

# Godfather of Harlem: Forest Whitaker is 'phenomenal' in his first, long-overdue TV lead

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- Oscar winner Forest Whitaker stars as infamous real-life crime boss Bumpy Johnson
- From the creators of *Narcos*, with John Ridley (12 Years A Slave, American Crime) directing
- Swiss Beatz has curated "the television soundtrack of the year," according to *The Los Angeles Times*
- 96% critics rating, Rotten Tomatoes
- Now on Showmax and 1Magic



*Godfather of Harlem*, starring Oscar winner Forest Whitaker as infamous crime boss Bumpy Johnson, is now streaming on Showmax and airing on 1Magic, with new episodes every Tuesday at 9.30pm.

In the early 1960s, Bumpy returns from Alcatraz to find the neighbourhood he once ruled in a shambles. With the streets controlled by Vincent 'Chin' Gigante (Emmy nominee Vincent D'Onofrio from *Daredevil* and *Jurassic World*) and the Italian mob, Bumpy takes on the Genovese crime family to regain control. During the brutal battle, he forms an unlikely alliance with radical preacher Malcolm X (Nigel Thatch, reprising his role from *Selma*), who wants to get heroin off the streets of Harlem. *Godfather of Harlem* is the remarkable true story of how the criminal underworld and the civil rights movement collided during one of the most tumultuous times in American history.

Here are five reasons to add it to your watchlist immediately:

## #1. It's based on a true story that could have been written for TV

*The Guardian* called Bumpy Johnson "the most feared criminal in Harlem... between 1930 and 1968." *Godfather of Harlem* is set towards the end of this Robin Hood figure's reign: it deserves a prequel about Bumpy's war with the more famous Dutch Schultz (played by Dustin Hoffman in *Billy Bathgate*), and it already unofficially has a sequel in *American Gangster*, Ridley Scott's Oscar-nominated film about Frank Lucas, Bumpy's protege. Bumpy appears in the opening scene of *American Gangster*; was fictionalised as Bumpy Jonas in the original *Shaft*; and has been played by Oscar nominee Laurence Fishburne, twice (in *The Cotton Club* and then in *Hoodlum*). As if Bumpy's story wasn't already an obvious fit for

its own series, he crossed paths with civil rights activist Malcolm X; Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (Emmy nominee Giancarlo Esposito from *Breaking Bad*), the first African-American to represent New York in the U.S. House of Representatives; and Cassius Clay (Deric Augustine from *Cloak & Dagger*) before he became known as Muhammad Ali.

## #2. It's from the creators of *Narcos*

*Godfather of Harlem* is written and executive produced by Chris Brancato and Paul Eckstein, co-creators of *Narcos*, IMDb's top ranked gangland show of the last decade. Nominated for Golden Globes, Emmys, BAFTAs and People's Choice Awards, *Narcos* is currently #55 on IMDb's list of the top-rated TV of all time - only *The Wire* and *The Sopranos* are higher ranked within its genre. As if that wasn't enough to get us excited, John Ridley, who won an Oscar for his screenplay for *12 Years A Slave* and was nominated for three Emmys as creator of *American Crime*, directs the pilot and is an executive producer.

## #3. It stars Forest Whitaker in his first TV lead

There's not much Forest Whitaker hasn't achieved yet. He won an Oscar, a Golden Globe and a BAFTA as Idi Amin in *The Last King Of Scotland*; took home Best Actor at Cannes as Charlie Parker in *Bird*; and had memorable roles in many of the biggest films in recent history, from *Star Wars: Rogue One* to *Black Panther*. So it comes as a surprise to realise he's never been the lead in a TV series, despite impressive smaller roles in hit shows like *Empire*, *Criminal Minds*, *The Shield*, and *E.R.*

It's about time too: as *Variety* put it, "Forest Whitaker is the sort of star seemingly built to make the leap to television: He's a decorated leading man whose subtlety of approach and whose commitment to delicate, unusual acting choices would seem to potentially play even better on the small screen."

He doesn't disappoint. To quote *The Los Angeles Times*, in *Godfather of Harlem* Forest is "phenomenal as the out-of-touch godfather who's playing catchup in a new world, and plays his character with a quiet yet haunting nuance that is this actor's specialty."

He's not the only acting drawcard either: in addition to Forest, Vincent D'Onofrio and Nigél Thatch, the impressive cast also includes Oscar nominee Chazz Palminteri (*The Usual Suspects*); Screen Actors Guild nominees Paul Sorvino (*Goodfellas*), Luis Guzmán (*Traffic*) and Erik LaRay Harvey (*Boardwalk Empire*); and Critics Choice nominee Elvis Nolasco (*American Crime*), not to mention Ifenesh Hadera (*She's Gotta Have It*, *Billions*) as Bumpy's wife Mayme.

## #4. Swiss Beatz curated "the best television soundtrack of the year"

According to *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Godfather of Harlem* has "the best television soundtrack of the year." A mix of period funk and soul; new compositions that could have been sung at the Apollo in the 60s; and new hip hop tunes that connect the past to the present, the soundtrack was curated by Swiss Beatz (aka Alicia Keys' husband, who Kanye West once called "the best rap producer of all time" on Twitter.) The *Godfather of Harlem* soundtrack, featuring the likes of DMX, Rick Ross, Jidena, A\$AP Ferg, Wale, and French Montana, already has over 400k monthly listeners on Spotify alone.

## #5. Critics love it

*Godfather of Harlem* currently has a 95% critics rating on *Rotten Tomatoes*, where the critics consensus is that the series is "as sharply dressed as it is smartly written." *Forbes* is already debating Emmys for Forest as Bumpy and Nigél as Malcolm X, while *Time Magazine* called it "the rare gangster epic we haven't seen before."

Watch the trailer:

Stream *Godfather of Harlem* on Showmax at <https://www.showmax.com/eng/tvseries/31n2gjlx-godfather-of-harlem> or watch it on 1Magic (channel 103) every Tuesday at 9.30pm.

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