

Celebration of Life
Thomas Jefferson Byrd, III
June 25, 1950 - October 3, 2020



Tuesday, October 13, 2020

11 AM

Hillside International Truth Center, Inc.

2450 Cascade Road

Atlanta, GA 30311

Obituary

Thomas Jefferson Byrd, III was born June 25, 1950 to Thomas Jefferson Byrd, Jr and Iris (I.V.) Byrd in Griffin, GA. Upon graduating from Fairmont High School in 1968, Thomas followed in his mother's footsteps and perused a BA in Early Childhood Education at Morris Brown College. While in college, Thomas was a proud member of the award winning Marching Wolverines, and he pledged the Alpha Sigma Chapter of Omega Psi Phi fraternity, Inc. in 1970. Byrd graduated in 1974 and began teaching in Atlanta. While teaching, he began taking dance classes at Barbara Sullivan's Atlanta Dance Theater, the 1st Black dance company in the southeast region; and it wasn't long before he became one of its principle dancers. This experience served as the catalyst for his desire to learn more about this new-found passion. He moved to San Diego, California, where he earned a Master of Fine Arts in dance from California Institute of the Arts. When he returned to Georgia in 1980 he went back to teaching, but he soon realized that his love for the arts still needed to be nurtured. While maintaining his "day job", Thomas taught dance classes on the weekends. As the Atlanta arts community learned of his adept abilities, he was soon hired as dancer and choreographer by various theatre companies throughout the southeast. Dance was Thomas' forte, until Edward Billups, Artistic Director of A.T.L.A.N.T.A, Inc. Theatre Company, offered him a role in one of his productions. This sparked his new-found passion for acting. Over time, the majority of his gigs shifted from dance/choreography to acting. His acting skills were honed by performing with local theatre companies, Jomandi Productions, People's Survival Theatre Company, The Alliance Theatre & The Phoenix Academy Theatre. After earning the *Teacher of the Year* title from Kirkwood Elementary School, and on the brink of being promoted to Principal, Thomas left education to pursue acting full time. This journey lead him to perform with numerous regional theatres such as Indiana Repertory Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, St. Louis Black Repertory & San Diego Repertory Theatre.

In 1995, Spike Lee gave Thomas his film debut when he was cast as the enigmatic Errol Barnes in *Clockers*. For the next 7 years, Byrd continued performing in films and regional theatre. In 2002, he relocated to New York where he was cast in the Broadway revival of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*; in which he received a Tony award nomination. His career continued to flourish while residing in New York.

In 2012, Thomas returned to Atlanta to reconnect with his roots and fortify his spiritual foundation. Having completed what he came to do, Thomas transitioned on October 3, 2020.

The impact of Thomas Byrd's contribution to education, the arts, and the Atlanta culture as a whole will resonate for years to come. His legacy lives on in every life he touched, especially in the lives of his children and grandchildren: Carmen Byrd (Kenya), Desaree Murden, Shannon Byrd-Crossley (Zaya & Khari), Kalah Byrd (Kannon), Aria Byrd and his namesake, Thomas Jefferson Byrd, IV (Ever).

Light, Peace and Progress to the Spirit of Thomas Jefferson Byrd, III

Order of Service

- Prelude Ismail Akbar
- Processional..... *Keep Your Head to the Sky* –Earth, Wind & Fire
- Welcome..... Bishop Jack Bomar- Executive Bishop of Hillside
International Truth Center, Inc.
- Scriptures..... Veronica Byrd
- Musical Tribute..... Dashill Smith
- Reflections..... Ray Ransom
Pearl Cleage (Read by Rev. Sharlene Ross)
Spike Lee (Read by Albert Cooper)
- Musical Tribute..... Denise Thimes
- Celebration of Life..... Reverend Dr. Rocco Errico
- Family Remarks..... Desaree Murden
Thomas Jefferson Byrd, IV
Shannon Byrd-Crossley
- Dove Release
- Recessional..... *I Like the Sunrise* –Kurt Elling

The family would like to thank all those who have reached out during this difficult time. Your thoughts, prayers, kind words and offerings are deeply appreciated. Your support and love means everything to us.

A special thanks to:

Spike Lee

Alfonso Dawson Mortuary

The Hillside International Truth Center family

Afemo & Elizabeth Omilami, Hosea Helps

Hope Thompson and Family