

# Sam Rivers

## Biography

Born Samuel Carthorne Rivers on September 25, 1923 in El Reno, Oklahoma.

Sam was born into a musical family- his grandfather was a minister and musician who published "A Collection of Revival Hymns & Plantation Melodies in 1882. His father graduated from Fisk University and sang with the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Silverstone Quartet, while Sam's mother accompanied on piano for the latter group. Sam earliest experience with music came from singing in a family vocal group at the age of five. He later studied violin, piano and trombone, before switching to saxophone at the age of 13.

Sam's first professional experience came playing with Jimmy Witherspoon during 3 years of navy service. He attended Boston Conservatory in 1947 and became involved in the Boston jazz scene. There he played with students Jaki Byard, Serge Chaloff, Gigi Gryce, Ken McIntyre, Paul Gonsalves, Alan Dawson and others. He resided in Miami, Florida from 1955 to 1957 during which time he played with Billie Holiday before returning to Boston in 1958 where he joined Herb Pomeroy's big band. During this second Boston tenure he hired a then 13-year old Tony Williams as part of his band and also acted as musical director for a number of R&B and Blues acts such as Wilson Pickett, B.B. King, Maxine Brown and T-Bone Walker.

In 1964, during his time with T-Bone Walker, Sam was offered the saxophone position in Miles Davis' quintet, replacing a departing George Coleman. During his tenure with Davis he recorded the live album "Miles in Tokyo." After leaving that group Sam moved to New York City where he worked briefly in Charles Mingus' group and began playing with Andrew Hill, McCoy Tyner, and Cecil Taylor. During the period 1964-1967 Sam recorded four albums as leader for the Blue Note label. During the period Sam also led the Harlem Ensemble and was composer in residence for the Harlem Opera Company.

In 1969 Sam became an Associate Professor and artist in residence at Wesleyan University and Connecticut College. In 1970 Sam and his wife Beatrice opened Studio Rivbea as a living and rehearsal space for music and dance. Studio Rivbea became a prominent performing space in Manhattan until its closing in 1979. The five album series "Wildflowers", documenting one week at the studio, was released in 1977 by Douglas Records. Starting in 1973 Sam became a roster artist for the Impulse Records label for whom he released four albums.

In 1979 Rivers moved to New Jersey and continued to lead various ensembles including Winds of Manhattan and the Rivbea Orchestra. During this period Sam was an artists in residence at both Dartmouth University and Cornish College. During 1987 Rivers joined the Dizzy Gillespie quintet, big band and United

Nations Orchestra, an association that lasted four years. During a quintet performance in Orlando, Florida Sam first became interested in moving to the area. He relocated there in August 1991 to pursue a steady working version of the Rivbea Orchestra to realize and perform a large number of compositions dating back to 1958.

Many of the musicians that comprise the current Rivbea Orchestra are veterans of the theme parks and related venues that flourish in the Central Florida area and many have been involved since the band's Orlando inception. The trio format ubiquitous to Sam's name has existed alongside the Orchestra, with bassist Doug Mathews and drummer Anthony Cole holding the bass and drum chairs in both ensembles. In 1996 Rivbea Sound Company was formed to release recordings by Sam Rivers and released its debut album, "Concept" with Mathews and Cole as sidemen. Sam River's Rivbea Allstar Orchestra, comprised of Sam's regular rhythm section and augmented by members of his previous bands, recorded and released two albums for RCA-Victor. These albums entitled "Inspiration" and "Culmination" both received Grammy nominations in 1999 and 2000, respectively. In November 2000, River's Orlando version of the Rivbea Orchestra performed for two evenings at Lincoln Center in New York City. The band is currently holding weekly residency workshops, performing for the public at the Sapphire in downtown Orlando.