

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lessly "Count" Fisher

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Fisher, Lessly, 1923-2015
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lessly "Count" Fisher,
Dates:	March 10, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:09:31).
Abstract:	Nightclub owner, police chief, and bandleader Lessly "Count" Fisher (1923 - 2015) owned The Carousel Club nightclub where such acts as Redd Foxx, Rodney Dangerfield, and John Coltrane performed. Fisher was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 10, 2007, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_082
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Band leader, nightclub owner, and police chief Lessly “Count” Fisher was born on August 19, 1923 in Canton, Mississippi to Ruby Mosby Fisher and future steelworker Seaser Fisher. Fisher was given the nickname of “Count” by Count Basie. He grew up in the New Edition section of East Chicago, Indiana and attended Calumet Elementary School, Garfield Elementary School, and Columbus School. Fisher graduated from Washington High School in 1941. An accident in the steel mill inspired him to join his cousin, Wallace Hayes playing drums for the Nightsteppers. Fisher, along with childhood friend Jack McDuff, learned to read music from Jesse Evans while working as driver and bodyguard for entertainment businessman, Jake Brennan.

Touring the Midwest, Fisher’s band also included Schoolboy Porter, Johnny Mott, Bill Lane and Aretta Lamar. In 1951, he met and toured several cities with singer Eve Rene. Later reunited with Rene, they played Indianapolis’ Joy Lounge and the Hubbub. Fisher married Eve Rene and established the Carousel Club in the late 1950s. Over the years, they featured The Hampton Family, Rodney Dangerfield, June Christie, Leroy Vinegar, Freddie Hubbard, George Kirby, Redd Foxx, Moms Mabley, Jimmy McGriff, Jack McDuff, John Coltrane and James Brown. The Fishers also participated in muscular dystrophy telethons with Lorne Greene. From 1963 to 1965, the couple operated the Chateau de Count et Eve near the Indiana State Capitol. There, they showcased Roy Hamilton, Lula Reed and Motown acts along with many other names.

In 1966, Fisher and Eve Rene moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan and performed at the London House as the house band. Eventually, Fisher moved away from show business and took a job as Sheriff’s Deputy for Kent County, Michigan. He was also Idlewild, Michigan’s first chief of police. Fisher and wife, Eve, a retired civil servant, lived in Grand Rapids. Their son, Rodney, is a musician who once portrayed Sir Nose D’Voidoffunk with George Clinton’s Parliament-Funkadelic.

Lessly "Count" Fisher was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 10, 2007.

Fisher passed away on November 22, 2015.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lessly "Count" Fisher was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 10, 2007, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Nightclub owner, police chief, and bandleader Lessly "Count" Fisher (1923 - 2015) owned The Carousel Club nightclub where such acts as Redd Foxx, Rodney Dangerfield, and John Coltrane performed.

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:

Fisher, Lessly, 1923-2015

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Fisher, Lessly, 1923-2015 --Interviews

African American jazz musicians--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Bandleader

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 Lessly "Count" Fisher, March 10, 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 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 Lessly "Count" Fisher, Section A2007_082_001_001, TRT: 0:29:02 ?

Lessly "Count" Fisher was born on August 19, 1923 in Canton, Mississippi to

Ruby Mosby Fisher and Seaser Fisher. His parents were also born in Canton, and educated through the eighth grade. His mother worked as a domestic, and frequently witnessed African Americans beaten by their white employers. After his father was threatened with lynching, Fisher's family fled the South with help from the Masonic Order, to which his father belonged. They relocated from Canton to East Chicago, Indiana, and settled in the multiethnic neighborhood of New Addition, where gang activity was common. His mother became an active member of the East Chicago's Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, where Fisher attended meetings of the Baptist Young People's Union of America. He also frequented the local juke joint, where he and his friends exchanged cans and bottles for nickels to play the jukebox, and were sometimes involved in fights. Fisher was the oldest of his parents' four children.

