

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Isaac "Redd" Holt

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Holt, Red, 1932-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt,
Dates:	January 17, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:11:11).
Abstract:	Jazz musician Isaac "Redd" Holt (1932 - 2023) was a part of the original Ramsey Lewis Trio, co-founder and leader of Young-Holt Unlimited, and was the founder and director of the Gumption Performing Artists Workshop. Holt was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 17, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_011
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

World-class musician Isaac Redd Holt was born on May 16, 1932, in Rosedale, Mississippi. He attended public schools in Chicago and received advanced musical instruction at the Chicago School of Music in the early 1950s. Holt's interest in drums and percussion began as a child, and Holt bought his first drum set when he was a sophomore at Crane Technical High School. He graduated from high school in 1951 and attended the Cosmopolitan School of Music in Chicago. In the 1980s, Holt attended Kennedy-King College to study radio and television.

Between 1954 and 1966, Holt was part of the original Ramsey Lewis Trio, with which he created the hit singles "Hang on Sloopy" and "In Crowd." He was co-founder and leader of Young-Holt Unlimited from 1966 to 1974, with which he created another hit, "Soulful Strut," and the successful single, "Wack Wack," which was used in the movie *Harriet the Spy* and various other movies and commercials. Since 1974, he has been the leader and owner of Redd Holt Unlimited. He continues to wow audiences with his percussion and vocal skills, performing at jazz clubs, festivals, theaters and concerts around the world.

As a jazz educator, Holt has been active for many years in Urban Gateways, a nonprofit organization that provides multicultural performing, visual and literary arts programs for children, teachers and parents in the Chicago area. Holt acts as an arts ambassador to school children to help improve the quality of their education by exposing them to his music and engaging them in creating, appreciating, and reflecting on his art form.

From 1980 to 1985, Holt directed the Gumption Performing Artists Workshop for artists to enhance their talents. Holt has received various awards and honors including the Jazz Master Award from the Midwest Arts, a Lifetime Achievement Award from Indianapolis Radio Sounds of Jazz, and Grand Master of Time Award in 1997 from the Jazz Institute of Chicago and the DuSable Museum of African American History.

He married his childhood sweetheart, Marylean, in 1954. They have three children, Isaac Lamont, Ivan Damoune and Reginald Lamar.

Isaac "Redd" Holt passed away on May 23, 2023.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 17, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Jazz musician Isaac "Redd" Holt (1932 - 2023) was a part of the original Ramsey Lewis Trio, co-founder and leader of Young-Holt Unlimited, and was the founder and director of the Gumption Performing Artists Workshop.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Holt, Red, 1932-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Holt, Red, 1932- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Jazz Musician

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt, January 17, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 7/20/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt, Section A2003_011_001_001, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Isaac “Redd” Holt describes his family background. His mother, Mary Stewart Gilliam, was born in 1911 in Benoit, Mississippi. She was raised by her uncle in Rosedale, Mississippi after her mother’s death. According to Gilliam’s Aunt Pearl, the Stewarts descended from a slave owner that had a white and black family. Holt’s father, Willie Holt, was born in 1905 to Lenora Henderson in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He met Gilliam through her uncle in Rosedale while working as a lumberman. The couple gave birth to Isaac Holt on May 16, 1932. Sights, smells and sounds of Holt’s childhood in Rosedale include rolling tires and lumberyard sawdust. During the Great Depression Willie Holt moved to Chicago to find work. He sent for his family in 1941, and they lived with Lenora Henderson in West Side Chicago. Willie Holt, a family man who valued education, passed away in 1945. Gilliam remarried, and spent most of her time as a housewife, though she occasionally worked as a nurse’s aide and taught macramé and crochet courses.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt, Section A2003_011_001_002, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

Isaac “Redd” Holt did not like Chicago upon moving there in 1941, but he became accustomed to the city, and enjoyed playing baseball in West Side Chicago. He enrolled in Crane Tech High School in 1947 to play basketball and join the school band. Holt dreamt of becoming a drummer after seeing the “Silas Green from New Orleans” variety show, and worked as a busboy to purchase drum set, Ludwig Single Tensions, in 1949. Holt was also a guard on his high school basketball team. In 1949, Holt and two of his peers, a saxophonist and a pianist, formed the West Side Clefts. A bassist was later added, and the quartet played regularly in Union Park. By 1950, the band had seven members, and HistoryMaker Eldee Young played guitar as a sit-in. When the group found out Young played the bass, they allowed him to join. HistoryMaker Ramsey Lewis was later recruited to play the piano as a replacement. The West Side Clefts broke up during the Korean War draft. Holt served in the U.S. Army 12th Regimental Band from 1951 to 1953.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt, Section A2003_011_001_003, TRT: 0:30:00 ?

