

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Isaac Hayes

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Hayes, Isaac
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Isaac Hayes,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 25, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:52:20).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Film actor, musician and singer, and film score composer Isaac Hayes (1942 - 2008 ) was the first African American to win an Oscar for Best Song. In addition to his musical activities, Hayes was also a prolific actor and literacy advocate. Hayes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 25, 2003, in Memphis, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_142
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Musician, actor, and entertainer, Isaac Hayes, was born Isaac Lee Hayes, Jr., on August 20, 1942, in Covington, Tennessee. When his parents died at an early age, Hayes went to live with his grandparents in Memphis. Hayes was a good student in high school, wanting to be a doctor; in the ninth grade, however, he dropped out to earn money. Hayes later enrolled in a night school from which he earned his diploma in 1962.

By the time Hayes was in his teens, he was adept at playing the piano, organ, and saxophone, as well as having spent years singing in a church choir. When he dropped out of school, Hayes immediately began performing with local R&B groups in Memphis, earning a solid reputation as a musician. Hayes recorded his first album in 1962, and by 1964, he was playing with the house band at Stax Records, one of the premier soul music recording labels in the South. After writing a number of hits in collaboration with David Porter for the group Sam & Dave, Hayes released his first solo album, *Presenting Isaac Hayes*, in 1967. Two years later, his breakthrough album, *Hot Buttered Soul* was released and Hayes became a star.

After producing a soundtrack to an experimental film by author Norman Mailer, Hayes was approached to write the musical score of *Shaft* in 1971; he would become the first African American to win an Oscar for Best Song. Hayes became involved in acting in the mid-1970s with an Italian film titled *Uomini Duri*, released in America as *Three Tough Guys*, and the title role in the film *Truck Turner* in 1974. Hayes returned to acting in 1981 with a role in *Escape from New York* and 1988's *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka!*. The 1990s and beyond saw a resurgence of Hayes in films, playing roles in *The Blues Brothers 2000*, *Dr. Doolittle*, and a remake of *Shaft*; he also became the voice of "Chef" in the animated television series *South Park*.

Hayes had a radio program on KISS-FM and was the spokesman for the World Literacy Crusade, a part of the Scientology movement. Hayes also established the Isaac Hayes Foundation to partner with nonprofit organizations to promote human rights. While in Ada, Ghana, in 1995, as a part of the World Literacy Crusade, Hayes was

crowned as a king, adopting the name of Nene Katey Ocansey I. Hayes also opened up a chain of restaurants across the country. In 2002, Hayes was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Isaac Hayes passed away on August 10, 2008, at the age of sixty-five.

Hayes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on June 25, 2003.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Isaac Hayes was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 25, 2003, in Memphis, Tennessee, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Film actor, musician and singer, and film score composer Isaac Hayes (1942 - 2008 ) was the first African American to win an Oscar for Best Song. In addition to his musical activities, Hayes was also a prolific actor and literacy advocate.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Hayes, Isaac

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hayes, Isaac --Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Musician and Singer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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## 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 Hayes, June 25, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac Hayes, Section A2003\_142\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:30 ?  
Entertainer Isaac Hayes speculates that his family's roots are in West Africa. In

