

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with George Duke

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Duke, George
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with George Duke,
Dates:	September 17, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:33:10).
Abstract:	Jazz pianist and music producer George Duke (1946 - 2013) won multiple Grammy Awards. He worked with Frank Zappa and Jean-Luc Ponty before becoming a solo artist. Duke then collaborated with artists like Barry Manilow, The Pointer Sisters, Gladys Knight and Smokey Robinson. Duke composed film and television scores, and was musical director of the Soul Train Music Awards. Duke was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 17, 2008, in Hollywood, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_112
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

George Duke was born George Mac Duke on January 12, 1946, in San Rafael, California. Duke was raised in Marin City, a working class section of Marin County. After his mother took him to see Duke Ellington perform, he started studying the piano and began absorbing the roots of black music in his local Baptist church. Duke attended Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley. By the age of sixteen, Duke was playing with a number of high school jazz groups. He received his B.A. degree in music from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, majoring in trombone and composition with a minor in contrabass. He then obtained his M.A. degree in composition from San Francisco State University.

Duke first captured the attention of the jazz world with his collaboration with Jean-Luc Ponty and the album *The Jean-Luc Ponty Experience with the George Duke Trio*. In the early 1970s, Duke became known for his solo work as well as for his collaborations with other musicians, particularly Frank Zappa. Duke joined veteran jazzman Julian "Cannonball" Adderley in 1971. Through "Cannonball", he was given the opportunity to meet and work with artists such as Nancy Wilson, Joe Williams, Dizzy Gillespie, Stanley Clarke, Flora Purim and Airto Moriera. In 1973, Duke rejoined Zappa and brought Jean-Luc Ponty with him. That band stayed together for the next three years, until Duke left to join forces with drummer Billy Cobham. In 1976, Duke became a solo artist and enjoyed success with a series of fusion-oriented LP's such as, *From Me To You*. In 1978, Duke's funk heavy album *Reach For It* went gold and propelled him to the top of the music charts. A year later, he recorded his best known album, *A Brazilian Love Affair*. About the same time, Duke decided to begin a career in music producing. His breakthrough in producing came with an album by A Taste of Honey. The single, "Sukiyaki," went to Number 1 on the pop, adult contemporary and R & B charts, ultimately selling over two million copies. Duke went on to produce and collaborate with such artists as Jeffrey Osborne, Deniece Williams, Stanley Clarke, Barry Manilow, Smokey Robinson, The Pointer Sisters, Gladys Knight and Anita Baker. In addition, Duke has acted as musical

director for numerous musical television specials, including the *Soul Train Music Awards*. During the 1990s, Duke also established a career in television and film scoring, working on the music for such films as *The Five Heartbeats*, *Karate Kid III*, *Leap Of Faith*, *Good Fences* and *Never Die Alone*. In 2001, Duke won a Grammy Award for producing the Best Jazz Vocal Album: Dianne Reeves' *In The Moment*. In 2005, Duke served as artist and emcee for a special series of concerts in India as part of a delegation of American jazz musicians sent on a State Department tour to promote HIV/AIDS awareness.

Duke continues to both produce and release new albums, his latest being *Duke Treats* in 2008. Duke is the recipient of numerous awards including multiple Grammy nominations, the Edison Life Time Achievement Award, and *Keyboard Magazine's* "R&B Keyboardist of The Year."

George Duke passed away on August 5, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with George Duke was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 17, 2008, in Hollywood, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Jazz pianist and music producer George Duke (1946 - 2013) won multiple Grammy Awards. He worked with Frank Zappa and Jean-Luc Ponty before becoming a solo artist. Duke then collaborated with artists like Barry Manilow, The Pointer Sisters, Gladys Knight and Smokey Robinson. Duke composed film and television scores, and was musical director of the Soul Train Music Awards.

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:

Duke, George

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Duke, George--Interviews

African American musicians--Interviews

African American sound recording executives and producers--Interviews

African American jazz musicians--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Jazz Pianist

Music Producer

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 George Duke, September 17, 2008. 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 George Duke, Section A2008_112_001_001, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

George Duke was born on January 12, 1946 in San Rafael, California to Beatrice Burrell Duke and Thaddeus Duke. When slavery ended, his maternal ancestors settled in Arkansas; Detroit, Michigan; Colorado; and Texas. His maternal great-grandmother was lynched, although Duke was unaware of the circumstances. Duke's mother was born in 1911 in Shepherd, Texas, where she grew up with nine siblings. Upon meeting Duke's father, who was from Carthage, Texas, she moved with him to Marin City, California in the 1940s. In San Francisco, Duke's mother attended San Francisco State College, and then taught in Marin City's public schools; while his father worked as a mechanic at the San Francisco Naval Shipyard. When Duke was twelve years old, his parents divorced as a result of his father's alcoholism. During Duke's childhood, his mother often took him to concerts in the San Francisco Bay Area. There, at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, he met his cousin, bassist Charles Burrell, who inspired his interest in jazz.

