

= Forest Whitaker =

Forest Steven Whitaker III (born July 15 , 1961) is an American actor , director , and producer .

He has earned a reputation for intensive character study work for films such as Bird , Platoon , Ghost Dog : The Way of the Samurai and Lee Daniels ' The Butler , for his work in independent films and for his recurring role as LAPD Internal Affairs Lieutenant Jon Kavanaugh on the Emmy Award @-@ winning television series The Shield . He is set to portray Saw Gerrera in the Star Wars spin @-@ off film , Rogue One : A Star Wars Story .

Whitaker won the Academy Award , British Academy Film Award , Golden Globe Award , National Board of Review Award , Screen Actors Guild Award , and various critics groups awards for his performance as Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in the 2006 film The Last King of Scotland .

= = Early life = =

Whitaker was born July 15 , 1961 , in Longview , Texas . His family moved to Carson , California when he was four . His father , Forest Steven Jr . , was an insurance salesman . Forest 's mother , Laura Francis (née Smith) , was a special education teacher who put herself through college and earned two master 's degrees while raising her children . Whitaker has two younger brothers , Kenn and Damon , and an older sister , Deborah .

His first role as an actor was the lead in Dylan Thomas ' play , Under Milk Wood .

Whitaker then attended Cal Poly Pomona on a football scholarship , but due to a debilitating back injury , he changed his major to music (voice) . He toured England with the Cal Poly Chamber Singers in 1980 . While still at Cal Poly , he briefly changed his major to drama . He was accepted to the Music Conservatory at the University of Southern California to study opera as a tenor , and subsequently was accepted into the University 's Drama Conservatory . He graduated from USC in 1982 . He also earned a scholarship to the Berkeley , California branch of the Drama Studio London . Whitaker also pursued a degree in The Core of Conflict : Studies in Peace and Reconciliation at New York University 's Gallatin School of Individualized Study .

= = Career = =

= = = Film work = = =

Whitaker has a long history of working with well @-@ regarded film directors and fellow actors , as well as working in direct @-@ to @-@ video films alongside novice actors such as Lil Wayne , Maggie Grace and 50 Cent . In his first onscreen performance of note , he had a supporting role playing a high school football player in the 1982 film version of Cameron Crowe 's coming @-@ of @-@ age teen @-@ retrospective , Fast Times at Ridgemont High . He co @-@ starred and interacted alongside Judge Reinhold , Phoebe Cates , Sean Penn and Robert Romanus . In 1986 , he appeared in Martin Scorsese 's film , The Color of Money (with Paul Newman and Tom Cruise) , and in Oliver Stone 's Platoon . The following year , he co @-@ starred with Robin Williams in the comedy Good Morning , Vietnam .

In 1988 , Whitaker played in the film Bloodsport alongside Jean @-@ Claude Van Damme and he had his first lead role starring as musician Charlie " Bird " Parker in the Clint Eastwood @-@ directed film , Bird . To prepare himself for the part , he sequestered himself in a loft with only a bed , couch , and saxophone , having also conducted extensive research and taken alto sax lessons . His performance , which has been called " transcendent , " earned him the Best Actor award at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival and a Golden Globe nomination . Whitaker continued to work with a number of well @-@ known directors throughout the 1990s . He starred in the 1990 film Downtown with Anthony Edwards and Penelope Ann Miller . Neil Jordan cast him in the pivotal role of " Jody " , a captive British soldier in his 1992 film , The Crying Game where Whitaker used an English accent . Todd McCarthy , of Variety , described Whitaker 's performance as " big @-@ hearted , " " hugely

emotional , " and " simply terrific . " In 1994 , he was a member of the cast that won the first ever National Board of Review Award for Best Acting by an Ensemble for Robert Altman 's film , Prêt-à-porter . He gave a " characteristically emotional performance " in Wayne Wang and Paul Auster 's 1995 film , Smoke .

Whitaker played a serene , pigeon-raising , bushido-following , mob hit man in Ghost Dog : The Way of the Samurai , a 1999 film written and directed by Jim Jarmusch . Many consider this to have been a " definitive role " for Whitaker . In a manner similar to his preparation for Bird , he again immersed himself in his character 's world ? he studied Eastern philosophy and meditated for long hours " to hone his inner spiritual hitman . " Jarmusch has told interviewers that he developed the title character with Whitaker in mind ; the New York Times review of the film observed that " [I] t 's hard to think of another actor who could play a cold-blooded killer with such warmth and humanity . "

Whitaker next appeared in what has been called one of the worst films ever made , the 2000 production of Battlefield Earth , based on the novel of the same name by L. Ron Hubbard . The film was widely criticized as a notorious commercial and critical disaster . However , Whitaker 's performance was lauded by the film 's director , Roger Christian , who commented that , " Everybody 's going to be very surprised " by Whitaker , who " found this huge voice and laugh . " Battlefield Earth won seven Razzie Awards ; Whitaker was nominated for Worst Supporting Actor , but lost to his co-star , Barry Pepper . Whitaker later expressed his regret for participating in the film .

