

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Voza Rivers

PERSON

Rivers, Voza

Alternative Names: Voza Rivers;

Life Dates: December 27, 1942-

Place of Birth: New York, New York, USA

Residence: New York, NY

Work: New York, NY

Occupations: Theater Director

Biographical Note

Theatre director Voza Rivers was born on December 27, 1942 in Harlem, New York City. After graduating from George Washington High School in 1959, Rivers received his A.S. degree in police science from the College of Police Science at the City University of New York and worked as an undercover officer with the New York City Police Department. He later received his M.A. degree in communication arts from the New York Institute of Technology.

In 1964, Rivers joined Roger Furman's New Heritage Theatre, and became New Heritage Theatre Group's executive producer in 1983. Under his leadership, New Heritage Theatre Group produced a series of South African plays and collaborated with black South African playwright Mbongeni Ngema in the 1980s. Their first play, *Woza Albert!*, heralded for its satirical take on the South African Apartheid, won over twenty awards worldwide. The second collaboration, *Asinamali!*, went to Broadway and was nominated for a Tony Award. Rivers received acclaim for the introduction and presentation of the third collaboration with Lincoln Center Theatre, *Sarafina!*, the South African musical by Ngema, depicting students involved in the Soweto Riots in opposition to apartheid. The Tony and Grammy nominated *Sarafina!* premiered on Broadway in 1988 at the Cort Theatre, and following 597 performances and eleven previews, closed in 1989.

Rivers has produced award-winning works Off-Broadway as well as productions at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Manhattan School of Music, Carnegie Hall and the world famous Apollo Theater. He has worked with artists including Nina Simone, James Brown, Ray Charles, the Count Basie

Orchestra, Tony Bennett, Max Roach, and Celia Cruz. Rivers has also produced more than 1500 events featuring world-renowned artists in the United States, South Africa and Japan, and has produced for artists such as: Ruby Dee, Luther Vandross, Ashford and Simpson, George Benson, Tito Puente, Lionel Hampton, Isaac Hayes, Little Jimmy Scott, Miriam Makeba, and Chaka Khan. Films executive produced by Rivers include: Hughes Dream Harlem (Langston Hughes), Sutton: A Man for All Seasons (Percy Sutton), A-Alike (2003 Oscar nominated student film), Lifted (2007) and The Savoy King: Chick Webb & the Music That Changed America (2012).

In 1997, together with playwright, author, director and educator Jamal Joseph, Rivers co-founded the youth group IMPACT Repertory Theatre, which was later nominated for an Oscar and Grammy for Best Song for the film August Rush in 2008. Rivers has served as chairman of the Harlem Arts Alliance since 2001. From 2015, he has served also as the executive producer of Harlem's Gertrude Jeannette's The H.A.D.L.E.Y. Players theatre. He was the first vice president of The Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce and the executive producer and vice chairman of HARLEM WEEK.

Voza Rivers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 29, 2018.

Related Entries

P.S. 68 [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

George Washington High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

New Heritage Theater [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1964 to 1983]

Producer and Member

New York Police Department [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1965 to 1985]

Detective

Greenlight Films [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1979 to 1987]

Vice Chairman

New York Entertainment and Sports Advisors [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1979 to 1989]

President

New Heritage Theater Group [MEMBEROF]
[from 1964 to ?]

Executive Producer

Impact Repertory Theater [MEMBEROF]
[from 1997 to ?]

Executive Producer and Co-Founder

Harlem Arts Alliance [MEMBEROF]

[from 2001 to ?]

Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce [MEMBEROF]

[from 2006 to ?]

Vice President