

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Roy Ayers

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Ayers, Roy |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Roy Ayers, |
| Dates: | September 19, 2016 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2016 |
| Physical Description: | 3 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:26:39). |
| Abstract: | Jazz composer and vibraphonist Roy Ayers (1940 -), a prolific jazz musician with more sampled hits than any other artist, was dubbed the “Godfather of Neo-Soul” in the 1990s. Ayers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 19, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2016_022 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

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.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Roy Ayers was conducted by Harriette Cole on September 19, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 3 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Jazz composer and vibraphonist Roy Ayers (1940 -), a prolific jazz musician with more sampled hits than any other artist, was dubbed the “Godfather of Neo-Soul” in the 1990s.

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:

Ayers, Roy

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ayers, Roy--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Vibraphonist

Jazz Composer

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 Roy Ayers, September 19, 2016. 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 Roy Ayers, Section A2016_022_001_001, TRT: 1:27:56 ?

Roy Ayers was born on September 10, 1940 in Los Angeles, California to Ruby Ayers and Roy Ayers, Sr. His paternal grandfather taught English in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His father worked as a junkman, while his mother was a piano teacher. They met and married in Oklahoma; and raised four children, including Ayers, in the South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles. At five years old,

Ayers was given his first set of vibraphone mallets by jazz musician Lionel Hampton. Later, Ayers attended Los Angeles' Thomas Jefferson High School, where he played percussion in the band, and met vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson. He was also mentored by his teacher, Samuel Rodney Browne. Ayers graduated from high school in 1962; and, that year, was featured on Curtis Amy's albums 'Way Down' and 'Tippin' on Through.' In 1963, he recorded his first solo album, 'West Coast Vibes,' with the encouragement of composer Leonard Feather. Ayers went on to collaborate with bebop pianist Jack Wilson and jazz fusion drummer Chico Hamilton.

Video Oral History Interview with Roy Ayers, Section A2016_022_001_002, TRT: 2:29:23 ?

Roy Ayers studied music at Los Angeles City College until 1966. He then left school to play the vibes with flutist Herbie Mann in Japan, where he also worked with musician Sadao Watanabe. In 1967, Mann produced Ayers' second solo album, 'Virgo Vibes'; and, in 1968, Ayers collaborated with pianist Herbie Hancock on his third album, 'Stoned Soul Picnic.' In 1970, he moved to New York City, where he formed Roy Ayers Ubiquity and released the jazz fusion album 'Ubiquity.' In 1972, he signed a contract with Polydor Records, and released the hit song "We Live in Brooklyn, Baby" with keyboardist Harry Whittaker. Ayers composed the soundtrack for the blaxpoitation film 'Coffy' in 1973; and, in 1974, released 'Change Up The Groove,' which featured tracks later sampled by A Tribe Called Quest. In 1977, he organized the group RAMP, and produced their sole album, 'Come Into Knowledge.' Ayers toured Africa in 1979, and met Nigerian musician Fela Kuti, with whom he recorded the album 'Music of Many Colors.'

Video Oral History Interview with Roy Ayers, Section A2016_022_001_003, TRT: 3:29:20 ?

Roy Ayers founded Uno Melodic Records in 1980, and produced Sylvia Striplin's "You Can't Turn Me Away" the following year. On his label, Ayers also released his own albums 'Silver Vibrations' and 'Drivin' On Up,' as well as 'Lots of Love' with musician Fela Kuti. In 1984, Ayers switched to Columbia Records, and released the African groove album, 'In The Dark.' The next year, he collaborated with jazz artist Lonnie Liston Smith to record 'You Might Be Surprised.' In the late 1980s, Ayers performed for three weeks of sold out shows at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in London, England. He was featured on hip-hop artist Guru's album, 'Guru's Jazzmatazz, Vol. 1,' in 1993; and, in 1994, Mary J. Blige sampled Ayers' track, "Everybody Loves Sunshine," on her triple platinum album, 'My Life.' Ayers' music was also featured in the 'Grand Theft Auto' video games, and on albums by Tyler, The Creator and Alicia Keys. Ayers talks about his wife, Argerie Ayers; and reflects upon his life, legacy, and career.