

DON'T ASK FOR PERMISSION

PRESIDENT OF ARRAY FILMWORKS PAUL GARNES HAS LEARNED THAT PRODUCING IS BOTH A TEAM SPORT AND A MATTER OF PLAYING BY YOUR OWN RULES.

INTERVIEW BY DINO-RAY RAMOS

Paul Garnes started working with Ava DuVernay on her films *Middle of Nowhere* and *Selma*, and since then their partnership has flourished. After putting the work in on shows like *Queen Sugar* and *Cherish the Day*, he was named president of ARRAY Filmworks—DuVernay’s independent film distribution banner and advocacy collective—in July 2021. Prior to stepping into his new role, Garnes had served as ARRAY’s head of physical production.

Even before his time at ARRAY, he cut his teeth in various producing positions, working in film and TV at nearly every major studio and network including Disney, Dreamworks, HBO, ABC, NBC, BET and Paramount Pictures. He also worked as VP

of operations and production for Foxx-King Productions as well as head of production for Simmons Lathan Media Group. Garnes also worked for another major player in the business as VP and executive in charge of production for the Tyler Perry Company.

With all that under his belt, Garnes has learned to not ask for permission and is determined as ever to tell stories that matter.

WHAT MOVIE, PERSON, TV SHOW OR HOLLYWOOD PROJECT INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME A PRODUCER AND A STORYTELLER?

Growing up on the South Side of Chicago, I never imagined a pathway that included Hollywood, movies, TV shows—those





Producers Paul Garnes,
Ava DuVernay and
Howard Barish

things seemed so far away. In high school I got involved in theater, which opened me up to the concept of arts as a career. But then around my junior year, Spike Lee released *School Daze*, and that changed everything. For the first time I saw people who looked like me working behind the scenes, and I knew that's what I

wanted to do. That inspired me to go to film school at Columbia College Chicago.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH STORYTELLING?

Storytelling is a team sport. You depend on writers, directors and actors for vision and passion, but successful storytelling happens in the details. Putting the perfect team together and focusing on what's important. Producing for television and film is such a unique storytelling forum. You don't do it by yourself.

WHAT ONE PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOURSELF WHEN YOU WERE COMING UP AS A PRODUCER?

Don't wait for anyone to give you permission or to validate what it is that you want to do. In so many different careers there are set pathways to find your way. I've learned over and over again that in producing, there is no one set path. Often you'll find yourself alone and questioning whether you should keep going. I would love to go back to young me, not for advice through the uncertainty, but just to encourage me to keep going! Fight for it!

WHO GAVE YOU WHAT YOU WOULD CONSIDER YOUR FIRST BIG BREAK THAT HELPED LIGHT A FIRE UNDERNEATH YOU AS A PRODUCER?

In the late 1990s I met Reuben Cannon through a mutual acquaintance, which led to my first movie credit as associate producer on the indie film *Dancing in September*. Anyone who's done an independent film knows how wild an experience that can be, but that film validated my dream of spending the rest of my career working in this industry as a producer. I'm proud that all these years later, Reuben is still a mentor and a friend.

NOW THAT YOU KNOW WHAT YOU KNOW NOW, HOW DO YOU WANT TO MOVE FORWARD WITH YOUR CAREER AND THE KIND OF STORIES YOU WANT TO TELL?

The kind of stories that interest me haven't changed. I love to explore the complexity of who we are, why we do what we do, and why we feel what we feel. What has changed as I've gotten older and done this longer is a greater need for the projects I work on to mean something to others. ■

NEW MEMBERS

A SPOTLIGHT ON SOME OF THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF THE PRODUCERS GUILD AND WHAT MAKES THEM TICK



Divya D'Souza

After starting her career as an AD in film, D'Souza was drawn to producing because of its collaborative aspect. From the director to the studio to the crew, she always looks to create the best product possible and develop diverse voices that introduce the world to different stories.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received about producing?

The hardest thing for a producer to say should be no, because when you say no you need to be able to provide an answer for a different or better way to move forward—or at least guide the person in helping them get to that solution.