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Screen GEMS

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ON THE RECORD... CHIWETEL EJIOFOR

In what may be his biggest role, this Black Brit proves his staying power in 2012

Chiwetel Ejiofor, 32, has been on a slow, steady grind since his debut in *Amistad*. Almost 13 years later, and now costarring as a scientist in the world-is-ending epic *2012* (in theaters November 13), the London native has an impressively versatile résumé. Though he's a man of few words—but ohh, that accent!—we got him to open up about his choices, his career perceptions and what he's learned about strutting in stilettos.

ESSENCE: You once said that you'd "overshot" yourself with *Amistad*. Do you still have those feelings?

CHIWETEL EJIOFOR: I was 19 and although I had some idea of what I wanted my career to be, it certainly didn't include working with Steven Spielberg. That was an incredible ride. I still feel an excitement and an element of trepidation about getting a new project. It would be a shame to lose that.

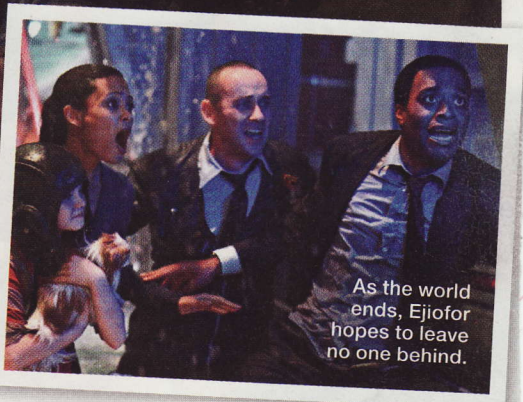
ESSENCE: You've been a doctor turned cabbie (*Dirty Pretty Things*), a drug dealer (*American Gangster*) and even a drag queen (*Kinky Boots*). Is there any part you won't play?

C.E.: As long as the story and characters are well-developed, I don't think there's any role I won't play. I didn't think about being a drag queen until I read the script for *Kinky Boots*. That character was one of the best I've ever come across and suddenly I thought, *Oh, I want to play this drag queen.*

ESSENCE: You did quite well, but walking in heels is hard, isn't it?

C.E.: [Laughs] Thank you.... And yes, it really is.

—Regina R. Robertson



As the world ends, Ejiofor hopes to leave no one behind.