

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Billy Porter

PERSON

Porter, Billy

Alternative Names: Billy Porter;

Life Dates: September 21, 1969-

Place of Birth: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Residence: New York, NY

Work: Los Angeles, CA

Occupations: Actor

Biographical Note

Actor Billy Porter was born on September 21, 1969 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and raised by his mother, Cloerinda Ford. Porter attended Taylor Allderdice High School in Pittsburgh, as well as the Pittsburgh School for the Creative and Performing Arts, where he studied acting, music, and dance. He later attended Carnegie Mellon University's School of Drama in Pittsburgh, graduating in 1991.

In 1991, Porter was cast in the ensemble of *Miss Saigon*, which won three Tony Awards and became one of the longest-running shows in Broadway history. Throughout the 1990s, he continued to appear in Broadway musicals, including *Five Guys Named Moe*, *Smokey Joe's Café*, and the 1994 revival of *Grease*, in which he played Teen Angel. Porter pursued a career in the music industry, winning the 1992 season of the talent competition *Star Search* and releasing a self-titled R&B album in 1997 with A&M Records. Starting in 2000, he took a hiatus from acting on Broadway to direct productions like the music revue *Being Alive* at the Suzanne Roberts Theatre in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Los Angeles staging of *Once on This Island*, and a revival of George C. Wolfe's play, *The Colored Museum*. Porter wrote the solo performance piece *Ghetto Superstar*, which he debuted in 2005 at New York City's Public Theatre. Porter went on to appear in the Pittsburgh premiere of Suzan-Lori Parks' *Topdog/Underdog*, as well as in the off-Broadway revival of *Angels in America* at the Signature Theatre in New York City in 2010, where he played Belize.

In 2013, Porter returned to Broadway as Lola in the musical *Kinky Boots*, winning the 2013 Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical, the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actor in a Musical, and the 2014 Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album for

his performance. In the years following, Porter wrote the semi-autobiographical play *While I Yet Live*, which premiered at Primary Stages in New York City in 2014, and played Aubrey Lyles in the 2016 Broadway musical *Shuffle Along, or the Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed*. In 2018, Porter became a series regular in the television show *Pose*, and appeared on multiple episodes of *American Horror Story: Apocalypse*. He was a supporter and fundraiser for the Ali Forney Center, a community center for homeless LGBT youth in New York City.

Billy Porter was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 7, 2016.

Related Entries

Taylor Allderdice High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

High School Diploma

University of California, Los Angeles [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Reizenstein Middle School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Carnegie Mellon University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

B.F.A.

Broadway [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1991 to 2000]

Actor

A&M Records [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1997 to 2000]

Singer

Film [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2000 to ?]

Actor - Film and Television

Off-Broadway [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2004 to ?]

Actor, Playwright

Reprise Theature Company [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2008 to 2008]

Director

Broadway [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 2012 to 2013]

Actor

The Huntington Theatre Company [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 2015 to 2015]

Director

Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]