



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William "Buddy" Collette

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	William "Buddy" Collette
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William "Buddy" Collette,
Dates:	April 20, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	7 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:08:48).
Abstract:	Jazz musician William "Buddy" Collette (1921 - 2010) became the first African American musician to perform on television on the Groucho Marx show, "You Bet Your Life." Collette was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 20, 2007, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_153
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Jazz musician William "Buddy" Collette was born on August 6, 1921 in Los Angeles, California to Willie Hugh and Goldie Marie Collette. Collette cultivated his love for music at a young age, taking up the alto-saxophone and forming his first group at age twelve. This group included Britt Woodman on the trombone and Charles Mingus on the bass. By age seventeen, Collette was performing professionally and soon thereafter, he served in the U.S. Navy as a bandleader during World War II.

After returning from the war, Collette began playing with the Stars of Swing, a jazz quartet featuring saxophonist Dexter Gordon, bassist Charles Mingus, and drummer Chico Hamilton. The group helped to keep bebop music alive in Los Angeles during the mid-1940s in the historic Center Avenue neighborhood. In 1949, Collette performed around Los Angeles with a variety of jazz musicians including Edgar Hayes, Louis Jordan, Benny Carter, and Gerald Wilson. By 1950, Collette was working as a studio musician, and became the first African American musician to perform on television on the Groucho Marx show "You Bet Your Life." In 1954, Collette worked as a disc jockey under the pseudonym of Sleepy Stein and released an album entitled "Tanganyika," with a group consisting of Collette, drummer Chico Hamilton, trumpeter John Anderson, pianist Gerald Wiggins, guitarist Jimmy Hall, and bassist Curtis Counce. In 1955, Collette gained national recognition after he became a founding member of Chico Hamilton's legendary quintet. In 1956, Collette recorded his first album, "Man of Many Parts," as a bandleader. Later that year, Collette followed his debut album with "Nice Day with Buddy Collette," which led to a string of albums throughout 1958 and 1959 including "Calm Cool and Collette," "Porgy and Bess," and "Jazz Loves Paris." By 1966, Collette had become a noteworthy educator in Los Angeles. He also freelanced, worked in the studios, played in clubs and taught aspiring jazz musicians. Collette's students included such renowned woodwind players as Eric Dolphy, Charles Lloyd, Frank Morgan, Sonny Criss and James Newton.

In 1988, Collette recorded "Flute Talk," his first album as a bandleader since 1964. Collette also produced a spoken word record on his experiences with jazz in 1994, "Jazz for Thousand Oaks" in 1996, and "Live from the Nation's Capital" in 2000.

William "Buddy" Collette was interviewed by "The HistoryMakers" on April 20, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with William "Buddy" Collette was conducted by Lesure, Jacques on April 20, 2007, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 7 Betacam SP videocassettes. Jazz musician William "Buddy" Collette (1921 - 2010) became the first African American musician to perform on television on the Groucho Marx show, "You Bet Your Life."

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:

Collette, Buddy, 1921-2010

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Collette, Buddy, 1921-2010--Interviews

African American jazz musicians--Interviews

Saxophonists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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 William "Buddy" Collette, April 20, 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 8/11/2011 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, April 20, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with William "Buddy" Collette, Section A2007_153_001_001, TRT:

0:29:04 2007/04/20

William "Buddy" Collette explains the origins of his nickname as being created by his mother, Goldie Dorris Marie, with an alternate spelling of B-U-D-D-I-E. Collette discusses his family history in great detail, describing the personalities of his mother and father, how they met each other in California, and how his parents helped nurture his love of music. During Christmas Collette and his family would gather at his grandmother's home. Collette mentions other family members including his Uncle James, his brother Pat, his step-mother Alice Dorris, and his maternal grandfather Arthur Dorris.

African American families--California

African Americans--Migrations--History--20th Century

Video Oral History Interview with William "Buddy" Collette, Section A2007_153_001_002, TRT: 0:29:06 2007/04/20

William "Buddy" Collette discusses his childhood in Los Angeles, California. Collette grew up on Parmalee Avenue in California, a multicultural neighborhood. He was a mischievous child who was often disciplined by his father, Willie Hugh Collette. His earliest exposure to music was through two guitarists, Brown and Smith, who played music in his childhood home. Ducey Williams, a neighborhood friend in the music business, offered Collette a record deal in hopes that he would start a band. At age twelve, Collette began playing the saxophone. He convinced Charles Mingus, his childhood friend, to play bass in his band. After forming their band, Collette and Mingus begin to play jazz on the "Red Car," a public trolley train.

African American jazz musicians--California--Los Angeles.

African American men--Family relationships.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Buddy" Collette, Section A2007_153_001_003, TRT: 0:29:07 2007/04/20

William "Buddy" Collette discusses his life at age twelve during the Great Depression as one being riddled with economic strife. Even though Collette had little money, he still enjoyed music and recalls being influenced by the Woodman Brothers and playing music with Charles Mingus. Collette's musical skills were nearly fully developed at this point and he was hired as a musician in the Naval Reserve during World War II. While at the Naval Reserve, he performed in the black unit at St. Mary's Pre-Flight. In 1945, Collette was discharged and studied music under the G.I. Bill. While studying, Collette also learned how to read sheet music.

Depressions--1929--United States

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American

Music--Instruction and study.

Video Oral History Interview with William "Buddy" Collette, Section A2007_153_001_004, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/04/20

William "Buddy" Collette recalls getting together with Charles Mingus to start another band with Britt Woodman, Lucky Thompson, Spaulding Gibbins, and Oscar Bradley. Around 1945, Collette left the band to join the Stars of Swing as their flute player. The Stars of Swing played a genre Collette describes as "cool jazz", not bebop. In 1948, Collette played the Crystal Tea Room with Eric Dolphy and worked with Milt Holland to integrate white and black musicians' unions.

Musicians--Labor unions--California

Integration--United States.

Mingus, Charles, 1922-1979

Video Oral History Interview with William "Buddy" Collette, Section A2007_153_001_005, TRT: 0:29:18 2007/04/20

William "Buddy" Collette begins to work towards his goal of integrating the orchestras and unions in the Los Angeles region. While working towards this goal, Buddy meets Jerry Fielding, the musical conductor for Groucho Marx and becomes the first African American person to perform on television when Fielding recruits him to play on the Groucho Marx show, "You Bet Your Life." During the 1950's Collette is refused service at a number of restaurants downtown because he is African American. Yet, he went on to record his first album in 1956 entitled "Man of Many Parts".

Musicians--Labor unions--California

You bet your life. (Television program)

Discrimination in public accommodations

Marx, Groucho, 1890-1977

Video Oral History Interview with William "Buddy" Collette, Section A2007_153_001_006, TRT: 0:31:14 2007/04/20

William "Buddy" Collette recalls beginning his teaching career around 1972. During this time period, Collette also begins to perform regularly on "The Flip Wilson Show" and remembers what it was like being one of the first African Americans on television. Collette is still performing outside of television at this time with Nelson Riddle and Billy May. Towards the end of his career in 1994, Collette becomes a board member of the Professional Musicians Union, Local 47; the same union he had worked so hard to integrate. In closing, Collette expresses how the stroke he suffered affected his ability to play music.

Flip Wilson show (Television program)

Riddle, Nelson

African Americans on television

May, Billy

Video Oral History Interview with William "Buddy" Collette, Section A2007_153_001_007, TRT: 0:11:49 2007/04/20

William "Buddy" Collette narrates a collection of photographs.

Photos