In 2001 , Whitaker had a small , uncredited role in the Wong Kar-wai directed The Follow , one of five short films produced by BMW that year to promote its cars . He co-starred in Joel Schumacher 's 2002 thriller , Phone Booth , with Kiefer Sutherland and Colin Farrell . That year , he also co-starred with Jodie Foster in Panic Room . His performance as the film 's " bad guy " was described as " a subtle chemistry of aggression and empathy . "

Whitaker 's 2006 portrayal of Idi Amin in the film , The Last King of Scotland earned him positive reviews by critics as well as multiple awards and honors . To portray the dictator , Whitaker gained 50 pounds , learned to play the accordion , and immersed himself in research . He read books about Amin , watched news and documentary footage featuring Amin , and spent time in Uganda meeting with Amin 's friends , relatives , generals , and victims ; he also learned Swahili and mastered Amin 's East African accent . His performance earned him the Academy Award for Best Actor , making him the fourth African-American actor in history to do so , joining the ranks of Sidney Poitier , Denzel Washington , and Jamie Foxx . For that same role , he was also recognized with the British Academy Film Award , Golden Globe Award , National Board of Review Award , Screen Actors Guild Award , and accolades from the Broadcast Film Critics Association , London Film Critics Circle Award , Los Angeles Film Critics Association , National Society of Film Critics , and New York Film Critics Circle among others .

In 2007 , Whitaker played Dr. James Farmer Sr. in The Great Debaters , for which he received an Image Award nomination for Outstanding Supporting Actor . In 2008 , Whitaker appeared in three films , first as a business man known only as Happiness , who likes butterflies , in the film The Air I Breathe . He also portrayed a rogue police captain in Street Kings , and a heroic tourist in Vantage Point .

In 2013 , after languishing in several limited releases and independent features such as Freelancers and Pawn , Whitaker has enjoyed a bit of career resurgence , having played the lead role in Lee Daniels ' The Butler , which has become one of his greatest critical and commercial successes to date .

Whitaker also starred in the film Black Nativity , alongside Jennifer Hudson , Angela Bassett , and Jacob Latimore . He also co-starred with Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2013 's The Last Stand , playing an FBI agent chasing an escaped drug cartel leader .

Whitaker has been confirmed as a castmember in the upcoming Star Wars anthology film Rogue One .

== Television work ==

After completing several films in the early 1980s , Whitaker gained additional roles in multiple television shows . On the series , Diff 'rent Strokes , he played a bully in the 1985 episode " Bully for Arnold " . That same year , Whitaker also played the part of a comic book salesman in the Amazing Stories episode " Gather Ye Acorns " . He appeared in the first and second parts of North and South in 1985 and 1986 . Throughout the 1990s , Whitaker mainly had roles in television films which aired on HBO , including Criminal Justice , The Enemy Within , and Witness Protection .

From 2002 to 2003 , Whitaker was the host and narrator of 44 new episodes of the Rod Serling classic , The Twilight Zone , which lasted one season on UPN . After working in several film roles , he returned to television in 2006 when he joined the cast of FX 's police serial The Shield , as Lieutenant Jon Kavanaugh , who was determined to prove that the lead character , Vic Mackey , is a dirty cop . As opposed to his previous character work , Whitaker stated that he merely had to draw on his childhood years growing up in South Central Los Angeles for the role . He received rave reviews for his performance ? Variety called it a " crackling @-@ good guest stint " ? and he reprised the role in the show 's 2007 season .

In the fall of 2006 , Whitaker started a multi @-@ episode story arc on ER as Curtis Ames , a man who comes into the ER with a cough , but quickly faces the long @-@ term consequences of a paralyzing stroke ; he sues , then takes out his anger on Dr. Luka Kova? , who he blames for the strokes . Whitaker received a Primetime Emmy Award nomination for his performance in the series . Also in 2006 , Whitaker appeared in T.I. ' s music video " Live in the Sky " alongside Jamie Foxx .

Whitaker was cast in the Criminal Minds spin @-@ off , Criminal Minds : Suspect Behavior , that was subsequently cancelled by CBS on May 17 , 2011 .

== = Theatre == =

Whitaker made his Broadway debut in 2016 in a revival of Eugene O 'Neill 's play Hughie at the Booth Theatre , directed by Michael Grandage .

== = Producing and directing == =

Whitaker branched out into producing and directing in the 1990s . He co @-@ produced and co @-@ starred in A Rage in Harlem in 1991 . He made his directorial debut with a grim film about inner @-@ city gun violence , Strapped , for HBO in 1993 . In 1995 , he directed his first theatrical feature , Waiting to Exhale , which was based on the Terry McMillan novel of the same name . Roger Ebert observed that the tone of the film resembled Whitaker 's own acting style : " measured , serene , confident . " Whitaker also directed co @-@ star Whitney Houston 's music video of the movie 's theme song , " Exhale (Shoop Shoop) " .

