

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Edward Robinson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Robinson, Edward, 1933-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Edward Robinson,
Dates:	April 29, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	3 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:05:38).
Abstract:	Gospel pianist Edward Robinson (1933 - 2014) is recognized as one of Chicago's pioneers of gospel music and has accompanied Mahalia Jackson, Aretha Franklin, and many others. Robinson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 29, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_094
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Gospel pianist Edward Robinson was born in 1933. At a young age, Robinson sat down at his older brother's piano and began playing the song "Does Jesus Care" by ear. This experience began a lifetime dedicated to gospel music.

After his family moved to Chicago from Birmingham, Alabama, Robinson started playing piano for Louis Bodie. He became an accompanist for Mahalia Jackson and traveled the world with her for seventeen years. While traveling with Mahalia Jackson, he played gospel songs at the White House for five presidents, performed before European royalty and took the stage at New York's legendary Carnegie Hall. He has also performed with Aretha Franklin, Albertina Walker, Sam Cooke, The Caravans, Gladys Knight and Robert Anderson.

Despite his professional success, Robinson remained faithful to his gospel roots. In 1997, Mayor Richard Daley and the City of Chicago honored Robinson as one of Chicago's pioneers of gospel music. Former Illinois Governor George Ryan also honored him as a historian.

In his later years, Robinson worked as the pianist for the St. Andrew Temple Choir and as chapel musician for Leak and Sons Funeral Directors. Robinson also traveled the world as the pianist for Willie Wilson. He passed away in November of 2014, at the age of 81.

Edward Robinson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 23, 2003.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Edward Robinson was conducted by Adele Hodge on April 29, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 3 Betacame SP videocassettes. Gospel pianist Edward Robinson (1933 -

2014) is recognized as one of Chicago's pioneers of gospel music and has accompanied Mahalia Jackson, Aretha Franklin, and many others.

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:

Robinson, Edward, 1933-

Hodge, Adele (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Robinson, Edward, 1933---Interviews

African American church musicians--Interviews.

Pianists--Interviews.

African American church musicians.

Pianists.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Gospel Pianist

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 Edward Robinson, April 29, 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 5/30/2023 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 Edward Robinson, Section A2003_094_001_001, TRT: 0:29:27
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Edward Robinson was born on May 10, 1933 in Birmingham, Alabama to

Althea and Gilbert Robinson. He never met his grandparents and has limited knowledge of his family history. Robinson enjoyed a close relationship with his mother, a religious woman who attended the Church of God in Christ and worked as a nurse. Robinson's father worked for Tennessee Coal and Iron Ensley, a steel mill in Birmingham, Alabama. Robinson attended Eureka Elementary School, Lincoln Middle School, and A. H. Parker High School in Birmingham where he benefitted from the instruction of his teachers. At the age of eleven, Robinson met gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. He discovered a natural affinity for the piano around the age of twelve by watching his older brother play. Robinson's early musical training was largely shaped by pianist Evelyn Hardy of the Gospel Harmonettes. In 1949, Robinson moved to Chicago, Illinois where he was hired by Reverend Louis Boddie as a church musician. He also narrates his photographs.

African American families--Alabama.

Jackson, Mahalia, 1911-1972.

Gospel musicians--United States.

African American mothers.

African American nurses.

Pianists.

Video Oral History Interview with Edward Robinson, Section A2003_094_001_002, TRT: 0:30:06
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Edward Robinson became Mahalia Jackson's personal musician in 1958 at the recommendation of a Columbia Records executive. Robinson describes life on the road with Mahalia Jackson at the height of her popularity. Due to Mahalia Jackson's friendship with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Robinson performed at freedom rallies, the 1963 March on Washington and at Dr. King's funeral in 1968. Robinson cites gospel pianist Lucy Smith Collier along with gospel singers Robert Anderson and Willie Webb, as major musical influences. Robinson also worked for Aretha Franklin and her father, Reverend C.L. Franklin, before she transitioned out of gospel music. Robinson describes the Mahalia Jackson's declining health and her death in 1972. Robinson then began teaching music in Chicago's Washington Park and Columbus Park for the Chicago Park District, a position he held for twelve years. Robinson was married for nine years, but never had children. In later years, Robinson remained active as a pianist for Leak & Sons Funeral Homes, St. Andrews Temple Choir, and Willie Wilson.

Jackson, Mahalia, 1911-1972.

Gospel musicians--United States.

Franklin, Aretha.

Civil rights movements--Songs and music.

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.

Video Oral History Interview with Edward Robinson, Section A2003_094_001_003, TRT: 0:06:05
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Edward Robinson met Evelyn Cole, the sister of Nat King Cole, while working for Reverend Elmer L. Fowler at Third Baptist Church. As a result, Robinson also had the opportunity to meet Ike Cole and Natalie Cole. Robinson accompanied Mahalia Jackson's performance at Nat King Cole's 25th anniversary celebration at the Coconut Grove. During his career, Robinson had the opportunity to perform on many television shows with Mahalia Jackson including the Ed Sullivan Show, the Dean Martin Show, and the Red Skelton

Show. Of all the celebrities Robinson has met, from Pearl Bailey to Gregory Peck, his favorite remains Sammy Davis, Jr.

Cole, Nat King, 1919-1965