

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Walter Mason, Jr.

PERSON

Mason, Walter (Actor)

Alternative Names: Walter Mason, Jr.;

Life Dates: January 26, 1926-February 28, 2017

Place of Birth: Detroit, Michigan, USA

Residence: Las Vegas, NV

Occupations: Stage Actor; Stage Director

Biographical Note

Production manager, stage actor, stage director, and stage production manager Walter Mason, Jr. was born on January 26, 1926, in Detroit, Michigan. His mother, Joanna Columbus Mason, a school teacher, and his father, Walter Mason, Sr., a skilled laborer, reared Mason in a church and community-oriented environment. After graduating from Detroit's Northwestern High School, Mason attended Wayne State University, where he earned his B.A degree in theater and business administration. Years later, Mason attended the Detroit College of Law while he continued to pursue a career in theater.

In a 1952 adaptation of Richard Wright's book *Native Son*, he portrayed its chief character "Booker Thomas" at the World Stage in Detroit, Michigan. His theatrical performances include his role as "Othello" in seven separate productions of *Othello* and "Caliban" in two productions of *The Tempest*. Mason has also been an instrumental figure in notable Broadway productions such as *Purlie Victorious* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Beyond acting, Mason served as a producer, director and artist for *The Good Book Sings* on WJR Radio and appeared on WXYZ TV's, *Showtime at the Apollo* as the master of ceremonies. He collaborated with choreographer, Alvin Ailey, in 1961 as the musical and production manager of *African Holiday*. Six years later, Mason became the production manager for *The Emperor Jones*, which starred actor James Earl Jones. Throughout his career, Mason has worked closely with many celebrities, including Sammy Davis, Jr., Duke Ellington, Frank Sinatra, Liza Minnelli, Jimmy Durante, Diana Ross, Dionne Warwick, Ella Fitzgerald, Lola Falana, Jackie Gleason and Gladys Knight and the Pips. As a private speech and drama coach, Mason has worked with many public figures and film and television performers.

Mason served as an associate to the dean of Yale University School of Drama at both Yale and on Broadway. In 1983, Mason produced and directed a theatrical presentation

at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. featuring aspiring young actors from black colleges and universities for The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education. The following year, Mason directed the production of the Pulitzer Prize winning play, A Soldier's Story, at Detroit's Fisher Theater.

Mason is the entertainment director at the Las Vegas Hilton Hotel and the founder and artistic director of the Aldridge Theater Company, Inc.

Mason passed away on February 28, 2017 at age 91.

Related Entries

Northwestern High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Wayne State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A.

Sampson Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Munger Middle School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Eugene O'Neill Foundation [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Production manager

Detroit Art Institute [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1949 to 1951]

Producer, Director, Artist

World Stage [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1952 to 1952]

Actor

Wayne State University [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1953 to 1953]

Actor

University of Detroit Mercy [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1956 to 1957]

Technical Director

Michigan Bell Telephone Company [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1985 to 1986]

Consultant and Speech Therapist

Las Vegas Hilton (Hotel) [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1986 to ?]

Entertainment Director

Ira Aldridge Theatre Co., Inc. [EMPLOYEEOf]
[from 1993 to ?]

Founder and artistic director

Actors' Equity Association [MEMBEROf]
[from ? to ?]

Member