

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Steve McKeever

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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>	McKeever, Steve, 1960-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Steve McKeever,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 17, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:47:50).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Record executive Steve McKeever (1960 - ) served as the senior vice president of artists and repertoire of Motown Records; during his tenure he created the subsidiary MoJAZZ Records. In 1998 McKeever founded Hidden Beach Recordings. McKeever was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 17, 2004, in Santa Monica, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_236
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Music producer and executive Steve McKeever was born in Chicago, Illinois. After graduating from St. Ignatius High School, McKeever attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he graduated in 1982. From there, McKeever attended Harvard Law School where he earned his J.D degree in 1985.

After completing his studies, McKeever was hired by the law firm of Irell & Manella LLP in Los Angeles as an entertainment lawyer. While at Irell &

Manella, McKeever helped launch the career of comedian Robin Harris by landing him a role in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*. In 1991, McKeever became the senior vice president of artists and repertoire of Motown Records; while there he helped to expand the label's lineup and manage its already burgeoning list of stars. In 1992, McKeever created MoJAZZ Records, a subsidiary of Motown, where he continued to help launch the careers of rising stars. In 1993, McKeever was instrumental in the sale of Motown Records to PolyGram Records; he eventually left Motown to work on his own projects, and in 1998 founded Hidden Beach Recordings (HBR).

Hidden Beach Recordings went on to become a leader in the music industry, representing acts such as R&B performer Jill Scott, saxophonist Mike Phillips, singer Darius Rucker and others. McKeever also introduced a variety of progressive initiatives under the Hidden Beach name, including the College Internship Program, an international effort that provides college students with hands-on music business experience. This program boasts nearly 400 members and has become a model for the entertainment industry.

McKeever served on the boards of directors of several organizations, including the National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences; the Northern Trust DreamMakers Forum; and City of Hope, a Los Angeles-based cancer research foundation.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Steve McKeever was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 17, 2004, in Santa Monica, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Record executive Steve McKeever (1960 - ) served as the senior vice president of artists and repertoire of Motown Records; during his tenure he created the subsidiary MoJAZZ Records. In 1998 McKeever founded Hidden Beach Recordings.

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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:

McKeever, Steve, 1960-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McKeever, Steve, 1960---Interviews

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African American lawyers--Interviews

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African American sound recording executives and producers--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:**

Record Executive

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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 Steve McKeever, November 17, 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 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).

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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 Steve McKeever, Section  
A2004\_236\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:18 2004/11/17

Steve McKeever talks about his family background. McKeever was born June 18, 1960 in Chicago, Illinois. His maternal grandfather, John Clarke, was raised in an all-white neighborhood in St. Louis, Missouri. The Clarke family passed for white before they were forced to move across town. McKeever's mother, Nany Monet Clarke McKeever, was born in St. Louis in 1936. She migrated to Chicago, Illinois as a high school student and met McKeever's father, Lester Harvey McKeever, Jr. McKeever's father was born in 1934 in Chicago and attended Phillips Academy in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood. McKeever's mother attended Hyde Park High School on Chicago's south side. John Clarke followed his daughter north as an adult, and worked as a janitor in the Chicago public school system, and as an apartment superintendent. The family developed a close relationship with Chicago painter and philanthropist Allen J. Beasley. McKeever talks about his family's relationship with the Beasleys.

African American lawyers--Interviews.

African American sound recording executives and producers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Steve McKeever, Section  
A2004\_236\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:30 2004/11/17

Steve McKeever talks about growing up in Chicago, Illinois' Hyde Park neighborhood in the 1960s. McKeever attended Bret Harte Elementary School on the University

of Chicago's campus. His mother was a third grade schoolteacher at Woodson South Elementary in Chicago. McKeever describes Hyde Park as an integrated, progressive, and liberal community. Interracial couples were welcome, and its residents voted against Richard Nixon in the 1972 presidential election. McKeever was considered a troublemaker in elementary school, and surprised the faculty with his outstanding standardized test scores. He was admitted into Chicago's St. Ignatius College Prep High School, but was unhappy with the curriculum because it did not support or encourage art. There were very few black students at St. Ignatius. As a youth, McKeever was interested in music and learned to play the piano by ear. He talks about his favorite records and artists from that period, and the musical styles that influenced him.

Video Oral History Interview with Steve McKeever, Section  
A2004\_236\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:49 2004/11/17

Steve McKeever talks about his experience at St. Ignatius High School in Chicago, Illinois. His father studied law and influenced McKeever's early interest in entrepreneurship and entertainment law. McKeever talks about Chicago's burgeoning music community and African American contributions to the entertainment business. As a high school student, McKeever spent time in Chicago's P.S. Recording Studio where artists like Earth, Wind, and Fire were cutting records, and where McKeever gave unofficial legal advice to local musicians. In 1978, he attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where he became a member of the student union board and organized concerts for the student body. He talks about working with musical artists and learning to negotiate. McKeever graduated from the University of Illinois in 1982 and was admitted into Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He describes expanding the Harvard Law School Forum speakers program as the forum's vice president of programming.

Video Oral History Interview with Steve McKeever, Section  
A2004\_236\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:18 2004/11/17

Steve McKeever talks about serving as vice president of programming for the Harvard Law School Forum. As vice

president, he convinced Stevie Wonder to appear at the forum in 1984, and met many other influential figures including Mayor of Chicago Harold Washington. McKeever completed his final year of law school at the University of California, Berkeley via the Harvard University exchange program in 1985. He then relocated to Los Angeles, California and was hired in the entertainment department at Irell and Manella LLP. After the department dissolved, McKeever joined a music firm in Santa Monica, California where he produced his first album, 'Be-Be's Kids,' by comedian Robin Harris. McKeever remembers meeting former president of Motown records Jheryl Busby who asked him to join Motown as the head of Artists & Repertoire in 1991. He talks about his work at Motown where he founded his own label, Mo Jazz. McKeever left Motown in 1995 and establish Hidden Beach Recordings, an independent record label in 1998.

Video Oral History Interview with Steve McKeever, Section  
A2004\_236\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:05 2004/11/17

Steve McKeever talks about his independent record label, Hidden Beach Recordings. McKeever describes facing a series of obstacles before launching the label in 1998, and signing the label's first artist, Jill Scott. McKeever remembers meeting Scott in an improvised studio performance. She made an impression, and McKeever signed her in early 1999. Scott's debut album, 'Who is Jill Scott?' sold nearly 2.5 million copies and was nominated for Best R&B Album at the 2001 Grammy Awards. McKeever lists other artists signed to Hidden Beach Recordings including Kindred the Family Soul, the husband and wife duo of HistoryMakers Aja Graydon and Fatin Dantzler. McKeever talks about Hidden Beach's marketing strategy and about the competitive nature of the music industry. He shares the Hidden Beach philosophy, and talks about the importance of finding an audience for alternative artists. He considers what mistakes he made as an entrepreneur, what he would do differently, and his desire to expand into other art forms.

Video Oral History Interview with Steve McKeever, Section  
A2004\_236\_001\_006, TRT: 0:15:50 2004/11/17

Steve McKeever describes his hopes and concerns for the African American demographic. In 1999, he established the Hidden Beach internship program established for students interested in independent and alternative record labels. McKeever considers the success and legacy of Hidden Beach Recordings as well as his family's pride in the label's success. McKeever talks briefly about his sister's dance career; she is a former performer with Garth Fagan's, "The Bottom of the Bucket...BUT Dance Theatre," and with the Urban Bush Women dance company. McKeever talks about his son, his personal legacy, and how he would like to be remembered.