

DIEGO RIVERA BIOGRAPHY

SAXOPHONIST – COMPOSER – ARRANGER

DIRECTOR OF JAZZ STUDIES – UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

“...his playing is carefully phrased and beautifully nuanced...” - Jazz Times

A world-class musician, composer, arranger and educator, Diego Rivera has entertained audiences for over 20 years. Rivera is known for his muscular tone and unique blend of straight-ahead jazz fused with music inspired by his Latino background and heritage. He currently serves as the Director of Jazz Studies at the Butler School of Music, University of Texas at Austin.

Rivera was born in Ann Arbor, MI and raised ‘just up the road’ in East Lansing, MI. Born into a Mexican-American family, his Chicano heritage has shaped his musical voice and creative endeavors. His parents named him after the famed muralist, Diego Rivera. A trip to the Detroit Institute of Arts at a young age inspired him to make his own mark with the Saxophone rather than the brush. He attended Michigan State University where he studied with Andrew Speight, Branford Marsalis, Ron Blake and Rodney Whitaker.

In 1999, he began his professional and touring career with the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra on their Big Band ‘99 tour. Since that maiden voyage, he has performed concerts at the most prestigious venues and festivals across the United States, Canada, Europe and Asia. In addition to touring with his own ensemble, Rivera has also toured both nationally and internationally with GRAMMY-Award winning vocalist, Kurt Elling, JUNO-Award winning Canadian Jazz Vocalist, Sophie Milman and The Rodney Whitaker Quintet. He is a member of the The Ulysses Owens Jr. Big Band (New York, NY), the Jazz @ Dr. Phillips Center Orchestra (Orlando, FL) and the Gathering Orchestra (Detroit, MI). He has also performed with artists: The Jazz @ Lincoln Center Orchestra w/ Wynton Marsalis, Ellis Marsalis, Christian McBride, Wycliffe Gordon, PRISM Saxophone Quartet, the Gerald Wilson Big Band and the Lincoln Center Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra.

A passionate educator Rivera has presented masterclasses at schools and universities both in the United States and abroad. In 2022, Rivera accepted a position to become the next Director of Jazz Studies at the University of Texas at Austin where he also serves as an Associate Professor of Jazz Saxophone. He is currently a Vandoren Performing Artist. In 2019 he was awarded the Dortha J. and John D. Withrow Teaching Award, Michigan State University’s highest honor for excellence in teaching and scholarly achievement at the College of Music. Ensembles and students under his direction have won several awards and recognitions at the Jazz @ Lincoln Center Jack Rudin Jazz Championship, The Notre Dame Jazz Festival and The Elmhurst Jazz Festival. Several of Professor Rivera’s former students enjoy careers as professional musicians performing with artists such as: Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz @ Lincoln Center, The Christian McBride Big Band, The Birdland Big Band, The Count Basie Orchestra, The DIVA Jazz Orchestra and the multi-GRAMMY Award winning group, Snarky Puppy.

Rivera has released 5 critically-acclaimed albums as a leader and has several other credits to his name as a recording artist, composer and arranger. He is currently a Posi-Tone recording artist, a New York/Los Angeles based record label. Rivera’s latest project, ***With Just A Word*** was released in February of 2024. His previous releases ***Love & Peace*** (2023) and ***Mestizo*** (2022) both received 4-Stars in DownBeat Magazine. They also finished in the Top 5 on the Year-End JazzWeek Radio charts which tracks national radio play for all current Jazz recordings. His other projects ***Indigenous***, ***Connections***, ***The Contender*** (D- Clef Records 2013) and ***Hercules*** (Rivera Records) all received national critical acclaim reaching the Top 10 on the JazzWeek Radio Charts. He has also appeared on several recordings as a sideman on the Posi-Tone, Mack Avenue and Detroit Music Factory Record Labels.

An avid composer and arranger, Rivera has written works for various recordings, projects and artists most notably for Jazz at Lincoln Center’s “Motor City Jazz” concert, a tribute to the music and musicians of Detroit. His arranging work can be heard on recordings by: *Carl Allen-Rodney Whitaker*, ***Get Ready*** (2007) and ***Work To Do*** (2008); *Ulysses Owens Jr.*, ***Onward & Upward*** (2014); *The New Century Quintet*, ***The Time Is Now*** (2014); *Michael Dease*, ***Decisions*** (2015)/***Bonafied*** (2018) and most recently on the *Ulysses Owens Jr. Big Band* debut recording, ***Soul Conversations*** (2021).