris Elba first came to fame portraying Stringer Bell on "The Wire"
He has two upcoming films, "Takers" and "Legacy"
The British actor says he's not yet at the point in his career that he'd like
He's also an accomplished DJ and aspiring music artist

(CNN) -- Actor Idris Elba is enjoying an interesting kind of fame right now.

In one camp are the people who loved his hard-core performance as Stringer Bell in the critically acclaimed HBO series "The Wire" and his comedic role as new boss Charles Miner on "The Office." In the other are the people who can't seem to get enough of his steamy good looks and British accent.

With starring roles in two motion pictures slated for release this year - the fast-paced action film "Takers" and the dark drama "Legacy" -- Elba finds himself heating up even more.

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But it's not enough for him.

"There's a sweet spot which I feel like I haven't reached yet," he says. "One is to be able to choose the roles I want and when I work and there are aspects of my creativity that I am tapping into but I haven't been able to turn into a business model yet. I'm not quite there."

Elba may not have reached his self-perceived pinnacle yet, but he's come a long way from the struggling actor who used to DJ to make extra money.

The son of a Ghanaian mother Sierra Leonean father, Elba grew up in East London and got his start in supporting parts in his native land. After moving to the United States, he made the rounds perfecting his craft before breaking out in 2002 as the cunningly ruthless drug dealer Stringer Bell on "The Wire."

Elba shed his natural accent for the part, embracing the mixture of Baltimore and Washington dialects the Bell character called for so convincingly that some fans still find it hard to believe he's British.

The actor says he puts a lot into "playing American."

"There's a bigger challenge for me when I play American, but I'm up for the challenge," Elba says. "Hugh Laurie [from the television drama 'House'] said it once, he said 'Being British and showing up on an American set with an American accent is like playing tennis with a fish.' I get that and I'm always aware of the accent."

Baltimore Sun television critic David Zurawik said it was a testament to Elba's superb acting that fans and critics alike were distressed by Bell's shocking exit from the critically acclaimed series. After all, who mourns the loss of a criminal?

"It took a special actor to play that character because you had to turn



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people's preconceived notions about criminals on its head," Zurawik said. "It's easy to play physically menacing on TV, but he was intellectually menacing and that's hard for an actor to do. He communicated the sense of superintelligence in a way that was a palpable force on the screen and it was as powerful as anyone else's physical force on the screen."

Elba is clearly good at playing bad and he takes on that task again in the heist flick "Takers," in which he co-stars with actors Matt Dillon, Paul Walker, Hayden Christensen and Michael Ealy along with singer Chris Brown and rapper T.I. as well as "Avatar" actress Zoe Saldana.

In person he is as easy on the eyes as on screen and as suave as his "Takers" character, Gordon Jennings, who leads a band of thieves for one final big score.

The actor said he enjoyed the camaraderie of the ensemble cast as well as the opportunity to use his natural speaking voice. "When we were talking about the character I said let's play him British," he said. "He's a thief, so he can be anything."

It's also not lost on him that there aren't many \$40 million action films produced with a majority black cast. Will Packer and his business partner Rob Hardy run Rainforest Films, which produced the movie, and Packer said Elba was a natural fit.

The group has worked on other films starring Elba, including "The Gospel" and "Obsessed," which co-starred actress and singer Beyonce Knowles.

Packer said Elba is leading-man material all the way.

"He and I have done about four or five films together and he's a supertalented guy," Packer said. "It's such a joy to work with him."

Jeff Friday, founder of the [American Black Film Festival](#), selected Elba to serve this year as ambassador of the event. The actor fully embraced the role, mixing with attendees and serving as DJ at parties.

"He's the hottest black male actor out there right now," Friday said. "We try to select someone who embodies the spirit of the festival and he's been the best [ambassador] we've had so far. Plus, I truly believe he is about to become a really, really big star."

Elba may also find fame behind the camera. He said he is working on a deal with the BBC to direct his first film, and he also served as executive producer on the upcoming independent film "Legacy," in which he also stars as Black Ops operative Malcolm Gray.

"Luther," the BBC crime drama series in which he stars, has recently been bought for the United States by BBC America.

Elba is also pursuing his passion for music, even though he knows people consider "actors who want to be musicians as cliché." He also has his own production company.

Ladies love a musician, which could mean even more female admiration for the good looks and charm that has led for a call for him to be the first black actor cast as James Bond.

What does Elba think of his sex symbol status? He takes it all in stride and not very seriously.

"Well, I've lived with this face for years," he laughingly told a crowd who gathered to hear him speak at the American Black Film Festival.

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noybizz

This dude is seriously good. I didn't know he was actually British before reading this article. I've seen him in a couple of things where he has the accent and I remember thinking "he plays British really well" - I guess that means the truth is he plays American really, REALLY well. He captures re... [more](#)

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SncrDerelict

He's not completely unknown to me, but I'm not really familiar with many of his works...If he is as humble in spirit as he seems to be about the complements he gets on his look then I hope he experiences continued success...

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misspaul

My goodness - there he is!!! I loved him in Tyler Perry's movie - I think it was Daddy's little girls. He is just so smooth and so damn fine!!!!!!

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CaribbnJah

Liked him better in the Wire. The Wire: one of the most underhyped series out there! only see bootleg or "free" movies of TP. TP is a fraud. But I'm not hatin'. That's been the secret to a lot of people "success": Make a ninja laugh... no matter how many times the plot and theme is repeated; n... [more](#)

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