

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ronnie Baker Brooks

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brooks, Ronnie Baker
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ronnie Baker Brooks,
Dates:	August 18, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:16:01).
Abstract:	Blues musician Ronnie Baker Brooks (1967 -) is a Chicago born blues singer and son of blues legend Lonnie Brooks. Brooks has been recognized as by Real Blues Magazine as a "Best New Blues Artist," releasing solo albums, "Golddigger" and "Take Me Witcha," on Watchdog Records, his own Chicago-based record label. Brooks was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 18, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_199
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Rodney Dion Baker, who performs as Ronnie Baker Brooks, was born in Chicago on January 23, 1967, to Jeannine Baker and Lee Baker, Jr.—better known as legendary blues singer and guitarist Lonnie Brooks. Brooks has been performing since his ninth birthday, when his father allowed him to join him on stage at Pepper’s Lounge in Chicago to play “Messin’ with the Kid” and “Reconsider Baby.”

After graduating from Hales Franciscan High School in 1985, Brooks worked briefly as a mail clerk before joining his father’s band in 1986. In 1988, Brooks’ work was featured on his father’s album, *Live from Chicago—Bayou Lightning Strikes*. He later appeared on Lonnie Brooks’ *Satisfaction Guaranteed* and the *Alligator Records 20th Anniversary Tour*, during which he had the opportunity to perform with Koko Taylor, Elvin Bishop, and Lil’ Ed Williams. He has since worked with Buddy Guy, Junior Wells, and Keb’Mo’, among other luminaries.

In 1992, Brooks made his debut as a solo performer, substituting for an ill Lonnie Brooks at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. In 1998, *Real Blues Magazine* selected Brooks as the Best New Blues Artist. Since his show at Buddy Guy’s Legends on New Year’s Eve of that year, Brooks has been a solo artist, releasing the albums *Golddigger* and *Take Me Witcha* on Watchdog Records, his own Chicago-based label.

Brooks lives in Dolton, Illinois.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ronnie Baker Brooks was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 18, 2005, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Blues musician Ronnie Baker Brooks (1967 -

) is a Chicago born blues singer and son of blues legend Lonnie Brooks. Brooks has been recognized as by Real Blues Magazine as a "Best New Blues Artist," releasing solo albums, "Golddigger" and "Take Me Witcha," on Watchdog Records, his own Chicago-based record label.

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:

Brooks, Ronnie Baker

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brooks, Ronnie Baker--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Blues 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 Ronnie Baker Brooks, August 18, 2005. 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 Ronnie Baker Brooks, Section A2005_199_001_001, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Ronnie Baker Brooks was born Rodney Baker on January 23, 1967 in Chicago, Illinois. His mother, Jeannine Broussard Baker, was born on February 26, 1941 in Chicago and grew up on the South Side. Her father was from Louisiana. Her family at one time all lived together in an apartment building her grandfather managed where Buddy Guy was a tenant. She worked at the Internal Revenue Service for twenty-five years. His father, HistoryMaker Lonnie Brooks, was born Lee Baker, Jr. on December 18, 1933 in Dubuison, Louisiana to Lee Baker, Sr. and Lillie Baker. As a young man, he moved to Texas where he was discovered playing guitar by Clifton Chenier. In the late 1950s, Brooks' father moved to Chicago and became a prominent blues musician. He met Brooks'

mother while performing at the Blue Flame Lounge shortly after arriving in Chicago. Brooks' family was a musical one, and he learned to play guitar at a young age at his home on Chicago's South Side.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronnie Baker Brooks, Section A2005_199_001_002, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Ronnie Baker Brooks grew up in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. He played at Washington Park and watched the annual Bud Billiken Parade where he saw Prince one year. He attended Corpus Christi School until eighth grade. As a young child, he saw a boy in his neighborhood killed by a car while walking a dog. The dog miraculously survived, and Brooks adopted him. At the age of nine, while his father was away on a European tour, Brooks learned to play two songs on guitar. As a reward, his father invited him to perform onstage for the first time. Brooks dropped music and began playing basketball as a teenager, joining the team at Hales Franciscan High School in Chicago. He played against basketball star Ben Wilson, who was later murdered. Although Brooks quitting music saddened his father, Brooks' parents remained supportive. In the 1960s and 1970s, gangs became prominent in Chicago, but Brooks' family and his status as an athlete protected him. After high school, Brooks picked up music again.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronnie Baker Brooks, Section A2005_199_001_003, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Ronnie Baker Brooks accidentally broke an expensive guitar of his father's as a child, which taught him an important lesson about caring for instruments. After his beloved dog, Rex, ruined his father's alligator shoes twice, his father got rid of the dog. His father bought him a Gibson guitar when he saw Brooks was serious about pursuing music. As a child, Brooks saw blues musicians visiting his house to play music with his father. Since no one his age played music, he focused on basketball instead. At Hales Franciscan High School, Brooks played forward guard and flute with the orchestra. He enjoyed the blues, which was unusual for someone his age, and he also listened to hip hop in high school, first underground, then on the radio. Brooks considered going to college, but decided to work. Disliking his job as a clerk in a mailroom, he toured with his father instead, caring for the instruments and learning the business side of music while discovering that he wanted to play professionally.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronnie Baker Brooks, Section A2005_199_001_004, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

Ronnie Baker Brooks began seriously playing music around 1987. While touring with his father, Brooks listened to the many Chicago blues artists that travelled with them. Brooks did not often tune his guitar differently like Albert King or Buddy Guy, but he was influenced by his predecessors to use his music to express his feelings honestly. Listening to rock guitarists he admired such as Jimi Hendrix and George Benson gave him a new outlook on blues music. Albert Collins encouraged Brooks early in his musical career, and Brooks wrote his song 'I'll See You Again' while grieving Collins' death. During Brooks' tours in Europe, he noticed greater appreciation for the blues there, unlike in Chicago where they were taken for granted. Brooks also describes his memories of Harold Washington's mayoral term and death, and his desire to preserve his family's musical legacy through making blues more popular.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronnie Baker Brooks, Section A2005_199_001_005, TRT: 0:21:40 ?

Ronnie Baker Brooks grew up attending church on Sunday with his family although his parents never forced religion upon him. His daughter, Noel Dion

Williams, is the granddaughter of blues musician Jody Williams. He currently plays a Stratton Plus he dubbed “The Baby.” While considering various legends about blues music, Brooks notes the commonality of the surname King, with musicians like HistoryMaker B.B. King, Albert King and Freddie King all sharing that name. He relates his thoughts about the story of blues guitarist Robert Johnson making a pact with the devil, which he considers to be merely a myth. In reflecting upon his family’s support, he notes how his parents kept him out of trouble and how his father provided valuable career advice that helped him avoid the pitfalls of financial exploitation and drug abuse experienced by many musicians. Brooks also describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his legacy, his regrets, and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Ronnie Baker Brooks, Section
A2005_199_Brooks_Ronnie_06_MED_001, TRT: 1:07:54

Video Oral History Interview with Ronnie Baker Brooks, Section
A2005_199_Brooks_Ronnie_06_MED_002, TRT: 1:00:27