

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Johnny Pate

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Pate, Johnny
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Pate,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 30, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:29:11).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Jazz bassist and music arranger Johnny Pate (1923 - ) formed the Johnny Pate Trio and Combo, and was house bassist for Chicago's The Blue Note. Johnny Pate's bass solo on "Satin Doll" is featured on the album "Duke Ellington Live at The Blue Note," and he has collaborated with Curtis Mayfield, produced the Impressions's hits "Amen," "We're A Winner" and "Keep On Pushin'." and arranged for B.B. King, Gene Chandler and Jerry Butler. Pate was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 30, 2004, in Las Vegas, Nevada. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_188
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Jazz bassist, rhythm and blues arranger John W. Pate, Sr., "Johnny Pate," was born December 5, 1923 in blue collar Chicago Heights, Illinois. Pate took an interest in the family's upright piano and learned from the church organist who boarded with them. He attended Lincoln Elementary School, Washington Junior High and graduated from Bloom Township High School in 1942. Drafted into the United States Army, Pate joined the 218th AGF Army Band where he took up the tuba and played the upright bass in the jazz orchestra. In 1946, after his tour of service, Pate moved to New York City where bassist Oscar Pettiford helped him get started.

Pate played with the Red Allen - J.C. Higginbotham Combo and jazz violinists Stuff Smith and Eddie South. Returning to Chicago, he arranged musical numbers at the Regal Theatre with Red Saunders. Pate studied at the Midwest Conservatory of Music from 1950 to 1953 and continued to perform in the 50s with Dorothy Donegan, Sarah Vaughan, Joe Williams, Count Basie and Ahmad Jamal. Forming the Johnny Pate Trio and Combo in 1957, he was also "house bassist" for Chicago's Blue Note. Johnny Pate's bass solo on "Satin Doll" is featured on the album *Duke Ellington Live At The Blue Note* (1959). Pate continued to perform, and appeared on albums featuring James Moody, Phil Woods, Shirley Horn, Wes Montgomery, Stan Getz, Kenny Burrell, Jimmy Smith and Monty Alexander as producer and arranger.

Contacted by Carl Davis of Chicago's Okeh Records, Pate arranged a Curtis Mayfield song, "Monkey Time," which was a big hit for Major Lance in 1963. Pate's collaboration with Curtis Mayfield produced most of the well-known Impressions tracks including "Amen," "We're A Winner" and "Keep On Pushin'." He produced *B.B. King: Live at the Regal* and also arranged for Betty Everett, Gene Chandler and Jerry Butler. In the 1970s Pate orchestrated and arranged *Shaft In Africa*, *Brother on the Run*, *Bucktown*, *Bustin Loose* and others. He continued to

arrange in the 1980s for Peabo Bryson and Natalie Cole. Retiring to Las Vegas in the 1990s, Pate was honored in 2003 as the “Unsung Hero of Popular Music”. Pate’s son is well known bassist, Don Pate and his cousin is saxophonist, Johnny Griffin.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Johnny Pate was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 30, 2004, in Las Vegas, Nevada, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Jazz bassist and music arranger Johnny Pate (1923 - ) formed the Johnny Pate Trio and Combo, and was house bassist for Chicago’s The Blue Note. Johnny Pate’s bass solo on “Satin Doll” is featured on the album "Duke Ellington Live at The Blue Note," and he has collaborated with Curtis Mayfield, produced the Impressions’s hits “Amen,” “We’re A Winner” and “Keep On Pushin’.” and arranged for B.B. King, Gene Chandler and Jerry Butler.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Pate, Johnny

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Pate, Johnny--Interviews

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# Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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# Occupations:

Jazz Bassist

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Music Arranger

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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# 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 Johnny Pate, September 30, 2004. 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).

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# 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.

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# Detailed Description of the Collection

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Pate, Section A2004\_188\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:34 ?

