

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ruby Wilson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wilson, Ruby, 1948-2016
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ruby Wilson,
Dates:	July 30, 2010
Bulk Dates:	2010
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:22:15).
Abstract:	Singer Ruby Wilson (1948 - 2016) known as the "Queen of Beale Street", is a renowned blues singer who has performed in venues worldwide. Wilson passed away on August 12, 2016. Wilson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 30, 2010, in Memphis, Tennessee. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2010_093
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer Ruby Wilson, who would come to be known as the “Queen of Beale Street”, was born in Texas. She moved to Memphis Tennessee and started her professional singing career when she was sixteen years old. Fellow musician B.B. King is her godfather, and Wilson has been one of the house staples at B.B. King’s Blues Club in Memphis, Tennessee.

Wilson has recorded more than ten albums and has performed with other artists such as B.B. King, Isaac Hayes, and Ray Charles. She has had roles in several movies, including *The Chamber*, *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, *Cookie’s Fortune*, and *Black Snake Moan*, and her music was included in some of their soundtracks. She was also one of the blues musicians included in the documentary film *Delta Rising*, alongside other blues artists such as Willie Nelson, Chris Cotton, and Morgan Freeman.

Wilson performed at the White House, the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and many other prominent venues around the globe. She was honored with the Memphis sound Award for Best Entertainer, the Authentic Beale Street Musician Award, and a Supporter’s Award from the St. Jude Children’s Hospital. Wilson was inducted into the African American Hall of Fame in 2010 and was a member of the Memphis-Shelby County Film & Tape Commission.

Wilson passed away on August 12, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ruby Wilson was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 30, 2010, in Memphis, Tennessee, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Singer Ruby Wilson (1948 - 2016)

known as the "Queen of Beale Street", is a renowned blues singer who has performed in venues worldwide. Wilson passed away on August 12, 2016.

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:

Wilson, Ruby, 1948-2016

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wilson, Ruby, 1948-2016--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

B.B. King Blues Club

Occupations:

Singer

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 Ruby Wilson, July 30, 2010. 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 Ruby Wilson, Section A2010_093_001_001, TRT: 0:30:14 ?

Ruby Wilson was born on February 29, 1948 near Dallas, Texas. Her mother, Ida Emma Reed, was also born outside of Dallas in 1922. She worked as a maid. Wilson's father, Ocie Lee Wilson, was born in 1917 in the same part of Texas and worked as a contractor and farmer. Wilson has limited knowledge of her family history. She describes how her parents met and how she takes after their personalities. Wilson has three brothers and one sister. She describes her close knit childhood neighborhood in the country and her parents' expectations. As a child, Wilson had to walk ten miles to get to Dallas, the closest city, since there often was no money for the bus. She spent much of her time outdoors with her siblings and was active in her church, Valley Baptist Church. Wilson remembers

watching Tennessee Ernie Ford on television and listening to gospel music. She attended Riverside Elementary School and I.M. Terrell High School, both all-black schools in Fort Worth, Texas. Wilson graduated from high school in 1966.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruby Wilson, Section A2010_093_001_002, TRT: 0:30:52 ?

Ruby Wilson joined her church choir as a ten year old at her mother's urging. Although she was initially enrolled in a music class as a student at I.M. Terrell High School in Fort Worth, Texas, Wilson did not want to sing in front of her class so she switched to auto mechanics. In 1963, Wilson was a sophomore at Terrell High School when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. She describes the reactions at the school upon learning the news. Kennedy had visited the high school prior to his death. She recalls other political figures in the 1960s. As a youth, Wilson spent her summers picking cotton. She talks briefly about touring with Shirley Caesar's gospel group, The Caravans, as a student. At the end of high school in 1966, Wilson married musician Jessie Moseley. The newlyweds moved to the West Side of Chicago, Illinois, where they played gospel music at churches around the city. She describes church life in the city and the riots of 1968 after Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruby Wilson, Section A2010_093_001_003, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

Ruby Wilson describes the circumstances that led to her touring with Shirley Caesar's gospel group, The Caravans, as a teenager. After touring with Caesar and living in Chicago, Illinois in her late teens, Wilson began to listen to more secular music and started to sing jazz, R&B, and the blues. In the early 1970s, Wilson divorced her husband and returned to Texas, where she sang jazz in a small club in the evenings and continued to sing with her church choir on Sunday mornings. Wilson remembers meeting HistoryMaker B.B. King in Dallas, Texas. In the mid-1970s, Wilson worked for a chain of clubs called The Other Place, and had the opportunity to travel to Memphis, Tennessee, where she met HistoryMaker Isaac Hayes. Settling in Memphis, Wilson also met Rufus Thomas and his children Carla Thomas, Marvell Thomas, and Veneese Thomas. She talks about performing at black clubs in Memphis, recording a benefit album for Haiti with the Bar-Kays, and singing on 'The Elvis Cruise.'

Video Oral History Interview with Ruby Wilson, Section A2010_093_001_004, TRT: 0:31:36 ?

Ruby Wilson recalls her interactions with HistoryMaker and civil rights activist Jerry Fanion, former Memphis school superintendent Dr. W.W. Herrenton, HistoryMaker and photographer Ernest Withers, and musician Ray Charles. In the mid-1980s, Wilson was appointed to the honorary position of Queen Ambassador of Beale Street. Several years later, her title was changed simply to Queen of Beale Street. As such, she has traveled the world as representative of the City of Memphis, Tennessee. She describes her time in New Zealand in 1996, where she was hosted by the Maori queen, Dame Te Atairangikaahu. In the late 1990s, Wilson began to work with a tour company called Jazzdagen, which allowed her to travel the world by cruise and perform. Wilson talks about albums she has recorded and her singing style. She also talks about her acting career, which began with the biopic 'Marie' in 1985. Wilson was cast with no prior acting experience and no audition. She concludes by reflecting on the changes on Beale Street.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruby Wilson, Section A2010_093_001_005, TRT: 0:09:54 ?

Ruby Wilson describes her vision for Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee, and her hopes and concerns for the African American community. In 2004, Wilson had a stroke; she describes her recovery and subsequent homelessness. Wilson describes her children, her legacy and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Ruby Wilson, Section A2010_093_001_006, TRT: 0:08:25 ?
Ruby Wilson narrates her photographs.