his travels, Africans thought him to be a 'Douala man,' or of an ethnic group from Cameroon. Hayes describes that the first generation in his family to be enslaved in the United States lived in Virginia. He recognizes, though, that for generations his family called Tennessee home. Somerville and Covington, Tennessee are the towns with which his family had the greatest connection. Hayes recalls that his grandmother told stories of her mother's enslavement and her subsequent reactions to the activities around the U.S. Civil War. Hayes's discussion of his mother reveals that her family were sharecroppers in the South. His mother died in a southern mental hospital before Hayes was two years old. In giving his father's background, Hayes describes that Isaac Hayes, Sr. left the family after the mother's death. Hayes, Jr.'s grandparents became guardians to him and his sister. Some time later, Isaac Hayes, Jr. shared an emotional reunion with his father who offered him information on his background and their lost years.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac Hayes, Section A2003\_142\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Entertainer Isaac Hayes describes that until the age of seven, he lived on a farm in Covington, Tennessee with his grandparents. Upon an uncle's urging, the family then moved to Memphis, Tennessee, an experience Isaac Hayes describes as 'culture shock.' The family relocated to New Chicago, a close-knit community in north Memphis, Tennessee. Isaac Hayes describes experiences that inspired his love of music, including his grandfather's singing around the home, Hayes's participation in myriad musical church events, and the music of the WDIA radio station out of Memphis. Isaac Hayes describes that he was nearly a straight A student, with a love of literature; nevertheless, he was held back a grade upon moving from a rural area to Memphis. Though an exceptional and well-rounded student, Hayes felt pressure to drop out of high school for several weeks. He cites his poverty and its concomitant shame as the cause. Teachers and family supported him and found a way for him to feel more comfortable in his school environs. Throughout his high school life, Hayes pursued a number of jobs that would allow him a more comfortable life. Finally, he describes becoming involved in a talent show that turned him on to the virtues of performance. He was inspired to pursue formal musical training in junior high and high school.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac Hayes, Section A2003\_142\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Entertainer Isaac Hayes discusses many of the early jobs he held, including working as a chef and cleaning bricks for a construction company. In one such job, a white factory owner became a father figure and mentor to the young man. Isaac Hayes remembers one particular anecdote from his adolescence that taught him the power of doing the right thing. A second anecdote includes Hayes returning to his high school several years after graduation to pay for the school property that kept him from receiving his diploma. Hayes discusses some of his many early gigs, both in church and at venues in Tennessee. He discusses the lack of experience that he brought to his first band and their ability to win crowds over nevertheless. Hayes goes on to describe his early professional success, particularly in collaboration with other local musicians. He discusses his interest in the vocal aspect of music making. Particularly, he remembers the opportunity he had to demonstrate his vocal ability to an influential music business figure.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac Hayes, Section A2003\_142\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Entertainer Isaac Hayes remembers creating a look for his first major album cover. The featured photograph emphasizes his bald head, the most recognizable aspect of his signature look. Hayes discusses the events of 1968: his album's release and the monumental death of civil rights hero Dr. Martin Luther King,

Jr., an event that inspired Hayes to be proactive in his humanitarian efforts. Hayes describes his creative efforts in the studio during the making of his breakthrough album, 'Hot Buttered Soul.' He goes on to discuss the performance aspect of his career, including the role of his outrageous costumes in his live gigs. Hayes explains that a member of his security staff likened him to the biblical figure Moses upon seeing crowds' reactions to him. The serendipitous moniker, the 'Black Moses,' caught on internationally. Isaac Hayes lists his extensive discography. He then discusses the need for intergenerational communication and cooperation in the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac Hayes, Section A2003\_142\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:15 ?

Entertainer Isaac Hayes urges black people to take part in economic cooperation. Particularly, he stresses the need for black entertainers and athletes to reinvest in the black community. Hayes describes that a trip to slave dungeons in Ghana demonstrated to him the need for educational programs that venture beyond the Eurocentric paradigm. Hayes describes being welcomed into Ghanaian royalty; his speaking engagements, with their emphasis on Africa, caught the attention of a king. Hayes underwent rituals that resulted in his becoming a Ghanaian king as well. A tour of Ghana revealed the deplorable state of schools. Hayes describes being moved to fund-raise in the name of educational efforts in Africa. He then discusses his affiliation with Scientology, which he describes as an "applied religious philosophy." Hayes describes the philosophy's deep commitment to learning. Hayes remembers a lull in Hollywood's luster around the late 1960s and early 1970s. The success of 'Shaft,' a project for which he composed the score, demonstrated the power of black audiences. Hayes was interested in playing the lead role in the film; however, retrospectively he recognizes that creating the score was the ideal role for this musician.

Video Oral History Interview with Isaac Hayes, Section A2003\_142\_001\_006, TRT: 0:25:10 ?

Entertainer Isaac Hayes discusses the success of his musical score for the film 'Shaft' which garnered him an Academy Award in the Song of the Year category. In addition to his musical aptitude, Isaac Hayes has demonstrated a talent for acting; he's taken on several television and film roles which he names. Despite the breadth of his career successes, Isaac Hayes came across difficult financial times and had to file for bankruptcy. He describes the bankruptcy proceedings as flawed and exploitative. He was ultimately stripped of the rights to the music on which he had built his career. Isaac Hayes describes that a host of new projects allow him to rebuild what was lost. Hayes describes that his healthy lifestyle has kept him looking young and feeling cleansed. He lists several of his favorite musicians and remembers musician Barry White, a contemporary with whom he shared many similarities, including their smooth musical stylings. Hayes explains his hope that the black community will heighten its prospects through an emphasis on education and improved guidance for the youth. He also emphasizes his commitment to the cause of literacy in Africa. Hayes would like to be remembered as someone who shared all he had with humanity and contributed to the world that posterity will inhabit.