Whitaker continued his directing career with the 1998 romantic comedy , Hope Floats , starring Sandra Bullock and Harry Connick , Jr . He directed Katie Holmes in the romantic comedy , First Daughter in 2004 while also serving as executive producer ; he had previously co @-@ starred with Holmes in Phone Booth in 2002 . He had previously gained experience as the executive producer of several made @-@ for @-@ television movies , most notably the 2002 Emmy @-@ award winning Door to Door , starring William H. Macy . He produced these projects through his production company , Spirit Dance Entertainment , which he shut down in 2005 to concentrate on his acting career .

Whitaker and his partner Nina Yang Bongiovi produced the film Fruitvale Station , which won the Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award for U.S. dramatic film at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival , as well as Repentance (2014) and Dope (2015) .

== = JuntoBox Films == =

Whitaker plays an active role as co @-@ chair of JuntoBox Films since his initial involvement as co @-@ chair with the collaborative film studio starting in March 2012 . JuntoBox was developed as a

social @-@ media platform for filmmakers and fans to share ideas to create films and then collaborate to make them . Since Whitaker joined as co @-@ chair , five projects have been greenlit for production .

= = Honors = =

In addition to the numerous awards Whitaker won for his performance in The Last King of Scotland , he has also received several other honors . In September 2006 , the 10th Annual Hollywood Film Festival presented him with its " Hollywood Actor of the Year Award , " calling him " one of Hollywood 's most accomplished actors . " He was honored at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival 2007 , where he received the American Riviera Award .

Previously , in 2005 , the Deauville (France) Festival of American Film paid tribute to him . On April 16 , 2007 , Whitaker was the recipient of the 2,335th star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for his contributions to the motion pictures industry at 6801 Hollywood Boulevard . He received the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from Xavier University of Louisiana in 2009 at the 82nd Commencement Ceremony . He received the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from California State University , Dominguez Hills on May 16 , 2015 .

= = Personal life = =

In 1996 , Whitaker married actress Keisha Nash , whom he met on the set of Blown Away . The Whitakers have four children : two daughters together (Sonnet and True) , and his son (Sergio Hyatt) and her daughter (Autumn) from previous relationships . On Inside the Actors Studio , Whitaker said that a genetic test indicated he was of Igbo descent through his patrilineal line , and of Akan descent through his matrilineal line .

Whitaker studies yoga and has a black belt in kenpo . He also trains in the Filipino martial art of Kali , under Dan Inosanto . Inosanto is best known for having been a student of the late Bruce Lee and has trained actors such as Denzel Washington and Brandon Lee .

Whitaker 's left eye ptosis has been called " intriguing " by some critics and " gives him a lazy , contemplative look . " Whitaker has explained that the condition is hereditary and that he has considered having surgery to correct it , not for cosmetic reasons but because it affects his vision .

= = Activism = =

= = = Charity work = = =

Whitaker , who is a vegetarian , recorded a public service announcement with his daughter , True , promoting vegetarianism on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) . He is also a supporter and public advocate for Hope North , a boarding school and vocational training center in northern Uganda for escaped child soldiers , orphans , and other young victims of the country 's civil war .

= = = Politics = = =

In politics , Whitaker supported and spoke on behalf of Senator Barack Obama in his 2008 presidential campaign . On April 6 , 2009 , he was given a chieftaincy title in Imo State , Nigeria . Whitaker , who was named a chief among the Igbo community of Nkwerre , was given the title Nwannedinamba of Nkwerre , which means A Brother in a Foreign Land .

Whitaker was inducted as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation , in a ceremony at UNESCO headquarters on June 21 , 2011 . As Goodwill Ambassador , Whitaker works with UNESCO to support and develop initiatives that empower youths and keep them from entering or remaining in cycles of violence . At the induction ceremony , U.S. Ambassador to UNESCO David

Killion described Whitaker as a " perfect choice as a Goodwill Ambassador ... He has exemplified compassion in every area of his life , with humility and grace . He does this because it 's the right thing to do . "

In 2010 , Whitaker received the Artist Citizen of the World Award (France) .

In May 2011 , Whitaker co @-@ founded the International Institute for Peace (IIP) at Rutgers University in Newark , New Jersey . Launched during the international Newark Peace Education Summit , IIP ? s mission is to develop programs and strategic partnerships to address cutting @-@ edge issues such as increasing citizen security through community @-@ building ; the role of women and spiritual and religious leaders in peace @-@ building ; the impact of climate change ; and the reduction of poverty . IIP operates under the auspices of UNESCO as a Category 2 Center .

= = Filmography = =

= = = Film = = =

= = = Television = = =