

EMMY, GOLDEN GLOBE, SAG WINNER

GOTHAM AWARD WINNER

S. EPATHA MERKERSON & YOLONDA ROSS

WRAP SHORT FILM

# DESMOND'S NOT HERE ANYMORE

DIRECTED BY

MMABATHO MONTSHO

AUGUST 4, 2021

## IT'S A WRAP.

The 2019 HollyShorts Film Festival's winning short screenplay, *Desmond's Not Here Anymore*, has wrapped principal photography in Seattle, Washington. Emmy-, Golden Globe-, SAG- and multi-NAACP-winning actor S. Epatha Merkerson describes this unique, women-powered short film production as "a most cherished experience." *Law & Order* alumna and *Chicago Med* veteran Merkerson stars alongside Gotham Award winner and multi- Independent Spirit Award nominee Yolonda Ross (*The Chi*, *The Get Down*, *Antwone Fisher*) in this gothic family drama directed by South African Mmabatho Montsho (*2020 Best Short Film – Worldwide Women's Film Festival*, *Golden Horn Award for Best TV Drama Script*).

Inspired by HollyShorts 2019 Screenplay winner, screenwriter Lindiwe Suttle Müller-Westernhagen's own sexual abuse story, *Desmond's Not Here Anymore* follows a devoted daughter who struggles to care for her mother whose Alzheimer's keeps a painful memory alive from their past. "This film is a celebration of the unique, abiding mother-daughter bond, and ultimately about healing."



**WHAT SOLD S. EPATHA MERKERSON ON THE ROLE:** "Yolonda Ross called me and asked would I play her mother in a film she had been cast in. I said 'Yes' before reading a word of the script, having been a big fan of her tremendous talent. Then I read the script and realized I was about embark on a project that speaks truth on so many levels. Lindiwe Suttle Müller-Westernhagen has crafted a poignant tale about sexual abuse, mother-daughter relationships, family secrets, terror, fear, Alzheimer's and, ultimately and most

importantly, forgiveness. Add to that the opportunity to work on a set where 26 of 37 crew members were women."

**YOLONDA ROSS ON HER EXPERIENCE OF FILMING:** "To work on a film with such a heavy subject matter, with so many women in key positions, and opposite S. Epatha Merkerson, who I've been a fan of for years, was not work at all. It was a very special experience... I have not laughed and cried on set as much as I did here," says Ross.



Hungarian-born, Berlin-based Agnesh Pakozdi is the cinematographer. She was the Best Cinematography winner at the 62nd Seminci Film Festival in 2017 and a Top 3 Nominee for the Michael Ballhaus Cinematography Award in 2019. The annual competition's production is sponsored by the Seattle Film Summit, and the organization is financing the short. The film is produced by HollyShorts' 88th Street Productions and Slager Fuj Creative Media.

Statistics show that black women disproportionately experience sexual violence, and, in fact, one in four Black girls will be sexually abused before the age of 18. Meanwhile, Alzheimer's disease is the fourth leading cause of death amongst African Americans. "I hope this film inspires support and conversations in the Black community," says Suttle Müller-Westernhagen.

S. Epatha Merkerson has received numerous high-profile accolades for her work including an Emmy, a Golden Globe, a Screen Actors' Guild Award, four NAACP Image Awards, two Obie Awards, and two Tony Award nominations. Yolonda Ross is best known for her role as Jada on the SHOWTIME Original Series, *The Chi*, and is a Gotham Award winner, GLAAD Media Awards nominee and multi-Independent Spirit Award nominee.

*Desmond's Not Here Anymore* is the latest in a series of short films produced by the Seattle Film Summit through the HollyShorts Film Festival's annual Screenplay Competition.

*Desmond's Not Here Anymore* will premiere at opening night of this year's 17th annual HollyShorts Film Festival at the TCL Chinese Theatre in September.



DIRECTOR MONTSO ON THE SCREENPLAY: "Lindiwe's writing is breathtaking, and her way with characters and world-building is reminiscent of Toni Morrison; it invites you to walk hand in hand with each character as they work through their personal horrors in search of true healing."

S. Epatha Merkerson is repped by ICM and McGowan Rodriguez. Lindiwe Suttle Müller-Westernhagen is repped by Alta Global Media.

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IG: @desmondsnothereanymore  
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