

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Sandra Fortune-Green

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green,
Dates:	September 23, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:24:38).
Abstract:	Ballet dancer and dance instructor Sandra Fortune-Green (1951 -) participated in the Second International Ballet Competition in Moscow, Russia in 1972 and was the only African American to ever compete. She was the owner of the Jones-Haywood School of Dance and taught ballet at Howard University and at the Duke Ellington School of Arts. Fortune-Green was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 23, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_270
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Prima ballerina Sandra Fortune-Green was born on March 2, 1951 in Washington, D.C. to Elizabeth and Raymond Fortune. Fortune-Green began her dance career at age ten, enrolling in the renowned Jones-Haywood School of Dance under the instruction of Doris Jones and Claire Haywood. Fortune-Green flourished at the school, eventually becoming a principal dancer for the Capitol Ballet Company.

After Fortune-Green graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School in 1968, she pursued her dance studies in New York at the School of American Ballet, the American Ballet Theatre, and the Joffrey Ballet, before settling back in Washington, D.C. to attend Howard University. In 1972, Fortune-Green left Howard to begin training for the prestigious Second International Ballet Competition in Moscow, Russia. She was the only African American to ever compete in this competition. Fortune-Green was eliminated after the second round of judging, but finished twenty-sixth out of the 126 dancers participating. After returning to the United States, Fortune-Green married her high school sweetheart, Joseph Green, on New Year's Eve of 1975.

In 1987, Fortune-Green earned a Washington, D.C. Mayor's Arts Award presented by Marion Barry, and in 1994, she was invited to join the faculty at Howard University's dance department, where she taught ballet technique classes. Fortune Green also is on the dance faculty at the Duke Ellington School of Arts, a position she has held for more than thirty years. In 2007, Fortune-Green became the new owner of the Jones-Haywood School of Dance, the same studio she attended throughout her adolescence and early adulthood. Years earlier, Jones and Haywood stated in a 1974 interview that they hoped Fortune-Green would continue their legacy.

Fortune-Green has been widely recognized for her efforts within the performing arts, including a designation as an outstanding alumnus from Howard University. Fortune-Green was also featured in two major publications, *Black Dance from 1619 to Today* by Lynne Fauley Emery and *The Black Tradition in Dance* by Richard Long.

Sandra Fortune-Green was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 23, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Sandra Fortune-Green was conducted by Cheryl Butler on September 23, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Ballet dancer and dance instructor Sandra Fortune-Green (1951 -) participated in the Second International Ballet Competition in Moscow, Russia in 1972 and was the only African American to ever compete. She was the owner of the Jones-Haywood School of Dance and taught ballet at Howard University and at the Duke Ellington School of Arts.

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:

Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)--Interviews

African American dancers--Interviews

African American ballerinas--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Ballet Dancer

Dance Instructor

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Sandra Fortune-Green, September 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 Sandra Fortune-Green, Section A2007_270_001_001, TRT: 0:28:46 2007/09/23

Sandra Fortune-Green was born on March 2, 1951 in Washington, D.C. to Elizabeth Davis Speed and Raymond Fortune. Fortune-Green's grandparents, railroad worker Coley Davis and domestic worker Lucille Davis, moved from Virginia to Washington, D.C. with Fortune-Green's great-grandmother, Mary Love Williams. They had five daughters, of whom Fortune-Green's mother was the oldest. Fortune-Green's father was born in Washington, D.C.; and, after attending high school, married Fortune-Green's mother, and enlisted in the U.S. Army. Fortune-Green's parents divorced upon his return in 1950. Her father married Elizabeth Fortune, and worked as a car mechanic in the Bronx, New York; while her mother married Samuel Beeler, with whom she had two sons, Curtis Beeler and Michael Beeler. Fortune-Green grew up in the segregated city of Washington, D.C., where she was sheltered from racial discrimination by her family. She began her education at Barnard Elementary School, and later attended Theodore Roosevelt Senior High School.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Divorce.

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green, Section
A2007_270_001_002, TRT: 0:29:44 2007/09/23

Sandra Fortune-Green initially defied the authority of her stepfather, Samuel Beeler, but relented after he tutored her in math. Her mother, Elizabeth Davis Speed, was active in social clubs in Washington, D.C., and had many pastimes, including ice skating, drawing and music. When Fortune-Green was ten years old, her mother enrolled her in lessons at the Jones-Haywood School of Ballet in Washington, D.C. Initially, Fortune-Green resisted her instructors' strict requirements, but became committed to studying dance after seeing a performance of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Washington, D.C. At eleven years old, Fortune-Green successfully auditioned for the Bolshoi Ballet, and was the only African American child to appear in the company's local production of 'Ballet School.' At the Jones-Haywood School of Ballet, Fortune-Green was taught alongside dancers like Hinton Battle, Sylvester Campbell and Renee Robinson, and often had difficulty accepting criticism from Doris Jones and Claire Haywood.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Jones-Haywood School of Ballet (Washington, D.C.).

Jones, Doris.

George Washington University.

