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## INTERVIEW

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### William S. Gooch Talks to Lavinia Dowdell

Photo Credit: Ernest Green



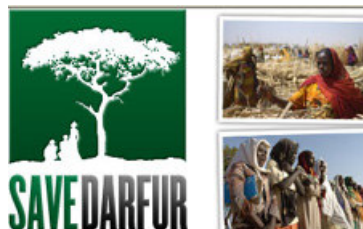
### Lavinia Dowdell: Accentuating the Positive

If Lavinia Dowdell bottled her positive outlook on life and put it on the market, we would all be happier, and she would be a very wealthy woman. In spite of this economic downturn, which will certainly affect Hollywood and the independent film industry, Lavinia continues to focus on her goals and maintain her unbridled optimism. Don't get me wrong, Lavinia is no Pollyanna, she is fully aware of the pitfalls and impediments the current economic crisis could have on her career. But like all disciplined artists, she has counted up the costs and willingly takes the risks that will satisfy her thespian thirst.

Over a light dinner and drinks, Lavinia detailed to me what she hopes to accomplish on the West Coast. By accentuating the positive, Lavinia has found that delicate balance between hard work, ingenuity, and manifesting one's own destiny.

**William Gooch: When we last spoke you talked about some projects you had in the works, what is the status of those projects?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** I have one project that is scheduled to shoot in the next two weeks. The project is called *Legend of Nethiah* and it is produced by Star Runner Productions. It is a science fiction movie about kids making up a fantasy story that actually comes to life as the story is being told. I play one of the kid's parents, which is interesting for me because I don't usually get cast as a mother



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in films.

**William Gooch: What is the size of your role in *Legend of Nethiah*?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** It is a supporting role. The children are the major focus of the film.

**William Gooch: How did you get cast in *Legend of Nethiah*?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** One of the producers for *Legend of Nethiah* was a co-producer in another film I did. He was familiar with my work and asked me to read for the role. They liked my interpretation and hired me for the part. I was already coming to the West Coast where the film was being shot, so it was an easy fit. I have learned that it is good to be flexible and open to all job opportunities.

**William Gooch: Now, you are in the film, *Chasing the Green*, when is that to be released in theatres?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** The film is still doing the film festival circuit and getting rave reviews. And any great reviews of the film are good for me, also. (Coyishly laughing) Anyway, it will be in theaters sometime in the late spring.

**William Gooch: What is the storyline of *Chasing the Green*?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** It the true story of two brothers who start a cellular company in the 1990s that was the first company to market an electronic terminal for credit card transaction. The brothers were a part of the first criminal case ever brought by the SEC against an independent company. The story resonates for today because the guys who started the company had a great business model but got sidetracked by greed.

**William Gooch: What is your role in the film?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** I play the office manager who has been with the company since its inception. She is a no-nonsense, tough cookie.

**William Gooch: How did you develop your character in *Chasing the Green*?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** I tried to find a balance between being a tough person at the office and someone who is a single parent with a child at home. And because she is a single mom all the responsibility of rearing her child falls on her. That reality definitely informs my character, so I had to find that balance.

**William Gooch: Who are your co-stars in *Chasing the Green*?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** My fellow actors are William Devane (24), Ryan Hurst (*Remember the Titans*), and Jeremy London (*7th Heaven*).

**William Gooch: In our last interview, you talked about all the staged readings you've done. (A staged reading is a script read-through before the play or movie goes into production. The entire work is usually performed for potential investors minus scenery, costumes, and props. During this process, the script may also be edited and tweaked.) Why did you think it was necessary to do staged readings and has that experience developed you as an actor?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** I absolutely love doing staged readings because you are massaging the material before it is produced. You are ironing out the kinks during this process and really developing a relationship with the playwright and the producers. I have done over 40 staged readings and being a part of that creative process has really informed my acting. You learn how to take direction immediately and readjust your character to spontaneous editing. You have to bring all your training to the fore. Most of the time you only get an honorarium, which is sometimes only lunch and transportation.

Often you are called the night before the reading and have to perform in these wonderful, old New York theatres. I just love those old theatres, even though they are sometimes cold. Those old, ornate theatres have this ambience, and I always imagine that I am performing in a theatre where Helen Hayes, Elizabeth Ashley, Phylicia Rashad or S. Epatha Merkerson may have performed.

**William Gooch: How would find out about the readings?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** Mostly through work of mouth. Sometimes, you may be replacing someone who has dropped out.

**William Gooch: Have you done any staged screenplay readings?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** Yes, I have. Screenplay readings are usually not at a theater but at a rental space, and you are usually filmed. I have gotten film roles through staged screenplay readings. I actually got cast in *P.J.* from a staged screenplay reading. I did the reading a year before *P.J.* went into before production and ended up replacing an actress who dropped out before the filming started shooting.

**William Gooch: You will be in LA for pilot season casting, and how do you plan to navigate that casting process?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** I am really going to LA for *Legend of Nethiah* and will audition for casting agents while I am out there. My goal right now is to position myself and meet people in the industry. I am not expecting a treasure trove of work or auditions, just yet.



**Lavinia Dowdell**  
Photo Credit Ernest Green

**William Gooch: You are now officially bicoastal, what does that mean?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** In this industry that word is such a misnomer. Let's keep it real. It's really about having a place to stay in NYC and LA while you work and audition. Folks try to make a big deal about it, but it's not that special.

**William Gooch: On that note, why the more extended bicoastal stay this time?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** My career path has always been a natural progression. I believe it's now my time. I didn't want to be one of those actors who went to LA just to see what was going on. I now feel that I am psychologically and technically ready to work and be competitive.

**William Gooch: What advice would you give actors who are looking to do both stage and film?**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** I don't like to really give advice because everyone's path is different. But, I think it is really important to know your craft. Be prepared to take advantage of every opportunity.

**William Gooch: As always Lavinia, it was a delight to talk to you. Good luck in LA.**

**Lavinia Dowdell:** Thank you. I am excited, but I will miss NYC. There is no place like it.

This is the second installation in a six-part series on the life of a bicoastal African American actress.

For more information about Lavinia Dowdell and *Chasing the Green*, go to: [www.laviniadowdell.com](http://www.laviniadowdell.com) and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7aj7HutvxA>

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