

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Larry Ridley

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Ridley, Larry                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Larry Ridley,                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | November 30, 2016                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2016                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:01:19).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Jazz musician and music professor Larry Ridley (1937 - ) taught at Rutgers University from 1971 to 1999, and played with jazz legends such as Horace Silver, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, and Thelonious Monk. Ridley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 30, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2016_141                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Jazz musician and music professor Larry Ridley was born on September 3, 1937 in Indianapolis, Indiana to Lawrence and Nevolena Ridley. He was taught to play the violin at the age of five, but later became interested in jazz music and learned to play the bass. Ridley graduated from Shortridge High School in Indianapolis, Indiana. He went on to attend Indiana University in 1955, but completed his B.S. degree at New York University in 1971. He earned his M.A. degree in cultural policy from the State University of New York Empire State College in 1993, and his Ph.D. degree in performing arts from the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore in 2005.

After attending the Lenox School of Jazz summer program in 1959, Ridley moved to New York City to pursue a career as a professional jazz musician. In the 1960s, Ridley was active in the New York jazz music scene, playing on tours and in studio recordings with a wide range of notable jazz musicians, including Horace Silver, Sonny Rollins, Philly Joe Jones, John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Lee Morgan, and Jackie McLean. In 1971, he was hired as a professor of music at Rutgers University's Livingston College, where he developed the college's jazz education program, creating both bachelor's and master's degree programs in jazz performance. From 1970 to 1973, he toured the world as the bassist for Thelonious Monk. Ridley released his own album, *Sum of Parts*, in 1975. From 1981 to 1985, he played as part of the tribute band Dameronia, in honor of the composer Tad Dameron. In 1985, Ridley formed his own group, the Jazz Legacy Ensemble, releasing two albums *Live at Rutgers University* and *Other Voice*. Ridley retired from Rutgers in 1999, but continued to teach at the Manhattan School of Music and Swing University at Jazz at the Lincoln Center. He chaired the National Endowment for the Arts' Jazz Panel. He also served as the coordinator of the Jazz Artists in Schools program, executive director of the African American Jazz Caucus and northeast regional coordinator for the International Association for Jazz Educators.

Ridley received numerous awards and accolades for his work in jazz music and education. He was inducted into the International Association for Jazz Educators Hall of Fame, the Downbeat Magazine Jazz Education Hall of

Fame, and the Indianapolis Jazz Foundation Hall of Fame. He was honored by a Juneteenth 2006 Proclamation Award from the New York City Council, and was the recipient of the Meade Legacy Jazz Griot Award, the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Jazz Legacy Award, the MidAtlantic Arts Foundation's Living Legacy Jazz Award, and the Benny Golson Jazz Award from Howard University.

Larry Ridley was interviewed by *The Historymakers* on November 30, 2016.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Larry Ridley was conducted by Harriette Cole on November 30, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Jazz musician and music professor Larry Ridley (1937 - ) taught at Rutgers University from 1971 to 1999, and played with jazz legends such as Horace Silver, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, and Thelonious Monk.

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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:

Ridley, Larry

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ridley, Larry--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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## 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 Larry Ridley, November 30, 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).

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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 Larry Ridley, Section A2016\_141\_001\_001, TRT: 1:28:23 ?

Larry Ridley was born on September 3, 1937 in Indianapolis, Indiana to Nevoleane Morris Ridley and Laurence Ridley, Sr. Ridley's mother was born in Xenia, Ohio, and relocated with her family to Indianapolis, where her father, John Morris, worked at the local Chevrolet factory. In her teenage years, she worked as an elevator operator at the Madame C.J. Walker building. There, she met Ridley's father, who was a newspaper distributor for The Indianapolis Star. Ridley's parents married and settled in Indianapolis' Lockefield Gardens housing projects, where Ridley befriended future jazz musicians James Spaulding and Virgil Jones. He began his education at Burke Elementary School, and later transferred to William D. McCoy School 24. Inspired by violinists Fritz Kreisler and Jascha Heifetz, Ridley began taking violin lessons with Ruth McArthur at the McArthur Conservatory when he was six years old. He also studied with Mildred Lynn, who held the position of first violinist in the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Ridley, Section A2016\_141\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:25 ?

