

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Janet Adderley

---

## 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>	Adderley, Janet, 1956-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Janet Adderley,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 1, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:24:48).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Acting coach and actress Janet Adderley (1956 - ) founded The Janet Adderley School for the Performing Arts. Adderley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 1, 2005, in Pacific Palisades, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_094
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actress and acting coach Janet Williams Adderley was born Janet Williams in Marshall, Texas, on September 17, 1956. Adderley's mother, Velma Bernice MacAfee Williams, a mathematics professor, and her father Dr. John L. Williams, an optometrist, raised Adderley in Houston, Texas; Walter MacAfee, the pioneering radio astronomer, was her uncle. Attending Turner Elementary, Edgar Allen Poe Elementary and Holy Spirit Catholic School, Adderley graduated from Houston's Performing Arts High School in 1974. At Yale University, Adderley was a member of the Yale Dramat (the Yale Dramatic Association) before graduating in 1978 with her B.A. degree in American studies.

Moving to New York City, Adderley married Nat Adderley, Jr., whom she met at Yale University, in 1979, and started a family. Involved in various entertainment classes and projects, Adderley landed the role of Belle in the Broadway production of the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Starlight Express*. In 1990, Adderley was featured in the play *A...My Name is Alice* and appeared in television commercials in America and Britain. In 1991, Adderley relocated to Hollywood where she appeared in regional theatrical productions. In 1994 and 1995, Adderley appeared in the television series *Sweet Justice* with Cicely Tyson; she also appeared in the 1999 movie *Annie*, and *I Am Sam* in 2001.

In 1994, Adderley started a performing arts class for her daughter and fourteen other children; as the word spread, The Adderley School for the Performing Arts in Pacific Palisades was formed. At The Adderley School, students were instructed in all of the elements of musical theatre by performing youth versions of Broadway shows.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Janet Adderley was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 1, 2005, in Pacific Palisades, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Acting coach and actress Janet Adderley

(1956 - ) founded The Janet Adderley School for the Performing Arts.

---

# 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:

Adderley, Janet, 1956-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

Adderley, Janet, 1956---Interviews  
African Americans--Interviews

---

African American actresses--Interviews

---

Acting teachers--Interviews

---

African American businesspeople--Interviews

---

# Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

## The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

### Occupations:

Acting Coach

---

Actress

---

### HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers

---

## 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 Janet Adderley, April 1, 2005. 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 Janet Adderley, Section A2005\_094\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:41 ?

Janet Adderley was born on September 17, 1956 in Marshall, Texas. Her mother, Velma McAfee Williams, was born in 1928 in Marshall to a father descended from a white Kentucky plantation owner and a mother who was one of the first graduates of Wiley College. Adderley's mother also attended Wiley,

where she met Adderley's father. She was the first black woman at Rice University to earn her Ph.D. in mathematics. Adderley's father, John Williams, was born in 1926 to a Choctaw mother in Beaumont, Texas where he graduated high school early. He attended Wiley for a year, then was drafted into the U.S. Army and served for two years before returning to Wiley to complete his studies. Adderley's parents married and moved to Chicago, Illinois for their graduate degrees. After studying at Illinois College of Optometry, Adderley's father worked as an optometrist. Adderley and her siblings were raised in Houston, where her mother taught at Texas Southern University and Adderley enjoyed the annual faculty and family banquets.

African American actresses--Interviews.

Acting teachers--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Adderley, Section A2005\_094\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:47 ?

Janet Adderley, while living for a brief time with her maternal grandmother, attended a Catholic school in Marshall, Texas. Adderley grew up mainly in the Third Ward neighborhood of Houston, Texas. In elementary school, she had teachers who encouraged her love of performing. At age seven, she played Molly Munchkin in a children's production of 'The Wizard of Oz' at Alley Theatre. Adderley greatly admired Broadway star Judy Garland and Hollywood stars like Sidney Poitier, HistoryMaker Ossie Davis and HistoryMaker Ruby Dee. Rejecting the notion that her racial identity proscribed her interests and activities, Adderley refused to sit in the balcony. After a successful audition, she was admitted to The High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. Seeing a performance of Alvin Ailey's 'Revelations' sparked her awareness of black church traditions and her interest in African American history.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Adderley, Section A2005\_094\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:11 ?

Janet Adderley placed third in a statewide writing competition as a teenager. Inspired by her high school English teacher, she chose to attend Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut because of its proximity to the New York theater scene and from a wishful, teenage hope to meet actor Paul Newman, a Calhoun College fellow at the time. At Yale, Adderley sang in a gospel choir with Angela Bassett, was deeply impacted by her African American studies courses, and performed with the Yale Dramat. She also met her future husband, Nat Adderley, Jr., the son of jazz clarinet player Nat Adderly, Sr. and nephew to Cannonball Adderley. After graduating in 1978, the two married and had their first child the following year. Adderley spent the next ten years performing in regional theater until making her Broadway debut as Belle the Sleeping Car in Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'Starlight Express.' She describes the impact of her racial identity on her acting career and the increasing diversity of roles for black women.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Adderley, Section A2005\_094\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:24 ?

Janet Adderley was first hired as the standby for the role of Belle the Sleeping Car in Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'Starlight Express.' Webber almost eliminated the part from the Broadway premiere until the director convinced him to keep it. Adderley insisted upon a chance to try out for the part. She performed the role for the next two years to wide acclaim. Following her success on Broadway, Adderley decided to pursue film and television acting after appearing in several commercials. She moved to California with her daughters after separating from her husband, Nat Adderley, Jr., and earned a recurring role on NBC's 'Sweet Justice.' After the show's cancellation, Adderley started a theater class to help with her daughter's shyness. As the demand for more classes and need for a

larger space grew, Adderley opened The Adderley School for the Performing Arts in Los Angeles, California. She describes her teaching philosophy, the work she does with her students and scholarship opportunities at the school.

Video Oral History Interview with Janet Adderley, Section A2005\_094\_001\_005, TRT: 0:26:45 ?

Janet Adderley has run the Adderley School for the Performing Arts in Los Angeles, California since 1991. At the time of the interview, she was considering opening a second branch in addition to the one in Santa Barbara, California and possibly franchising in the future. Although she loved teaching, Adderley also hoped to resume performing, possibly in a one-woman cabaret show. Adderley talks about her parents' responses to her career; her father was against her pursuit of acting while her mother supported her interest in the arts. Adderley describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community and how she wants to be remembered. In reflecting on her legacy, she notes her past conflicts around her black identity; however, she now sees her experiences as the sole African American in white communities as opportunities to educate others about the black experience, similar to the roles played by Sidney Poitier. She also narrates her photographs.