

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kasi Lemmons

PERSON

Lemmons, Kasi

Alternative Names: Kasi Lemmons; Karen Diane Lemmons

Life Dates: February 24, 1959-

Place of Birth: St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Residence: New York, New York

Work: New York, New York

Occupations: Filmmaker

Biographical Note

Film director, screenwriter, and actress Kasi Lemmons was born on February 15, 1959, in St. Louis, Missouri, to Dorothy and Milton Lemmons. She attended the New York University Tisch School of the Arts, the University of California, Los Angeles, and The New School for Social Research, in New York City.

Lemmons's first TV role was on the soap opera *You Got a Right*. As a youth, she also performed at the Boston Children's Theater. She has since starred in several films and TV shows, including *As the World Turns*, *The Cosby Show*, *School Daze*, *Vampire's Kiss*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *The Five Heartbeats*, *Candyman*, *Fear of a Black Hat*, *Hard Target*, *Drop Squad*, *ER*, and *Disconnect*. Lemmons made the short film *Dr. Hugo* in the mid-1990s, followed by her writing and directorial debut, *Eve's Bayou* (1997), which won Outstanding Directorial Debut from the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, Best Director from the American Black Film Festival, and Best First Feature from the Independent Spirit Awards, among other awards.

Lemmons' second film, *The Caveman's Valentine* (2001), opened the 2002 Sundance Film Festival. That year she also led a tribute to Sidney Poitier at the 74th Academy Awards. Lemmons' third film, *Talk to Me* (2007), won several awards, including Best Director from the African-American Film Critics Association, Best Movie by a Woman from the Women Film Critics Circle, and Outstanding Directing in a Motion Picture (Theatrical or Television) from the NAACP Image Awards. In 2013, Lemmons adapted for the screen Langston Hughes's musical *Black Nativity*. Lemmons' 2019 film *Harriet* won Best Director from the Black Film Critics Circle, among other awards. Later that year, Lemmons adapted the novel *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* by Charles Blow into an

opera libretto for Terence Blanchard. Her latest project has been a musical biopic of Whitney Houston called I Wanna Dance with Somebody.

Lemmons has served as an associate arts professor at the New York University Tisch School of the Arts. She has contributed to Film Independent's Filmmaker Labs as a speaker and moderator, served as an advisor to the Sundance Screenwriter and Filmmaker Labs, and taught at AFI, Yale University, Columbia Film School, MIT, UCLA, USC, The Los Angeles Film School, and the University of Pristina Film School, in Kosovo. She also has served on the board of Film Independent. Lemmons received an honorary doctorate of humane letters in 1998 from Salem State College and served as an artist in residence in 2008 at Vassar College.

Lemmons and her husband, Vondie Curtis Hall, live in New York City. They have three children: Che, Hunter, and Zora.

Kasi Lemmons was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on February 6, 2022.

Related Entries

New York University Tisch School of the Arts [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

University of California, Los Angeles [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

The New School for Social Research [STUDENTOf]
[from ? to ?]

Various [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Actor

Various [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to 1997]

Writer and/or Director

Vassar College [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 2008 to 2008]

Artist in Residence

New York University Tisch School of the Arts [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Associate Arts Professor

Various [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from ? to ?]

Lecturer, Speaker, Moderator

Film Independent [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Board

Black Filmmakers Foundation Summit [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Attendee