

# Wesley Snipes Alfre Woodard

Star In Maya Angelou's  
Family Movie,

## 'Down In The Delta'

Wesley Snipes and Alfre Woodard lead an all-star stellar cast in the soon-to-be-released movie, *Down in the Delta*.

The movie, a heartwarming family drama, opens nationwide on Christmas Day. Critics who were lucky enough to attend sneak previews are already raving about the film that celebrates family, hope and positive change.

Famed poet **Maya Angelou** makes her feature-length directorial debut with the powerful, emotion-packed movie.

Woodard stars as Loretta, who lives in Chicago with her two children, played by newcomers Mpho Koaho and Kulani Hassen. Her family is about to fall apart because she



▲ Actors Wesley Snipes and Alfre Woodard team up in the new, emotion-packed family movie, *Down In The Delta*, which opens at theaters everywhere on Christmas Day.



is headed down the path of self-destruction as she gives into the alcohol- and drug-ridden city streets.

Snipes, who also served as one of the film's producers, plays Loretta's cousin, Will, who along with his father, Earl, played by Al Freeman Jr., encourages her to believe she can find a better life. Freeman won accolades for his portrayal of Nation of Islam leader the Honorable Elijah Muhammad in Spike Lee's blockbuster epic, *Malcolm X*.

Veteran TV-movie-Broadway actress Mary Alice stars as Loretta's mother who, in an effort to pull her daughter and grandchildren away from harm's way, pawns the family's most prized heirloom—a candelabra they affectionately call Nathan—and sends them to live with Loretta's uncle down in the Mississippi Delta.

Actress Esther Rolle of "Good Times" TV fame who recently died at age 78 (JET Dec. 7) portrays Annie, Loretta's aunt, in the film. She delivers a powerful, must-see performance in the film as a woman suffering from Alzheimer's disease. It marks one of her final appearances on



◀ Famed poet and author **Maya Angelou** makes her feature-length directorial debut with *Down In The Delta*.

▶ The late actress **Esther Rolle** of "Good Times" fame made one of her final appearances on the silver screen in this new movie. She portrays a woman battling Alzheimer's disease in the film.





◀ Snipes portrays Loretta's caring cousin, Will, who helps her put her life back on track.

▶ Woodard (Loretta) holds the family's precious heirloom and inspiration, Nathan, which is pawned to send her down in the Mississippi Delta.

the silver screen.

Adding to the film's success is actress Loretta Devine of *Waiting to Exhale* and *The Preacher's Wife* and the Broadway musical *Dreamgirls*; and TV actress Anne-Marie Johnson who starred on the former series, "In the Heat of the Night" and "What's Happening Now."

Both emotional and riveting, *Down*



in the Delta is a tale where big city meets small town, young meets old, parents reconnect with children and life for everyone becomes something they never expected.

The film celebrates the joy and strength of family. "Every generation can identify with this story," **Angelou** notes. "The blood family is very important. But when I say 'family,' I mean all kinds of family. I mean the extended family. The family is not only the cornerstone of a community, but the foundation upon which an individual stands and looks out

◀ Mary Alice (r), whose credits include *I'll Fly Away*, *A Different World* and Broadway's *Having Our Say*, is joined in movie by Woodard and new actors Mpho Koaho and Kulani Hussen.



COVER STORY



▲ Al Freeman Jr. delivers a powerful, heartwarming performance as Will's loving and sensitive father, Earl, who is Loretta's uncle in *Down In The Delta*.

upon the world. A family has the power to heal as well as to damage, to strengthen and build up as well as to tear down. I have been drawn to stories that affirm life-enhancing relationships. What better place to find those stories than within the structure of a family?"

She points out, "Every generation has had a Nathan, somehow. Maybe not a candelabra, maybe not a plate. Maybe it was a story. A family story that when the family gets together, somebody is going to tell that story. The story stays alive from one generation to the next. It can pull you right through."

Director **Angelou** says she is proud of her *Delta* cast. "I think every actor came there to steal the picture, everyone," she states.

**Angelou** says she was saddened to hear of Esther Rolle's death and recalls that it was really an honor to

work with her. "We've known each other for 30 years...She said to me that she appreciated me directing her in this film because she said few people direct her anymore, that directors seek her out, cast her, then say, 'You know what we want.' So some actors are longing to be directed. She said it just meant everything because it makes her stretch in a very demanding role."

