

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Roy Ayers

PERSON

Ayers, Roy

Alternative Names: Roy Ayers;

Life Dates: September 10, 1940-

Place of Birth: Los Angeles, California, USA

Residence: New York, New York

Occupations: Vibraphonist; Jazz Composer

Biographical Note

Jazz composer and vibraphonist Roy Ayers was born on September 10, 1940 in Los Angeles, California to Ruby Ayers and Roy Ayers, Sr. Ayers' mother, a schoolteacher and piano instructor, began teaching him music when he was only a toddler. Growing up near Central Avenue, the heart of the West Coast jazz scene, Ayers was exposed to local luminaries from an early age. At five years old, Ayers was given his first set of vibraphone mallets by bandleader Lionel Hampton. Ayers attended Thomas Jefferson High School, where many of his classmates also went on to become famous jazz and R&B artists. Ayers first played steel guitar and piano and did not study the vibraphone until meeting vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson at age seventeen. At twenty-two, Ayers began his prolific recording career as a sideman for jazz saxophonist Curtis Amy. In 1963, Ayers released his first album, *West Coast Vibes*, and went on to record with the Jack Wilson Quartet, Chico Hamilton, and the Gerald Wilson Orchestra in the 1960s, before joining up with jazz flutist Herbie Mann at The Lighthouse club in Hermosa Beach, California. Mann produced three of Ayers' albums for Atlantic Records, and Ayers was a principal soloist on Mann's hit album *Memphis Underground*. In 1970, Ayers moved to Manhattan and formed Roy Ayers Ubiquity, marking his move into jazz fusion. Ubiquity released a number of records on Polydor Records, including hits like 'We Live in Brooklyn' and 'Everybody Loves the Sunshine.' As the decade closed, Ayers went solo with songs like *Let's Do It*. In 1980, Ayers began collaborating with Nigerian musician Fela Kuti and formed Uno Melodic Records. Ayers considered *In The Dark*, released on Columbia Records in 1984, as one of his best recordings.

He continued releasing yearly albums through the 1990s. At the same time, Ayers' work was remixed, covered, and sampled by the emerging hip hop generation that included such artists as Mos Def, Puff Daddy, and Mary J. Blige. In 1993, Ayers appeared on Gang Starr rapper Guru's *Jazzmatazz, Vol. 1*, one of the first albums to

combine a live jazz band with hip hop production. Singer Erykah Badu has dubbed Ayers the Godfather of Neo-Soul.

Roy Ayers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on September 19, 2016.

Related Entries

Thomas Jefferson High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Los Angeles City College [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Wadsworth Avenue Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

The Jack Wilson Quartet [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Jazz Musician

The Gerald Wilson Orchestra [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Jazz Musician

Atlantic Records [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Jazz Recording Artist

Roy Ayers Ubiquity [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Jazz Musician

Uno Melodic Records [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Jazz Recording Artist