

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ann Marie Williams

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Williams, Ann Marie
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ann Marie Williams,
Dates:	May 2, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:07:17).
Abstract:	Artistic director Ann Marie Williams (1937 -) founded the Dallas Black Dance Theater in 1976, which, in thirty-two seasons, performed before 1.5 million audience members worldwide. Williams was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 2, 2006, in Dallas, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_086
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Ann Marie Williams was born Annie Marie Ferrell on October 21, 1937, to Lloyd and Izora Ferrell in Coolidge, Texas, in the Sandy Community of Limestone County. She attended the Sandy Community School, Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School in Hubbard, Texas, St. Anthony's Catholic School, and Lincoln High School in Dallas, Texas, where she graduated in 1955. She was first exposed to the arts in high school. The field trips to the opera, symphony and ballet provided exposure to dance as a profession, and she also took private dance lessons at the YWCA in Dallas.

Williams attended Prairie View A&M University where she received her early training from Barbara Hollis, who was a member of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. After receiving a degree in health and physical education in 1960 from Prairie View A&M University, she traveled to New York City to study under Arthur Mitchell. Williams, then, returned to Dallas as a dance teacher for the Dallas School System where she met and married her husband, Nathaniel Williams, in 1963. She took additional dance instruction under Edith James, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman and Alvin Ailey. In 1968, Williams was the first African American woman to receive a M.A. degree in dance from Texas Women's University. She also holds a certificate in arts management from Texas A&M University. Williams was hired to head up the first dance department at Bishop College in Dallas, where she received a \$1 million grant to fund the program. She formed the Dallas Black Dance Academy to teach children who no longer had a place to take dance lessons after the funding for continuing education ended at Bishop College. At the coaxing of her staff, Williams also started a dance company. As the popularity of the dance company escalated, in 1976, the Dallas Black Dance Theater was born.

Williams serves on the Board of Directors of the Dallas Opera, Arts District Foundation, TAPER, Dallas Dance Council, the Texas Women's University Alumnae, Dance USA and the International Association of Blacks in Dance. She has received a number of awards and honors for her support and commitment to the arts. The Dallas Black Dance Theater was commissioned to perform during the 1996 Olympics.

Williams lives in Dallas with her husband of forty-three years, Nathaniel Williams. They are the parents of Angelia Williams, a graduate of Florida A&M University School of Business and Industry.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ann Marie Williams was conducted by Denise Gines on May 2, 2006, in Dallas, Texas, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Artistic director Ann Marie Williams (1937 -) founded the Dallas Black Dance Theater in 1976, which, in thirty-two seasons, performed before 1.5 million audience members worldwide.

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:

Williams, Ann Marie

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Williams, Ann Marie--Interviews

African American dancers--Texas--Dallas--Interviews

African American dance teachers--Texas--Dallas--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Dallas Black Dance Theatre

Occupations:

Artistic Director

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Ann Marie Williams, May 2, 2006. 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 Ann Marie Williams, Section A2006_086_001_001, TRT: 0:30:03 ?

Ann Marie Williams was born on October 21, 1937 in Coolidge, Texas to Izora Coleman Ferrell and Lloyd Ferrell. Her mother was born in Coolidge to Venezuela Melton Coleman and Nathaniel Coleman. She was from a close-knit family that stressed education. Williams' father was also born in Coolidge. Williams' family lived in the Sandy community of Limestone County, Texas, and moved to Coolidge when she was five years old. Her mother cared for the family there, and her father returned to the farm, as he did not enjoy the hourly work available in town. He studied at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas and became a Methodist minister. Williams spent summers with her maternal grandparents, and remembers her maternal grandmother as a forceful woman. Williams did not know her paternal grandparents, Lela Ferrell and Sam Ferrell, as they died by the time she was young. Her father's sister, Isola Ferrell Echols, acted as grandmother to Williams and her siblings. She describes her five sisters and six brothers.

African American dancers--Texas--Dallas--Interviews.

African American dance teachers--Texas--Dallas--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Marie Williams, Section A2006_086_001_002, TRT: 0:30:17 ?

Ann Marie Williams grew up in the tight-knit Sandy community of Limestone County, Texas on land owned by her family. At Sandy Community School, her teacher Yuma Murphy helped her learn to read and impressed her with her style. Williams' family then moved to Hubbard, Texas, where they lived for four years and she attended Phyllis Wheatley High School. She also looked up to her teacher, Ms. Toulouse. When the family moved to Dallas, Texas, Williams attended St. Anthony School and Lincoln High School, where she made several lifelong friends, and graduated in 1955. She took dance classes at her high school and at the local Young Women's Christian Association, and was awed by trips to the opera and ballet. She decided to attend Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas because of the school's dance classes. There, she served as an assistant to dance teacher Barbara Hollis and learned about producing dance performances. Upon graduating, she taught dance at a middle schools in Dallas.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Marie Williams, Section A2006_086_001_003, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Ann Marie Williams was active in the Order of the Eastern Stars in high school. She graduated from Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas in 1960 then taught at Dallas area schools. She married Nathaniel Williams in 1963. In 1969, she received her master's degree in dance from Texas Woman's University. She founded the dance program at Bishop College, and used a Ford Foundation grant to bring in figures like Maya Angelou, as well as to fund community dance classes. When the grant ended, Williams opened a dance school in order to continue providing classes to the community. Soon after, Williams founded Dallas Black Dance Theatre, a modern and contemporary repertory company with part time dancers. In 1986, Williams had a car accident. Her board then hired an administrator, Zenetta S. Drew, and the company became full time. Williams describes the African dance programs that Chuck Davis led for the company each summer. She also recalls the company's trips to South Africa and Italy.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Marie Williams, Section A2006_086_001_004, TRT: 0:29:37 ?

Ann Marie Williams expanded the Dallas Black Dance Theatre to a company of full time, contracted dancers, and housed the organization free of charge in a Dallas Arts District building owned by Lucy Billingsley. Williams wanted to purchase the former Moorland YMCA, where she used to swim and teach, as a permanent home, but the owner decided to pass it to her children. In 2000, the owner's son approached Williams regarding the building's sale, and she and the board worked out an agreement to purchase it. They began renovations with plans to turn the completed structure over to the city. Williams talks about the importance of community support for the Dallas Black Dance Theatre's success, and how she trained her dancers and other employees to maintain that success in the future. She shares the advice of Alvin Ailey, who urged Williams to keep her company small in order to make her productions accessible to the wider community. Williams also describes how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Ann Marie Williams, Section A2006_086_001_005, TRT: 0:06:20 ?

Ann Marie Williams narrates her photographs.