Johnny Pate was born on December 5, 1923 in Chicago Heights, Illinois. His mother, Nora Radford Pate, was born in St. Francisville, Louisiana in 1899. His father, Charles Pate, Sr., was also born in Louisiana. Pate's parents were separated, and he never learned much about either side of the family. His mother's father may have been a minister and her mother a homemaker. Pate and his older brother were raised by their single mother in a working-class Italian neighborhood in Chicago Heights, an industrial town that often smelled of fumes from its chemical plants. Pate's mother was a domestic and kept a phone wherever they were living to check on her children while away; when Pate was three, he called her at work one day. Pate attended Payne Chapel and learned how to play the piano from the organist, Empress Lorenzo Krizer. He sang church songs with his mother, who also loved music. His family periodically traveled Chicago, Illinois where he had a chance to visit the Civic Opera House and various museums.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Pate, Section A2004\_188\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:29 ?

Johnny Pate attended Lincoln Elementary School in Chicago Heights, Illinois where he participated in the chorus. He enjoyed sports while growing up and played basketball at Washington Junior High School and Bloom High School. Pate learned to play the tuba with the direction of a local band leader and continued singing in choirs. During his teenage years, his mother's sister and her husband moved in with Pate's family. After graduating in 1942, Pate was drafted into the U.S. Army. While playing piano at the Camp Wheeler Service Club near Macon, Georgia, he was recruited to the army band to play the bass tuba and bass fiddle. Pate developed his musical skills to continue his service in the band rather than the infantry. After being discharged in 1946, he reunited with his wife and baby son, then moved to New York City to establish his musical career. He traveled for gigs before returning to his family in Chicago, Illinois where he attended Midwest Conservatory of Music intermittently while still touring.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Pate, Section A2004\_188\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:22 ?

Johnny Pate toured with jazz violinists and rivals Eddie South and Stuff Smith throughout the late 1940s. After providing musical arrangements to Red Saunders, he was picked to take over as musical director at Club DeLisa in Chicago, Illinois when "Wild" Bill Davis left. Sammy Dyer taught him how to arrange music for many different genres, including opera and swing, with a jazz sound. Pate recorded an album called 'Jazz Goes Ivy League' with King Records. While working a day job at Gamble Hinged Music Company, he recorded a hit cover of 'Swingin' Shepherd Blues.' HistoryMaker Carl Davis recruited him to do arrangements for Okeh Records, and one of his first was the 1963 hit 'Monkey Time' by Curtis Mayfield for Major Lance. Pate continued arranging a number of songs that Curtis Mayfield wrote. He also worked as a producer with ABC-Paramount Records and produced 'Just Be True' and 'Rainbow' for Gene Chandler. Pate found out through a fan in Europe that his music was popular in underground dance clubs there.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Pate, Section A2004\_188\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:43 ?

Johnny Pate worked with HistoryMaker B.B. King on a number of albums, including the critically acclaimed 'B.B. King Live at the Regal.' He worked with Curtis Mayfield on the soundtrack for the movie 'Super Fly.' This was his last project with Mayfield before parting ways. Pate also produced music scores for a Shaft TV series, Shaft in Africa and other films and television shows. Before retiring in the early 1990s, Pate produced albums with Peabo Bryson. Pate celebrated his success with his mother and was able to throw her a lavish party

at the Palmer House in Chicago, Illinois for her eightieth birthday. Pate talks about writing musical arrangements, offers his opinion on hip-hop and names some of his current favorite musicians. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and reflects upon his life and legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Pate, Section A2004\_188\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:03 ?

Johnny Pate was approached by Creed Taylor and HistoryMaker John Levy to become a producer for Verve Records. At Verve, he was able to focus on producing records that showcased his first musical love, jazz. He worked with Stan Getz, Shirley Horn and Monty Alexander, among others. After retirement, he lived in Las Vegas, Nevada where he was invited to play for a series called Jazz in the Park. That led to his writing arrangements and conducting for the University of Nevada in Las Vegas (UNLV) and working with its jazz ensemble. At the time of the interview, he was teaching a course on film scoring at UNLV and hosting a weekly show for its radio station, KUNV. Pate describes how he would like to be remembered and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Pate, Section A2004\_188\_Pate\_Johnny\_06\_MED\_001, TRT: 0:55:47