

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Benjamin Tucker

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Tucker, Ben, 1930-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Benjamin Tucker,
Dates:	January 23, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:56:00).
Abstract:	Radio entrepreneur and jazz bassist Benjamin Tucker (1930 - 2013) was Savannah, Georgia's first African American radio station owner. Tucker was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 23, 2007, in Savannah, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_026
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Noted jazz musician Benjamin Mayor Tucker was born on December 13, 1930 in Brentwood, Tennessee. Tucker and his twin brother grew up in Nashville with their parents Carrie Clayborne and Joseph Tucker. He graduated from Pearl High School in 1946 and matriculated at Tennessee State University in 1949 as a music major. In 1950, he joined the United States Air Force, serving for four years.

Tucker's love for music began at an early age. He taught himself to play the tuba at the age of thirteen and later the bass violin and piano. Some of his favorite jazz musicians included Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Fletcher Henderson. In 1956, Tucker moved to Hollywood, California, where he met Warren Marsh. His

first recording was a collaboration with Marsh entitled *Jazz of Two Cities* in 1959. That same year, *Metronome* magazine named him one of the world's top ten bass players. In 1961, he recorded *Coming Home Baby*, a hit for Herbie Mann and Mel Torme. This song was featured in the film *Get Shorty*.

Tucker became Savannah, Georgia's first African American radio station owner in 1972 when he purchased WSOK Radio. WSOK was the top AM station for thirteen years. His station had over 400,000 listeners and a reputation of integrity in advertising. In 1989, Tucker opened Hard Hearted Hannah's, a jazz club. He was not only the owner of the club, but he also led the band six nights a week.

Tucker served on the boards of several organizations. President Jimmy Carter appointed him to serve on the Selective Service Board, and President Ronald Reagan reappointed him. Tucker for the 1996 Olympic Committee in Atlanta, Georgia. He was also the creator of the Telfair Jazz Society in Savannah.

Tucker and his wife, Gloria, resided in Savannah, Georgia. They had two adult children, Sabra and Wayne.

Tucker was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 23, 2007.

Benjamin Tucker passed away on June 4, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Benjamin Tucker was conducted by Denise Gines on January 23, 2007, in Savannah, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Radio entrepreneur and jazz bassist Benjamin Tucker (1930 - 2013) was Savannah, Georgia's first African American radio station owner.

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:

Tucker, Ben, 1930-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Tucker, Ben, 1930---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Radio Entrepreneur

Jazz Bassist

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers|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 Benjamin Tucker, January 23, 2007. 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 Benjamin Tucker, Section
A2007_026_001_001, TRT: 0:28:40 2007/01/23

Benjamin Tucker was born on December 13, 1930 to Carrie Clayborne Tucker and Joseph Tucker, Sr. in Brentwood, Tennessee. His paternal grandfather, Joe Tucker, owned a farm in Williamson County, Tennessee, where Tucker's father was born in 1898. In Franklin, Tennessee, Tucker's maternal grandfather, Scott Clayborne, was a minister, and founded the Clayborne Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church. Both Tucker's grandmothers were homemakers and excellent cooks. After marrying, Tucker's parents moved to Brentwood, where his father learned to garden. He became one of the state's finest landscape gardeners, and was skilled in grafting plants and arranging flowers. His father maintained an estate owned by the president of National Life and Accident Insurance Company in Nashville, Tennessee. Tucker describes his close relationship to his father, who was also a deacon at Brentwood Baptist Church. Tucker grew up in Brentwood with his identical twin, Reuben Tucker.

Video Oral History Interview with Benjamin Tucker, Section
A2007_026_001_002, TRT: 0:31:10 2007/01/23

Benjamin Tucker grew up in Brentwood, Tennessee during the Great Depression. Tucker does not recall experiencing racial discrimination until adulthood, despite living in the segregated South. He attended Brentwood Elementary School, an all-black, two-room school. During this time, he listened to radio programs like 'Amos 'n' Andy,' as well as jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, who inspired his interest in music. At thirteen years old, Tucker purchased a bass violin, and taught himself to play it. Tucker also learned to play the tuba while a student at Pearl High School in Nashville,

Tennessee. Upon graduating in 1946, he attended Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College for two years, and then enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. He was sent to California, and played bass violin in a U.S. Air Force band until 1956, when he completed his service. Tucker then joined Warne Marsh's jazz band in Los Angeles, where he also met musicians like Shorty Rogers, Marty Paich and Art Pepper.

