

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Harold Battiste

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Battiste, Harold R.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Harold Battiste,
Dates:	November 15, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:39:40).
Abstract:	Nonprofit chief executive, jazz musician, and music producer Harold Battiste (1931 - 2015) produced work by notable musicians Sonny and Cher and Dr. John. Battiste also founded All For One (AFO) Records, and later the AFO Foundation, to document the musical history of New Orleans. Battiste was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 15, 2002, in New Orleans, Louisiana. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_197
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Musician, composer, arranger, performer and teacher, Harold Raymond Battiste, Jr. was born October 28, 1931, in New Orleans. Young Battiste loved the rich music of his New Orleans neighborhood. Graduating from Gilbert Academy in 1948, Battiste attended New Orleans' Dillard University, earning a B.S. in music in 1953.

Battiste's professional achievements as a producer and arranger for studio, film, stage and television included Sam Cooke's *You Send Me*, Sonny and Cher's *I Got You Babe*, Joe Jones's *You Talk Too Much*, Barbara George's *I Know* and Lee Dorsey's *Ya Ya*. Battiste introduced audiences to New Orleans artist Mac Rebennack as "Dr. John" and produced his earliest albums. Earning six gold records, Battiste spent thirty years in Los Angeles, including fifteen years with Sonny and Cher. In 1961, Battiste initiated the first African American musician-owned record label, *All For One*, better known as AFO Records. AFO featured contemporary New Orleans jazz musicians Melvin Lastie, Ellis Marsalis, James Black, Alvin Batiste, Ed Blackwell, Nat Perilliat and Alvin "Red" Tyler. In addition to mentoring and tutoring other music professionals and his musical scoring and conducting for film and television, Battiste lectured at several colleges including the University of California, Los Angeles; the University of Southern California; Southern University; Mozartium Music School in Innsbruck, Austria; and Le Torri Montanare in Lancano, Italy.

In 1989, he joined Ellis Marsalis on the Jazz Studies faculty of the University of New Orleans. While back in New Orleans Battiste founded the AFO Foundation to document and make available the musical history of the city. Battiste remained active in the community and served as a board member of the Congo Square Cultural Collective, the Louisiana State Music Commission, New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, Louisiana Jazz Federation, the African Cultural Endowment and numerous other cultural organizations. He received the Beaux Arts Award, the Mayor's Arts Award, the Governor's Arts Lifetime Achievement Award and many others. In 1998, the City of New Orleans proclaimed his birthday, October 28 as Harold Battiste Day with a proclamation from Mayor Marc

Morial.

Battiste passed away on June 19, 2015 at age 83.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Harold Battiste was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 15, 2002, in New Orleans, Louisiana, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nonprofit chief executive, jazz musician, and music producer Harold Battiste (1931 - 2015) produced work by notable musicians Sonny and Cher and Dr. John. Battiste also founded All For One (AFO) Records, and later the AFO Foundation, to document the musical history of New Orleans.

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:

Battiste, Harold R.

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Battiste, Harold R.--Interviews

African American jazz musicians--Interviews

African American sound recording executives and producers--Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Jazz Musician

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 Harold Battiste, November 15, 2002. 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 Harold Battiste, Section A2002_197_001_001, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Harold Battiste describes his family background. His father, Harold Battiste, Sr., was born in 1900 in Vacherie, Louisiana. His mother, Pearl Booker, was born to Wilbert Booker, a wood yard owner, and Mary Booker, a cook, in New Orleans, Louisiana. She attended New Orleans University, and graduated from there in 1923. Soon thereafter, Booker met and married Harold Battiste, Sr. The couple adopted Battiste's nephew, then gave birth to Harold Battiste, Jr. on October 28, 1931. They lived with Pearl Battiste's parents until 1941, when they moved into new housing projects. Harold Battiste, Sr. was a tailor and owner of Eagle Tailor Shop. Though Harold Battiste, Jr. was intrigued by jazz music as a child, his mother discouraged him because of her fear of its association with New Orleans' vice culture. Nevertheless, Harold Battiste, Sr. bought his son a clarinet in 1943, which Harold Battiste, Jr. played in the F.P. Ricard School band. Around 1944, Battiste then enrolled at Gilbert Academy, a private high school.

