Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®
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Creator: Sandra Fortune-Green

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green,

Dates: September 23, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 7 Betacam SP videocassettes (3:24:37).

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 is the owner of the Jones-Haywood School of Dance and has 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 Betacam 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 is the owner of the Jones-Haywood School of Dance and has 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®.

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**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-Green, Sandra

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

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


Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/26/2011 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, September 23, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green, Section A2007_270_001_001, TRT: 0:28:45 2007/09/23

Sandra Fortune-Green discusses her family background with a focus on her parents and grandparents. Her mother, Elizabeth Davis Fortune Beeler Speed, was popular and married three times. Fortune-Green’s father, Raymond Fortune, was an auto mechanic and his mother died when he was a teenager. Elizabeth and Raymond divorced when Fortune-Green was five years old and she lived with her mother. She talks about her maternal family and notes that her grandmother, Lucy Davis, suffered from poor health and her deceased grandfather, Collie Davis, worked on railroads. Fortune-Green describes her maternal great grandmother, Mary Love William, as a homemaker who prepared food for other family members. She does not know much about her paternal grandparents and her maternal grandfather’s parents because her elders were reluctant to share their stories. She and her cousins do not understand why and are trying to piece together their family history.

African American families--Washington (D.C.)
African American parents--Divorce
Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)

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

Sandra Fortune-Green discusses her family and recalls having a great time with them, especially during the holidays. Her grandmother’s home is the gathering place for the large family. Despite her parents’ divorce, her father still visits her maternal grandparents. Her mother’s inspiration for sending Fortune-Green to dance school began with a dance related event hosted by a social club she was a member of. Fortune-Green shares her experiences at the Jones-Haywood School of Dance in Washington, D.C. and describes the training of Doris Jones as demanding and lacking encouragement. Fortune-Green talks about seeing her first live performance at George Washington University at the age of ten, with African American dancers. This inspired her to become a ballet dancer. She discusses her audition for the Bolshoi, and the first performance. Fortune-Green was the only African American child selected to perform by the Washington School of Ballet.

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.)
Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)

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

Sandra Fortune-Green discusses her performances as a young ballerina in “Meddlesome Sweat,” “Colors,” and “Flair for Movement.” Performances were a big excitement for her, but as she got older it became more demanding. She talks about the Jones-Haywood School of Dance. Mrs. Haywood was a kind person and Mrs. Jones was strict. Fortune-Green talks about the Washington Ballet School, a white school, and two African American ballet schools. She
had never thought about being an African American ballerina because skin color did not have an effect on her studying ballet. She attended the School of American Ballet, in New York, in 1971 where she studied under the Russian ballet instructor, Alexandra Tomkowski, whose tone was energizing and commanding.

African American dancers--Washington (D.C.)
Jones-Haywood School of Ballet (Washington, D.C.)
Washington Ballet (Washington, D.C.)
School of American Ballet
Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)

Sandra Fortune-Green talks about her experiences in New York and the lack of dance theory classes. She enjoyed exploring the city and visiting the musical theaters in New York. She talks about her experiences on Martha’s Vineyard, during the 1960s, and describes Martha’s Vineyard as a mecca for middle class African Americans. Fortune-Green graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School in 1969 and enrolled at Howard University. She felt like a normal student and decided to leave Howard University. In 1972, at age of twenty-one, she began a year of rigorous training for the 2nd Annual 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
Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)

Sandra Fortune-Green discusses dance culture. She talks about her experiences in Moscow and describes it as physically and emotionally difficult and the equivalent of the Olympics because they were trained dancers from all over the world. She received a lot of press from the newspapers and magazines and was also invited to the White House. Fortune-Green discusses life after returning to the United States. She went to Bulgaria in 1974 with Sylvester Campbell and began performing internationally, including competing in the 6th International Ballet Competition where she was the first African American ballerina to compete. Fortune-Green talks about her husband, Joseph Green, whom she married in 1975. Joseph saw Fortune-Green at the home of a mutual friend, Linda Show, and they soon began dating.

Ballet--Subculture
Ballet--Moscow (Russia)
Jones-Haywood School of Ballet (Washington, D.C.)
African American dancers--Moscow (Russia)
African American couples--Marriage
Capitol Ballet Company
Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)
Video Oral History Interview with Sandra Fortune-Green, Section A2007_270_001_006, TRT: 0:29:19 2007/09/23

Sandra Fortune-Green discusses life after returning from Bulgaria and shares the concerns over her ability to balance her dance career and life with her husband. She discusses the death of Mrs. Haywood caused by cancer in 1978. Fortune-Green began working at the Duke Ellington School of Arts in 1978 and, around this time, she became a prima ballerina for the Jones-Haywood School’s Capitol Dance Company. She compares Capitol Ballet in Washington D.C and the Dance Theatre of Harlem arguing that though they are equal in quality, the Dance Theatre of Harlem is superior due to its quantity. Fortune-Green discusses a period of struggle caused by her mother’s death. She auditioned and accepted a position at the Washington Ballet School where she was respected and received great reviews. Fortune-green talks about her daughter, Kellie Elizabeth Green, born on February 1, 1982.

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.)
Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)

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

Sandra Fortune-Green talks about her father, Raymond Fortune, and his death caused by kidney failure in November 1984. She discusses a benefit performance to revitalize the Capitol Ballet School, which was the last time she performed, she and suffered from a brain aneurysm on April 7, 1997, but was able to return to the Duke Ellington School of Arts for the Spring Dance Concert in May. Fortune-Green talks about her daughter, Kellie Elizabeth Green, who has been a Captain at West Point since 2000. Fortune-Green shares some of the highlights in her life, including her upcoming retirement and her tenure at Howard University. She is also very proud to be the owner of the Jones-Haywood School of Dance. Fortune-Green talks about her desired legacy and hopes children learn how to navigate through challenges with voice, dignity and integrity.

Fortune, Sandra (Fortune-Green)
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