African American dancers--Washington (D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green, Section
A2007_270_001_003, TRT: 0:29:33 2007/09/23

Sandra Fortune-Green attended Theodore Roosevelt Senior High School in Washington, D.C., but focused on dance, often missing school activities like the senior picnic. At the all-black Jones-Haywood School of Ballet in Washington, D.C., Fortune-Green performed in ballets choreographed by her teachers, Doris Jones and Claire Haywood. They were occasionally joined by instructors from other black ballet schools in the area, like the Washington School of Ballet and the Therrell Smith

School of Dance. During her childhood, Fortune-Green was mostly unaware of racial tension, until the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. When Fortune-Green was fourteen years old, she earned a scholarship from the Ford Foundation, and began studying at the School of American Ballet in New York City. There, she was instructed by Russian ballet teacher Antonina Tumkovsky, and met choreographer George Balanchine. During her studies, she lived at her father's home in the Bronx, New York.

African American dancers--Washington (D.C.).

Jones-Haywood School of Ballet (Washington, D.C.).

Washington Ballet (Washington, D.C.).

School of American Ballet.

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green, Section A2007_270_001_004, TRT: 0:29:07 2007/09/23

Sandra Fortune-Green travelled frequently with her classmates from the Jones-Haywood School of Ballet in Washington, D.C. They spent the summers in New York City, where they attended schools like the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and the Joffrey Ballet School, while living at the home of Fortune-Green's father and stepmother. During these trips, Fortune-Green studied at the School of American Ballet. When Fortune-Green was fifteen years old, they trained in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts with their teachers, Doris Jones and Claire Haywood. Fortune-Green was also taught by dancer Arthur Mitchell, who often visited Jones' and Haywood's school. Upon graduating from Theodore Roosevelt Senior High School, Fortune-Green enrolled at Howard University on a scholarship. She performed in the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's production of 'The Nutcracker' in Canada during one Christmas holiday, and, in 1973, left Howard University to train for the Second International Ballet Competition in Moscow, Russia.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Martha's Vineyard (Mass.).

Jones, Doris.

African American dancers--New York (State).

Education, Secondary--Washington (D.C.).

Howard University.

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green, Section
A2007_270_001_005, TRT: 0:28:50 2007/09/23

Sandra Fortune-Green began training for the Second International Ballet Competition in Moscow, Russia in 1973. Fortune-Green was the only female African American competitor, and partnered with Clover Mathis, a dancer from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. While in Moscow, Fortune-Green lost over twenty pounds due to anxiety. She was welcomed by the residents of Moscow, although she was nearly blocked from the theater by an American tourist because of her race. Fortune-Green was eliminated during the second of three rounds, but returned to the competition the following year, when it was held in Varna, Bulgaria. She partnered with dancer Sylvester Campbell, and made it to the third round before being eliminated. In 1975, Fortune-Green married her high school sweetheart, Joseph Green, and purchased a house in Northeast Washington, D.C. She returned to the International Ballet Competition for the last time in 1976. She also talks about dancers' unhealthy weight loss methods, like smoking and purging.

Ballerinas--Attitudes.

Ballet--Russia (Federation)--Moscow.

Jones-Haywood School of Ballet (Washington, D.C.).

African American dancers--Russia (Federation)--Moscow.

African American couples--Marriage.

Capitol Ballet Company.

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green, Section
A2007_270_001_006, TRT: 0:29:19 2007/09/23

Sandra Fortune-Green continued her dance career in the 1970s. Although her teachers, Doris Jones and Claire Haywood, encouraged her to pursue a career in New York City, she focused on teaching at the Jones-Haywood School of Ballet in Washington, D.C. Haywood passed away in 1978, and Jones appointed Keith Lee as the school's director. Fortune-Green began teaching part-time at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and joined the

Capitol Ballet Company. During her tenure there, the previously all-black company became integrated, and then closed in the early 1980s. Fortune-Green's daughter, Kellye Green, was born in 1982, and Fortune-Green's mother died from an aneurysm the following year. The same day, Director Mary Day of the National Ballet of Washington, D.C. disparaged African American ballerinas on '60 Minutes,' and Fortune-Green went on to successfully audition for Day's company. She also recalls a summer employment program created by Mayor Marion Barry, which funded many of her students' dance training. Ballet--Bulgaria.

Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

Ballet dancers--Washington (D.C.).

Jones-Haywood School of Ballet (Washington, D.C.).

Capitol Ballet Company.

Dance Theatre of Harlem.

Washington Ballet (Washington, D.C.).

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green, Section
A2007_270_001_007, TRT: 0:29:19 2007/09/23

Sandra Fortune-Green danced in a benefit concert for the Capitol Ballet Company in 1988, alongside Sylvester Campbell, April Barry, Chita Rivera and Hinton Battle. The performance was successful, but the company did not come back together. Fortune-Green continued teaching at the Jones-Haywood School of Ballet and the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, D.C. In 1997, she suffered an aneurysm while picking up her daughter, Kellye Green, from swim practice. She was in a coma for one month, but fully recovered. In 2000, Fortune-Green's daughter enrolled at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York. Upon graduation, she completed a tour in Iraq, and was then stationed in Colorado Springs, Colorado. At the time of the interview, Fortune-Green was the owner of the Jones-Haywood School of Ballet. She describes her plans for retirement, and reflects upon her career and legacy. Fortune-Green concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.

Capitol Ballet Company.

Jones-Haywood School of Ballet (Washington, D.C.).

African American families.

Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

Intracranial aneurysms--Surgery--Washington (D.C.).

Howard University.