In 1954, Isaac “Redd” Holt and HistoryMakers Eldee Young and Ramsey Lewis signed to Chess Records after being introduced to Leonard and Phil Chess by their manager, HistoryMaker Daddy O-Daylie. Originally called the “Gentlemen of Jazz,” Daylie suggested a name change to the “Ramsey Lewis Trio,” as piano front men were popular at the time. The trio built their audience by playing in places like Ohio, Canada, and in Washington, D.C. at Abart’s Jazz Mecca. In 1965, a barmaid at Washington, D.C.’s Bohemian Caverns suggested the group play “The ‘In’ Crowd,” a Dobie Gray song, during a live show that was being recorded. The record gained significant airplay becoming a hit. In 1965, the “Ramsey Lewis Trio” dissolved after Lewis tried to gain fiscal and legal control of the group. Holt and Young formed “Young-Holt Unlimited,” and were signed to Associate Booking Corporation in 1966 by Joe Glaser. Holt describes his entertainment philosophy, the pressures popular jazz musicians face, and the versatility of jazz music.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt, Section A2003_011_001_004, TRT: 0:31:09 ?

In 1963 and 1964, the Ramsey Louis Trio played shows with musicians like HistoryMakers Oscar Brown, Jr. and Nancy Wilson, Floyd Morris, and

Cannonball Adderley, including “Free Sounds of ‘63”. In 1966, Holt and HistoryMaker Eldee Young sued HistoryMaker Ramsey Lewis for \$1 million. From 1966 to 1974, Young and Holt performed as Young-Holt Unlimited. During this period, Holt developed his talking tambourines solo and an interest in the ministry. Holt describes his melodic drumming technique, and how his music has been sampled without permission. From 1980 to 1985, Holt directed the Gumption Performing Artists Workshop, a musical development space that he has considered reviving with his sons. Holt was also involved with the Urban Gateways program. Holt talks about musical innovation on Chicago’s South Side, like the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), and playing at Birdland jazz club in New York City. Holt gives advice to young musicians, and talks about Abe Saperstein and Joe Glaser.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt, Section A2003_011_001_005, TRT: 0:28:55 ?

Isaac “Redd” Holt feels that recording music live is powerful, as it captures the energy of the audience. Holt argues that in the age of technology, live musicians are dwindling, and deejays and electronic music are becoming more popular. According to Holt, promotion of such music has caused an entire generation to appreciate electronic music more than live music. Holt shares his concerns for the African American community, and talks about his mother, Mary Gilliam. Growing up, Holt’s musical influences included Max Roach, Art Blakey, Gene Cooper, and Buddy Rich. He describes the sound of the early Ramsey Lewis Trio as a fusion between several genres, including classical, gospel, jazz, and funk. Holt also notes that he got his nickname, Redd, because he was the lightest child in his family. Holt talks about how he would like to be remembered, as well as his legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt, Section A2003_011_001_006, TRT: 0:30:38 ?

Isaac “Redd” Holt describes his experiences as an artist for Chess Records. According to Holt, The Ramsey Lewis Trio was treated fairly due to the management skills of HistoryMaker Daddy O-Daylie. Though Leonard Chess had a volatile personality, he liked his artists; Holt regularly ate meals at Bats Restaurant on Chess’ tab. A deal between Chess and Jack Tracy (to keep jazz pianist Ahmad Jamal signed to Chess Records) resulted in the Ramsey Lewis Trio recording their album, “Down to Earth,” for Mercury Records. Holt describes the showmanship of performing with the Ramsey Lewis Trio, as well. In 1966, Lewis formed Young-Holt Unlimited with HistoryMaker Eldee Young. After the group split in 1974, Holt formed Redd-Holt. Holt performs with his sons’ band, The Young-Holts, who are re-recording Holt’s most popular pieces. Holt describes his current projects and collaborations, and the challenges of being a drummer in a band. He closes by describing his musical legacy and narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt, Section A2003_011_001_007, TRT: 0:10:59 ?

Isaac "Redd" Holt narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac "Redd" Holt, Section A2003_011_Holt_Isaac_06_MED_001, TRT: 0:54:01