



By Don Thomas

Voza Rivers Legacy Series celebrates emerging voices in theater and film

By Keith L. Forest
Guest Scribe

The Voza Rivers Legacy Series kicked off on Wed., Dec., 3, 2025, with a press day held at The City College of New York (CCNY). Presented by New Heritage Theatre Group (NHTG), in partnership with CCNY, the event, which was preceded by a competitive citywide open mic contest, brought together the series' visionary producers, industry leaders, and the promising new talent selected from the groundbreaking series dedicated to uplifting the next generation of playwrights and screenwriters.

"Today we not only honor the legacy of storytelling but to actively create and present the next generation of storytellers. The talent joining us is phenomenal, and we look forward to sharing their voices with the creative community," said Rivers.

The Press Day centered around the five winning writers of the open-mic competition, three of whom were in attendance to share their creative journeys. The group included Screenwriter Syndie Helsop (Little Girl Blue), and Playwrights Eric Richardson-Hagans (If Only Yesterday)—a student at CCNY and Allison Shillingford (At the Table). Tony Award-winning Producer Irene Gandy added, "The energy at CCNY was electric. We believe in providing real opportunities, and this series will give these five winners the visibility and resources they deserve to bring their work from the page to the stage or screen."

The Voza Rivers Legacy



(L-R) VRLS winners, Playwright Eric Richardson-Hagan, Screenplay Writer Syndie Helsop and Playwright Allison Shillingford

Series is the brainchild of a powerhouse production team: Producer Voza Rivers, Tony Award-winning Producer Irene Gandy, Producer Amy Sprecher, and Aaliytha Stevens. The series is dedicated to fostering diverse, innovative storytelling and providing a crucial platform for emerging writers in theater and film. The series is supported, in part, by West Harlem Development Corporation, New York State Council on the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the

City Council, the Nederlander Organization, and the Shubert Organization.

The Voza Rivers Legacy Series is much more than an artistic competition; it is a commitment to continuing the legacy of its namesake. Voza Rivers' six-decade career has left a profound mark on Harlem and the global arts landscape. Known for his humility, generosity, and tireless commitment to uplifting new talent, Rivers has made remarkable contributions across theater, film, music, dance, and



Voza Rivers, Founder/Producer NHTG (Photo: Ronnie Wright)

social justice.

Rivers efforts have fostered vibrant, safe, and inclusive spaces for creativity, and empowered generations of artists to share their stories both locally and around the world. As the man famously responsible for bringing the iconic South African musical "Sarafina!" to Broadway, Voza maintains

a deep, vital connection to the global diaspora. The Legacy Series is designed to continue this work by nurturing new multidisciplinary voices from historically marginalized communities, including BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and artists with disabilities, with accessibility and inclusion standing as its core principles.



Voza Rivers and Tony Award-winning Playwright Jordan Cooper



Dee Dee Mozeleski and Producer Irene Gandy