Larry Ridley enjoyed listening to classical music on the 'The Bell Telephone Hour' radio program, and learned to play the violin at six years old. He and his brother, Michael Ridley, earned extra money by helping their father, Laurence Ridley, Sr., deliver ice. Each Sunday, Ridley's family attended the Bethel A.M.E. Church, where Ridley was an altar boy. At twelve years old, Ridley saw Ray Brown, Oscar Peterson and Herb Ellis perform as part of the 'Jazz at the Philharmonic' show. Around this time, he began listening to other jazz musicians like Jimmy Coe, Charlie Parker and Coleman Hawkins. During his teenage years, Ridley taught himself to play the bass, and formed a jazz band with his friends, Freddie Hubbard and James Spaulding. The group then befriended Buddy Montgomery, Wes Montgomery and Monk Montgomery, and began performing with their band, The Montgomery-Johnson Quintet, at local venues. During this time, Ridley was a student at the newly integrated Shortridge High School in Indianapolis.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Ridley, Section A2016\_141\_001\_003, TRT: 3:34:25 ?

Larry Ridley grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana, where there was a strong Ku Klux Klan presence. Although he and his friends avoided the segregated downtown area, Ridley encountered prejudiced teachers at the integrated Shortridge High School. In Indianapolis, Ridley performed with Freddie Hubbard, James Spaulding and Walter Miller as the Jazz Contemporaries, and was heavily influenced by the local jazz legend Erroll Grandy. In 1955, Ridley entered the Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington, Indiana, where he majored in music education. He was taught by Murray Grodner and Tibor Kozma, and his classmates included jazz composer David Baker and musician Alan Kiger. During the summer of 1959, Ridley studied with jazz musicians Percy Heath, Max Roach and Ornette Coleman at the Lenox School of Jazz in Lenox, Massachusetts. In his senior year, Ridley left Indiana University to move to New York City. There, he reconnected with Roach, and worked with Philly Joe Jones, Art Blakey and Billy Higgins.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Ridley, Section A2016\_141\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:01 ?

Larry Ridley attended the Lenox School of Jazz in Lenox, Massachusetts, where he performed with people like Bill Evans, Herb Pomeroy and Kenny Dorham. From there, he became inspired to pursue a career as a jazz musician, and moved to New York City in 1959. The following year, he performed with Max Roach at Village Gate, where he met Maya Angelou. The performance was recorded, and later released as 'We Insist! Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite.' Through the Black Arts Movement, Ridley became acquainted with activist H. Rap Brown,

writer Amiri Baraka and jazz pianist Randy Weston. After leaving Max Roach's band, he joined the Slide Hampton Octet in the late 1960s. Due to his flexible schedule, Ridley was often recruited to work with Carmen McRae, Sonny Rollins, Betty Carter and Anita O'Day. Alongside pianists like Cedar Walton, Harold Mabern, Ronnie Matthews and Kenny Barron, Ridley performed as a duo at venues like the Needle's Eye in New York City and recorded albums with Atlantic Records and Riverside Records.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Ridley, Section A2016\_141\_001\_005, TRT: 5:25:26 ?

Larry Ridley began taking classes at New York University in 1968, and went on to complete his bachelor's degree in music education. During this time, he also accompanied Thelonious Monk on an international tour. At this point, Ridley describes Monk's style of improvisation, and reflects upon how his broad musical background helped him to conform to the direction of various bandleaders. In 1971, Ridley became a professor of music at Livingston College in Piscataway, New Jersey, which was a newly opened residential college at Rutgers University. In 1972, he created their jazz studies program, and hired jazz musicians Ted Dunbar, Kenny Barron and Freddie Waits as instructors. Working with the National Endowment for the Arts, Ridley became the national coordinator for the Jazz Artists in Schools program. He also served on the jazz panel of the New York State Council on the Arts. While at Rutgers University, he began playing with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, which included Johnny Hodges and Harry Carney.

Video Oral History Interview with Larry Ridley, Section A2016\_141\_001\_006, TRT: 6:35:39 ?

Larry Ridley worked closely with Nancy Hanks and Walter F. Anderson at the National Endowment for the Arts in the 1970s. He served the chairman of the jazz panel and the national coordinator of the Jazz Artists in Schools program. In 1982, Ridley cofounded the Jazz Cultural Theatre with Barry Harris and Jim Harrison. Around this time, he met his wife, Magdalena Ridley. He continued to direct of the jazz program at Livingston College in Piscataway, New Jersey, where he trained musicians to become educators. In 1993, Ridley earned a master's degree from Empire State College, and became the jazz artist-in-residence at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, where he mentored Wynton Marsalis. In honor of his accomplishments, Ridley was inducted into the hall of fame at the International Association of Jazz Educators, and received an honorary doctorate from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. He shares his advice to future generations, and reflects upon his life and the future of jazz education.