

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ricardo Khan

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Khan, Ricardo, 1951-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan,
Dates:	August 14, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:44:24).
Abstract:	Stage director and artistic director Ricardo Khan (1951 -) co-founded and was the artistic director of the Crossroads Theatre Company in New Jersey. Khan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 14, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_238
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Ricardo Mohamed Khan was born on November 4, 1951, in Washington, D.C., to Mustapha and Jacqueline Khan, a doctor from Trinidad and an American nurse. Khan was raised in Camden, New Jersey. In 1968, as a high school student, he went on a class trip to Broadway and saw an all-black cast perform *Hello, Dolly*. The trip inspired him to become active in his high school's drama program, and the next year, he attended Rutgers University, where he studied psychology and theater. Khan earned his B.A. degree in 1973 and his M.F.A. degree in 1977, both from Rutgers University.

Khan and one of his graduate school classmates, L. Kenneth Richardson, were frustrated by the limited opportunities for African Americans in theater; they wanted roles that went beyond conventional stereotypes. In 1978, they came up with the idea for the Crossroads Theatre Company as a place to promote black theater and black artists. With help from Eric Krebs of the nearby George Street Playhouse and a government grant, the company became a reality; its first theater was the second floor of an old factory in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The Crossroads Theatre Company presented their first world premier, *One Monkey Don't Stop No Show* by Don Evans in 1981. In 1986, with the premiere of *The Colored Museum*, Crossroads was established as a distinguished regional company. The next year, Khan and Richardson launched a \$1 million campaign to build a new playhouse, though Richardson left the group before the new stage was completed in 1991.

In the following years, the Crossroads Theatre Company became increasingly well-regarded; in a famous 1996 speech, playwright August Wilson described it as a role model for black theaters. Khan won a number of personal awards as well, including induction into the Rutgers University Hall of Distinguished Alumni; an honorary doctorate from his alma mater; and the New Jersey Governor's Award. In 1999, the Crossroads Theatre Company received the Tony Award for the Best Regional Theater.

However, lingering financial problems forced the company to make major cutbacks. In 2000, Khan went on sabbatical, traveling in Trinidad and later in Africa. That same year, Crossroads had to close for a season; the next year, it was able to mount a few shows, and it has gradually built back up since. In 2003, Khan returned to his role as artistic director, and in 2008 the Crossroads Theatre Company celebrated its thirtieth anniversary.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ricardo Khan was conducted by Adrienne Jones on August 14, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Stage director and artistic director Ricardo Khan (1951 -) co-founded and was the artistic director of the Crossroads Theatre Company in New Jersey.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Khan, Ricardo, 1951-

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghilea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Khan, Ricardo, 1951---Interviews

African American theatrical producers and directors--Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Crossroads Theatre Company (New Brunswick, N.J.)

Crossroads Theatre Company (New Brunswick, N.J.)

Occupations:

Stage Director

Artistic Director

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan, August 14, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan, Section
A2007_238_001_001, TRT: 0:29:42 2007/08/14

Ricardo Khan was born on November 4, 1951 in Washington, D.C. to Jacqueline Driver Khan and Mustapha Khan, Sr. His paternal family was East Indian. They came to Trinidad as indentured servants, and eventually opened their own businesses there, including a general store and bookstore. Khan's maternal grandparents, Helen Driver and Richard Driver, Sr., settled in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where his grandfather owned a barbershop. Khan's mother studied nursing at Howard University, where she met his father, a medical student, during a psychology class. After his father received a master's degree from Howard University, Khan's family moved to Norristown, Pennsylvania for his father's medical residency at the Norristown State Hospital. During that time, Khan and his parents lived on a farm on the

hospital's estate. Then, they moved to Camden, New Jersey, where Khan became involved in organizations like Jack and Jill of America, Inc. and the South Camden Branch YMCA.

African American theatrical producers and directors--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan, Section
A2007_238_001_002, TRT: 0:30:55 2007/08/14

Ricardo Khan's parents attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. during the tenure of professors Charles R. Drew, Eric Williams and Roland B. Scott. His mother studied nursing, while his father studied medicine. After Khan's birth, he and his family moved from Washington, D.C. to Norristown, Pennsylvania, before settling in New Jersey. Khan spent most of his childhood in Camden, New Jersey, and was the oldest of four siblings. His family initially lived above his father's medical office in Camden, but moved to Princess Avenue as Khan's siblings were born. Khan's interest in theater developed at an early age, and he often produced nature shows with plant specimens, music and skits for his neighbors. Khan studied at Quaker schools in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and was one of the few African American students in his classes. He attended the Friends Select School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and then the Moorestown Friends School in Moorestown, New Jersey, where he faced racial discrimination.

Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan, Section
A2007_238_001_003, TRT: 0:29:03 2007/08/14

Ricardo Khan received little instruction on African American history at the Friends Select School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He also experienced racial discrimination during the school's musical productions, in which the students of color were relegated to roles in the chorus. During this time, Khan's interest in theater was influenced by his parents' jazz albums and musical soundtracks, the speeches of Malcolm X and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and television programs like 'The Jetsons' and 'Good Times.' After his family moved to

New Jersey, Khan attended the Moorestown Friends School in Moorestown, New Jersey, and then Cherry Hill High School West in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. There, Khan aspired to a career in the theater after auditioning for the school's production of 'Funny Girl' with his friend. In addition to his dramatic involvement at school, Khan attended Broadway shows through Jack and Jill of America, Inc., including the all-black production of 'Hello, Dolly!'

Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan, Section
A2007_238_001_004, TRT: 0:29:50 2007/08/14

Ricardo Khan began directing theater shows through Jack and Jill of America, Inc. after seeing an all-black production of 'Hello, Dolly!' on Broadway. While directing, Khan also performed in plays at Cherry Hill High School West in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. It was during a rehearsal there that he learned of the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. After graduation, Khan and his friends continued to practice musical numbers together, and founded a small company. He also enrolled at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, where he studied architecture, as his parents did not permit him to major in drama. Nevertheless, Khan pursued his aspirations by performing in the college's plays, taking theater courses and directing productions at Jack and Jill of America, Inc. Upon earning a degree, Khan visited his family in Trinidad, and then enrolled at the Howard University School of Law. Then, realizing that theater was his passion, he applied to the Mason Gross School of the Arts.

Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan, Section
A2007_238_001_005, TRT: 0:29:12 2007/08/14

Ricardo Khan earned an M.F.A. degree at the Mason Gross School of the Arts in New Brunswick, New Jersey. While in school, he attended Broadway productions of 'Dreamgirls' and 'Timbuktu!', which starred entertainer Eartha Kitt. Khan was also introduced to local African American theater companies like the Negro Ensemble Company, and saw many of their productions. He participated in workshops at director Woodie King, Jr.'s New Federal Theater in New York City after seeing their

show, 'What the Wine Sellers Buy.' Upon completing his M.F.A. degree, Khan worked as a community theater director with funding from the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973. Discontent with his experiences of racial discrimination in the theater community, Khan decided to co-found an African American theater company with actor L. Kenneth Richardson. Khan and Richardson were awarded a grant from CETA, and created a theater project in New Brunswick that became known as the Crossroads Theatre.

Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan, Section
A2007_238_001_006, TRT: 0:31:00 2007/08/14

Ricardo Khan founded the Crossroads Theatre in New Brunswick, New Jersey to provide the community with lead roles for black actors, and positive depictions of African Americans. The company's early productions included Leslie Lee's 'The First Breeze of Summer' and August Wilson's 'Jitney.' Initially, the Crossroads Theatre's audiences were mostly white; but, through subscriptions and group ticket sales, the African American community of New Brunswick became dedicated theatergoers. Khan directed the Crossroads Theatre for twenty-two years, and also served as a director for other organizations like the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon. Khan decided to leave the Crossroads Theatre in 1997; but, due to the company's financial difficulties, his departure was delayed until late 1999. The company was never very profitable, and had accrued a large debt after moving to a new facility. The Crossroads Theatre received a special Tony Award for best regional theater shortly before Khan's retirement.

Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan, Section
A2007_238_001_007, TRT: 0:30:55 2007/08/14

Ricardo Khan's theater company, the Crossroads Theatre, encountered financial difficulties in the late 1990s. Khan planned to leave the company in 1997, but these financial problems led him to stay longer than anticipated. As the media became aware of the organization's large debt, Khan was faced with choosing an interim director for the company. He disclosed his departure to the public in December of 1999, during a press conference to announce

the acquisition of new funding for the company. After leaving, Khan visited his paternal family in Trinidad. He heard about the continued problems at the Crossroads Theatre, but decided not to intervene. In 2000, the Crossroads Theatre closed temporarily due to its unresolved debt and feuding among the company leadership. In 2003, Khan accepted the company's invitation to return as director. He revitalized the Crossroads Theatre, and also established the World Theater Lab, an international theater company for people of color.

Video Oral History Interview with Ricardo Khan, Section
A2007_238_001_008, TRT: 0:13:47 2007/08/14

Ricardo Khan narrates his photographs.