African American musicians--Interviews.

African American sound recording executives and producers--Interviews.

African American jazz musicians--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with George Duke, Section A2008_112_001_002, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

George Duke grew up in a housing development in Marin City, California, and often saw live music in the San Francisco Bay Area with his mother, Beatrice Burrell Duke. Duke's maternal relatives included actor Billy Dee Williams; jazz vocalist Dianne Reeves; bassist Charles Burrell; and hip hop artist MC Hammer; and he aspired to become a musician himself after seeing Duke Ellington perform at the Presidio of San Francisco. Around this time, Duke bought his first jazz album, Miles Davis' 'Kind of Blue.' He took piano lessons with Sir Jules Haywood, but was unable to play the piano in his school band. Instead, he played the cello, and then the trombone at the integrated Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, California. There, Duke played in the school dance band and the orchestra, and received support from music teacher Robert Greenwood, who encouraged Duke to develop his talent. Upon graduating in 1963, Duke enrolled at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he played trombone on a partial scholarship.

Video Oral History Interview with George Duke, Section A2008_112_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

George Duke attended the San Francisco Conservatory of Music in San

Francisco, California, where he was taught by his cousin, bassist Charles Burrell. Outside his studies, Duke played piano with singer Al Jarreau at the Half Note nightclub, where he first met jazz musicians Cannonball Adderley and Carmen McRae. He also performed at the Both/And Club during this period, and completed a bachelor's degree in trombone and music composition in 1967. Through bassist John Heard, who played in the George Duke Trio, Duke met violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. Together, they experimented with jazz and rock beats on the record 'King Kong: Jean-Luc Ponty Plays the Music of Frank Zappa.' As a result, Zappa invited Duke to join his band, The Mothers of Invention. After one year with Zappa, Duke replaced keyboardist Joe Zawinul in Cannonball Adderley's quintet. During this time, he also met Brazilian musicians like Flora Purim and Airto Moreira. Then, Duke formed The Billy Cobham/George Duke Band with drummer Billy Cobham.

Video Oral History Interview with George Duke, Section A2008_112_001_004, TRT: 0:27:50 ?

George Duke recorded for the first time with MPS Records, a German label. In the 1970s, he released 'Feel' and 'Faces In Reflection,' before working with drummer Billy Cobham on the album 'Reach For It,' which was produced by Epic Records. Duke was introduced to funk music by drummer Leon "Ndugu" Chancler, who informed songs like "Dukey Stick" on Duke's album 'Don't Let Go.' During this time, Duke began producing records himself, including 'Here And Now' for the all-girl group The Third Wave, and 'Sweet Baby' for Stanley Clarke. In 1980, he produced A Taste of Honey's cover of 'Sukiyaki,' which became a hit song. Duke went on to produce for vocalists like Deniece Williams, Anita Baker, Rachelle Ferrell, Howard Hewett and Jeffrey Osborne. He also developed a working relationship with Miles Davis, for whom he developed the track "Backyard Ritual" on Davis' 'Tutu' album. Duke originally wrote the song 'Fumilayo' for Davis, but eventually produced it for his cousin, jazz singer Dianne Reeves.

Video Oral History Interview with George Duke, Section A2008_112_001_005, TRT: 0:25:50 ?

George Duke collaborated with numerous musicians throughout his career, including Bootsy Collins and Jeffrey Osborne, for whom he produced the album 'Stay With Me Tonight.' In 1988, Duke served as the musical director for the Nelson Mandela benefit concert at Wembley Stadium in London, England. He also scored various films, like 'The Heavenly Kid' and Ernest Dickerson's 'Never Die Alone'; and wrote music for television programs, including the theme song for 'Malcolm and Eddie.' With Walt Disney Records, Duke produced a children's album for the Foundation for Pediatric AIDS. At the time of the interview Duke and his wife, Corine Duke, were married for thirty-six years. He had a stepson, John Shiffer, and a son, Rashid Duke, who played with Diana Moreira Booker in the band Eyedentity. Duke talks about the development of the jazz music industry, and the significance of his lyrics. He also reflects upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with George Duke, Section A2008_112_001_006, TRT: 0:12:20 ?

George Duke narrates his photographs.