African American families--Mississippi.

African American families--Indiana.

East Chicago (Ind.).

African American neighborhoods--Indiana.

Basie, Count, 1904-1984.

Video Oral History Interview with Lessly "Count" Fisher, Section A2007_082_001_002, TRT: 0:29:19 ?

Lessly "Count" Fisher lived with his grandfather while attending a grade school in Calumet, Indiana. He went on to attend Columbus Elementary School in East Chicago, Indiana, where his teachers tutored him after school to keep him out of trouble. Even so, Fisher was often involved in fights. He admired boxing champions Joe Louis and Jack Johnson, and competed in the Golden Gloves three times. He also listened to radio programs like 'The Shadow' and 'Ma Perkins.' At East Chicago's Washington High School, Fisher joined the wrestling team, and earned good grades. He worked briefly at the Inland Steel Company with his father, Seaser Fisher; but left after witnessing a fatal accident. Instead, he took up tap dancing in Calumet City, Illinois. He then learned to read music, and formed a band. To raise funds for a drum set, he worked as a bodyguard for garment factory owner Jake Brenneman. Fisher left East Chicago to perform with his band just after graduating from high school.

African American children--Indiana.

High school athletes.

Golden Gloves Tournament.

East Chicago (Ind.).

Video Oral History Interview with Lessly "Count" Fisher, Section A2007_082_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Lessly "Count" Fisher worked as a clerk at Jake Brenneman's clothing store in East Chicago, Indiana, and later became Brenneman's bodyguard. He also performed with his band, and became a regular at nightclubs like the DuSable Lounge and Club DeLisa in Chicago, Illinois. Fisher toured with Jack McDuff and the Night Steppers, and met nightclub owners Mike DeLisa and Red Saunders. On one occasion, he played the Sutherland Hotel with Lester Young. Although Fisher never made a record, his band was often broadcast live on the radio. Fisher met his wife while performing at George's Bar in Indianapolis, Indiana, when the owner requested that she sing with the band. After assisting nightclub owner Morris Mitchell, Fisher purchased a nightclub in Indianapolis, which he named the Chateau de Count et Eve. Musicians like Jack McDuff, Jackie Davis and Roy Hamilton all performed there, and celebrities such as boxer Richard Afflis and actress Jayne Mansfield were frequent patrons.

Nightclubs--Indiana--Indianapolis.

Music--Performance--Indiana.

Video Oral History Interview with Lessly "Count" Fisher, Section A2007_082_001_004, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Lessly "Count" Fisher opened the Chateau de Count et Eve nightclub in Indianapolis, Indiana with his wife, Lois Fisher. The venue featured acts like saxophonist John Coltrane and drummer Elvin Jones. Fisher banned guns; required his waiters to dress in uniforms; and, despite monitoring his staff closely, was once cheated by a bartender. When Fisher's mother, Ruby Mosby Fisher, fell ill, he sold the club and moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan. He opened several small businesses there, including a supermarket, restaurant, donut shop and clothing store. He also began working at a local nightclub, and befriended the county sheriff, who often performed there. When the sheriff asked him to serve as his deputy, Fisher accepted. After Fisher's longtime friend Robert Blevins became the sheriff of Lake County, Michigan, Fisher was appointed as the chief of police of Idlewild, Michigan. Together, they investigated burglaries at empty summer homes. Fisher concludes this part of the interview by reflecting upon his life.

Police--United States--Michigan.

Police chiefs--United States--Michigan--Idlewild.

Nightclubs--Indiana--Indianapolis.

Video Oral History Interview with Lessly "Count" Fisher, Section A2007_082_001_005, TRT: 0:12:35 ?

Lessly "Count" Fisher describes his hopes and concerns for the African American community and the world. He reflects upon his legacy, and the values he hoped to teach his children. Fisher concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

African Americans--Conduct of life.

Nightclubs--Indiana--Indianapolis.