

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Carl Davis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Davis, Carl, 1934-2012
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Carl Davis,
Dates:	December 19, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:31:55).
Abstract:	Music producer Carl Davis (1934 - 2012) produced a number of hits starting in the '60s, earning his reputation as a "hitpicker." Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 19, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_306
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Successful record producer Carl H. Davis was born September 19, 1934, in Chicago, Illinois, where his father was a postal worker. He attended McCosh Elementary School and Englewood High School. He later earned a GED in 1954 and an associate's degree from Cortez College of Business in 1957.

Davis began his radio career typing play-lists for popular Chicago disc jockey Al Benson on WGES Radio in 1955. He quickly earned a reputation as a "hitpicker." His success allowed him to join the marketing department of Arnold Distributors. In the early 1960s, Davis managed the Nat label and had a minor hit with "Nite Owl" by the DuKays. In 1962, he became a producer for Okeh Records. There,

Davis discovered the legendary Gene Chandler and produced and co-wrote the “Duke of Earl” in 1962 and Major Lance’s “Monkey Time” in 1963. Through his work, Davis created a Chicago sound with upbeat arrangements backed by musicians and arrangers like Johnny Pate and Sonny Sanders. A partnership with Curtis Mayfield resulted in hits for Major Lance, Billy Butler (Jerry’s brother) and Walter Jackson. Meanwhile, Gene Chandler’s “Rainbow,” “Just Be True,” and “Man’s Temptation” were all hits. Davis produced the hit “Dear Lover” for Mary Wells and often hired Motown’s Funk Brothers band. Davis was then hired by Brunswick Records where he produced Jackie Wilson’s “Higher and Higher” and Barbara Acklyn’s “Love Makes A Woman.” After forming Atlantic’s Dakar Records, he produced the Chi-Lites and Tyrone Davis’ “Turn Back the Hands of Time” and “Can I Change My Mind.”

Davis had eight grandchildren, lived in Chicago and managed his own record label, Chi-Sound, until 2012.

Davis passed away on August 9, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Carl Davis was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 19, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Music producer Carl Davis (1934 - 2012) produced a number of hits starting in the '60s, earning his reputation as a "hitpicker."

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:

Davis, Carl, 1934-2012

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Davis, Carl, 1934-2012--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Music Producer

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 Carl Davis, December 19, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Carl Davis, Section

A2003_306_001_001, TRT: 0:30:24 2003/12/19

Carl Davis was born on September 19, 1934 in Chicago, Illinois to William Davis and Mattie Gibson Davis. The book, 'Trinal American Family Gibson,' by Edward "Boo" Gibson, documents his maternal family history. Davis' parents were from Louisiana and met when Davis' father was a bodyguard for Davis' maternal uncle's band. While working in a Louisiana sawmill, Davis' father assaulted a white co-worker for offending his wife. The white co-worker planned to lynch Davis' father, but his boss warned the family, and they moved to Chicago. Davis has ten siblings; he is the only one born with his father's real last name, Adams. Davis grew up in Park Manor on Chicago's South Side, and remembers the streetcars and sledding in the winter. He was a mischievous child and was kicked out of James McCosh Grammar school, and transferred to Shiloh Seventh-Day Adventist School. In 1948, he entered Englewood High School, but left in 1951 when he could no longer play football due to a failing grade. He joined the U.S. Air Force.

Video Oral History Interview with Carl Davis, Section
A2003_306_001_002, TRT: 0:30:05 2003/12/19

Carl Davis used his older brother's birthday to get into the U.S. Air Force at sixteen. He became a clerk typist in Cheyenne, Wyoming and then moved to Barksdale Air Force Base near Shreveport, Louisiana. While in Shreveport, Davis and his friend were threatened by a white police officer. He also experienced racial discrimination on the Air Force Base and was transferred after he punched a Lieutenant who disrespected him. At his new assignment, he learned to use a DSJ Composamatic machine. In 1955, Davis returned to Chicago, Illinois and found a job working on the DSJ machine for the D.J. Al Benson, where he developed an ear for music and helped discover a band called the Dukays. After hearing their song, 'Duke of Earl', he encouraged the lead singer to become a solo artist and release the song under the name Gene Chandler, in 1962. The record quickly rose to number one, and Davis accompanied Chandler when he performed on TV shows across the U.S.

Video Oral History Interview with Carl Davis, Section
A2003_306_001_003, TRT: 0:30:25 2003/12/19

Carl Davis was successful with Gene Chandler's hit 'Duke of Earl' and worked at Okeh Records, where he signed artists such as Walter Jackson and Major Lance, and produced hits like 'Monkey Time' in 1963. There, Davis first worked with Curtis Mayfield. Davis' African American group the Vibrations recorded a song called 'Hang On Sloopy' that became a huge hit after it was covered by a white group, The McCoys, which was the type of situation that happened frequently. Davis worked for Brunswick Records until 1975 when they were sued. Davis was released from his contract and started Carl Davis Productions Inc. and the record label Chi-Sound. He worked with artists such as Gene Chandler, the Chi-Lites and Young-Holt Trio, which included HistoryMakers Eldee Young and Isaac 'Redd' Holt. Davis talks about the lack of radio air-play African American artists received; and, compares today's radio stations, which play songs that are already hits, to the past, when radio disk jockeys broke new records.

Video Oral History Interview with Carl Davis, Section
A2003_306_001_004, TRT: 0:30:13 2003/12/19

Carl Davis had an altercation with Okeh Records president, Len Levy, when a gossip columnist mistakenly named Davis president in an article, which led to the end of Davis' career at Columbia Records. He went on to greater success, while Okeh Records folded shortly thereafter. Davis remembers that Gene Chandler was a great performer but difficult to work with. He recounts stories about Walter Jackson, The Chi-Lites, Young-Holt Trio, Kenneth 'Babyface' Edmonds and Mary Wells. Davis continued to release albums in Europe and was looking forward to signing singer, Jason Goodwin, in 2003. He describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and describes difference between digital recordings versus live recordings.

Video Oral History Interview with Carl Davis, Section
A2003_306_001_005, TRT: 0:30:48 2003/12/19

Carl Davis describes the changes in the music industry

and remembers musicians Maurice White, Floyd Morris, and his brother Cliff Davis, who all recorded at his Chi-Sound studio. Davis remembers WVON radio station's radio personalities, including HistoryMaker Herb Kent. He considers what he would have done differently; reflects upon his legacy; describes how he would like to be remembered and narrates his photographs.