The cast also had high praise for **Angelou**. Says Snipes, "Her life has been such a hodgepodge of everything—she is a true maverick. We knew she would have the sensibility to direct the film, and that she is successful in everything she ever does."

Woodard raves of **Angelou**, the director. "There was a lot of learning going on. She has traveled so many highways. I've known and admired **Maya** for many years, and being directed by her in this movie showed



Woodard's character forms a special sister-friend bond with Zenia, played by Loretta Devine, who cares for Woodard's aunt in the film, which is the must-see movie of the holiday season.

me a new dimension of her character, her determination and her talents."

The film's spirit is captured by the soundtrack album that features tunes by such artists as Stevie Wonder, Janet Jackson, Luther Vandross, Chaka Khan, Me'Shell Ndegeocello, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Ashford and Simpson, and The Leverts (Gerald, Eddie and Sean) who perform the album's first single *Where Would I Be*.

Woodard notes the universal appeal of *Down In the Delta*. "What's fabulous about this piece is it's African-American people, but family, and those relationships are universal. Everybody's got a Mama."

Angelou points out, "In all of my work, I try to tell the human truth—what it is like to be a human... what makes us stumble and fall and somehow miraculously rise and go from darkness into light. Everything can

change. There's no time in our lives when we can say this will not change. Everything can change; it is never too late to make a change."

Adds Angelou, "The message of my life's work is that human beings are more alike than different. Everyone in the world wants a good job, to be paid a little more than they're worth, to be loved and to accept love in return. Everyone wants safe streets and for children to be healthy. This is what drew me to *Down in the Delta*. It is a story of these very kind of human truths, a story to remind us that, as human beings, we are more alike than different."

Woodard assures moviegoers that they will feel good and even inspired after seeing *Down in the Delta*. "I know they're going to feel deeply. I know they will be smiling. They are going to want to call their family at the end of this movie."

## ENTERTAINMENT

### Nancy Wilson Mourns Death Of Her Parents

The parents of songstylist Nancy Wilson recently died eight days apart.

Ms. Wilson's mother, Lillian E. Manis, died on Nov. 19 in Chillicothe, OH, after a long illness. She was 80 years old.

Ms. Wilson's father, Olden Dever Wilson, 81, died suddenly on Nov. 27 at his home in Yucca Valley, CA, of natural causes.

The couple had been divorced for many years, but remained close friends.

In addition to her world-famous daughter, Mrs. Manis is survived by

sisters, Virginia Ward and Ruth Cousins; brothers Larry Austin, Gordon Austin, Richard Austin and Theodore Austin; seven grandchildren; a great granddaughter; and a host of nieces and nephews.

In addition to his famed daughter, Mr. Wilson is survived by his wife, Bertha Trout Wilson; sister, Mayme Wilson; daughters, Rita Jean Crawford, Brenda Vann and Karen Davis; 16 grandchildren, five great-grandchildren; and a host of nieces and nephews.

### 'Stella' Movie Attracts Single Women To Jamaica

After seeing the hit movie *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, single women from all over the world are flocking to Jamaica to get their groove back.

"Jamaica couldn't have paid for the publicity we're getting," says photographer Ken Ramsay, referring to the scenes that linger on white-sand beaches, turquoise and emerald waters, cloudless skies and exotic flowers.

The movie, released earlier this year, is set in Jamaica and stars Angela Bassett as Stella, an older woman who falls madly in love with a younger man half her age, played by new actor Taye Diggs.

The movie was based on the best-selling book of the same name by Terry McMillan, who said she kept running into women who bought tickets

to Jamaica after *Stella* became a best-seller in 1996.

David Patrick of Jamaica, who is in his 30s, told the Associated Press during an interview in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, "Women have been coming in droves since that movie. It's not just Americans. English women, German, Swiss—they all say the same thing: 'They've come to get their groove back.'"

Ocho Rios is Jamaica's most popular destination for Black Americans. Maureen Singh, owner of a dive shop there, says she is seeing a lot more middle-aged American women vacationing on the island alone or in groups.

Jamaica's Tourist Board has screened the film for U.S. travel agents and aired TV spots promoting the island as a lovers' getaway.

