

APOLLO

KAMILAH FORBES

Cofounder and artistic director of HiARTS, Kamilah Forbes, is an award-winning director and producer. In her diverse body of work, Forbes is noted for having a strong commitment to the development of creative works by, for, and about the Hip-Hop Generation. Her talent in the range of aforementioned endeavors has been said to “cast a vivid and evocative spell on both the national and international stage.”

While her family originally hails from Jamaica, Forbes was born and raised in Chicago. After graduating from Howard University with a degree in theater, Forbes partnered with one of her former classmates and friends, actor Chadwick Boseman (*42, Get On Up*) and wrote a theatrical piece fusing the elements of her generation’s sensibilities, thrust and penchant for social justice, coining the aesthetic ‘hiphop theater’. Forbes and Boseman presented the piece at the National Black Arts Festival and in other venues. A year later, the *Hip-Hop Theater Festival* was born.

Over the last 16 years, Forbes has led the *Hip-Hop Theater Festival* as it has grown from a fledgling project into an independent nonprofit organization with a truly national scope. Presented in New York, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, the festival has featured the works of nearly 100 artists from the United States and from around the world, including England, Brazil, and Canada. Many new and wellknown artistic forces have had their work leveraged under Forbes’s artistic direction, including OBIE Award-winner Will Power, TONY Award-winner Sarah Jones, Rennie Harris, Nilaja Sun, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, and Indio Melendez, to name a few.

HiARTS received the Union Square Arts Award under Forbes’ direction, as well as a special award given by the New York Regional Association of Grantmakers for “its innovative approach for addressing sociopolitical issues in NYC and beyond.”

Other projects produced by Ms. Forbes include: *What’s Going On*—the 40th anniversary celebration of Marvin Gaye’s seminal conversation with America (with John Legend as Marvin Gaye, Sharon Jones as Tammy Terrell, and Dap, Sonia Sanchez, and others); *One Mic*—a month-long multidisciplinary celebration of HipHop Worldwide; and *Nas’ 20 Year Anniversary of Illmatic*—a celebration of the classic hiphop album, accompanied with 96 players from the National Symphony Orchestra—all staged at the Kennedy Center.

Forbes first came to prominence as the writer/director of HipHop Theatre Junction’s premier work “Rhyme Deferred.” Forbes has produced several works for both television and theater, most notably the sevenseason Peabody Award-winning series *Russell Simmons presents Def Poetry* on HBO. She was also a coexecutive producer on the *Brave New Voices* documentary series on HBO, in addition to executive-producing the most recent PBS special *The Women’s List*.

Forbes has received numerous accolades for her work in the arts, including a Josephine Abady Award, AUDELCO Award nomination, NAACP Image Award, numerous Helen Hayes Award nominations, DC Commission Distinguished Artist Award, Tony Award, and The Mayor’s Arts Award for Emerging Theatre Artist.

Updated as of 3/23/20