Video Oral History Interview with Benjamin Tucker, Section
A2007_026_001_003, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/01/23

Benjamin Tucker joined the West Coast jazz community when he began playing with Warne Marsh's group, Jazz of Two Cities, in Los Angeles, California. He purchased his Tyrolean bass violin, which he used for most of his recordings, through the American Federation of Musicians Local 47. In 1959, Tucker moved to New York City to further his music career. He played with jazz pianist Marian McPartland at Manhattan's Hickory House; and, after the performance, was invited on her tour. He also played with trumpeter Roy Eldridge, flutist Herbie Mann, and singers Chris Connor and Miriam Makeba. In 1960, Tucker recorded 'Comin' Home Baby,' which he composed for his wife, Gloria Tucker. He recruited musician Bobby Dorough to write the lyrics, and Mel Torme recorded a hit version featured in films like 'Get Shorty' in 1995, and 'Calendar Girls' in 2003. In 1965, Tucker helped Bobby Hebb record 'Sunny' on Mercury Records. Tucker later sold his rights to the song, and purchased the WSOK Radio station in Savannah, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Benjamin Tucker, Section
A2007_026_001_004, TRT: 0:29:00 2007/01/23

Benjamin Tucker founded Tuckrow Productions, Inc. with musician Bob Dorough in New York City. They created advertisements for Dutch Masters cigars and Esso gasoline, and also developed educational songs that were broadcast on ABC. In 1972, Tucker entered the radio broadcast industry. With his attorney, he surveyed potential locations, including Seattle, Washington and Louisville, Kentucky, before acquiring WSOK Radio in Savannah, Georgia. Although he initially faced resistance from his employees, the station climbed to the top market

position, which it held for eleven years. As owner, Tucker expanded the station's programming, and sponsored public service efforts, including sickle cell anemia research and literacy campaigns. However, when national advertising agencies refused to work with him, he was forced to sell the station. Tucker then purchased WLVA Radio in Hardeeville, South Carolina, and began renovations. However, his investors sold the station to Luci Baines Johnson without consulting him.

Video Oral History Interview with Benjamin Tucker, Section
A2007_026_001_005, TRT: 0:28:20 2007/01/23

Benjamin Tucker owned WSOK Radio in Savannah, Georgia from 1972 to 1978. He used his platform to address community issues, like the disruption caused by a local motorcycle gang. As Tucker returned to musicianship in the late 1970s, President Jimmy Carter appointed him to the boards of the Georgia Fair Employment Practices commission; the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; and Georgia's selective service, to which he was reappointed by President Ronald Reagan. In 1989, Tucker opened Hard Hearted Hannah's jazz club in Savannah. He changed locations multiple times before settling upstairs at The Pirates' House. However, his partner became unhappy with Tucker's financial gain as a jazz musician at the venue, and requested that Tucker leave the business. In the 1990s, Tucker released two albums, 'Savannah Presents Jazz' and 'Christmas in Savannah,' with pianist John Colianni and drummer Teddy Linder. He also advocated for diabetes awareness, and played at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Benjamin Tucker, Section
A2007_026_001_006, TRT: 0:29:40 2007/01/23

Benjamin Tucker played bass with numerous renowned jazz musicians, including Benny Goodman, B.B. King, Freddy Cole and Art Blakey, and toured with singer Peggy Lee. He remembers several instances when his antique Tyrolean bass violin was damaged, and the high cost of repairs. He also describes how his childhood community of Brentwood, Tennessee has changed due to an influx of wealth around the time of interview. Tucker had two

children, Wayne Tucker and Sabra Tucker; and, at the time of the interview, had been married to his wife, Gloria Daly Tucker, for forty years. He reflects upon his life and how he would like to be remembered. Tucker concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.