African American jazz musicians--Interviews.

African American sound recording executives and producers--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Battiste, Section A2002_197_001_002, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Harold Battiste enrolled in Gibert Academy in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1944, where he played clarinet in the school's marching and concert bands. Battiste was not very skilled, and wrote his first musical arrangement (by ear) to impress his band director. After graduating from Gilbert Academy in 1948, Battiste enrolled at Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he majored in music education. Though the school looked down on jazz music, Battiste was able to practice jazz regularly due to the progressive director of the music department, Melville C. Bryant. Battiste joined a jazz band called "The Johnson Brothers," and was influenced by musicians like Charlie Parker, and composers like Igor Stravinsky. He was also motivated to elevate the perception of jazz music. After graduating in 1952, Battiste took a job as a music teacher at Carver High School in DeRidder, Louisiana. He quit in 1954 after he witnessed a racist encounter between the school's principal and the superintendent.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Battiste, Section A2002_197_001_003, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

In 1954, Harold Battiste moved to his hometown of New Orleans, Louisiana from DeRidder, Louisiana. He worked as an itinerant teacher at Carter G. Woodson High School and McDonogh 35 High School until 1956. Battiste moved to Los Angeles, California in the summer of 1956 with Edward Blackwell and HistoryMaker Ellis Marsalis, Jr., where he secured a position at the post office to support his family. In the meantime, he, Blackwell, Marsalis, and Ornette Coleman experimented with music. While shopping around one of Coleman's demos, Battiste met music producer Robert "Bumps" Blackwell, who was helping gospel artist Sam Cooke crossover to pop music. Blackwell invited Battiste to help arrange a song for Cooke that would introduce the artist to the pop world, which resulted in Cooke's 1957 hit "You Send Me". Battiste was subsequently hired by Specialty Records to open an office in New Orleans Louisiana. In 1961, Battiste founded All For One Records. The label's first hit was Barbara George's 1961 song "I Know".

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Battiste, Section A2002_197_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Harold Battiste arranged Lee Dorsey's 1961 hit "Ya Ya" before moving back to Los Angeles, California in 1963. Upon arriving in Los Angeles, Battiste began working with Sonny Bono on small projects. Battiste had known Bono since the late 1950s, when each of them worked in Specialty Records' artists and repertoire department. Nevertheless, the first song Battiste arranged for Sonny and Cher, then known as Caesar and Cleo, was a record entitled "The Letter." After Sam Cooke's death in 1964, Battiste worked on a few more songs with the duo, who had morphed into "Sonny and Cher." In 1965, Battiste arranged the duo's chart-topping hit, "I Got You Babe." Battiste worked with the couple in the studio and with their television shows well into the 1970s, when the couple divorced. In the late 1960s, Battiste took troubled artist and family friend, Mac Rebennack, under his wing. Battiste helped Rebennack develop his voodoo-inspired persona, Dr. John, and produced Rebennack's debut album, "Gris-Gris," in 1968.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Battiste, Section A2002_197_001_005, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Harold Battiste talks about Congo Square, a former African slave market and gathering place in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Zydeco music. Battiste also talks about New Orleans music icons like James Booker and the Neville Brothers, and shares his concern that the city's musical pioneers are not acknowledged. He talks about his current projects and his focus on elevating the perception of jazz music. Battiste shares his concerns for the African American community, and talks about his family, legacy, and how he would like to be remembered. Battiste closes the interview by sharing a message for his children and narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Battiste, Section A2002_197_001_006, TRT: 0:13:00 ?

Henry Battiste narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Harold Battiste, Section A2002_197_Battiste_Harold_06_MED_001, TRT: 1:01:01