

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Ingram

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Ingram, James
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James Ingram,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 25, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:13:53).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Musician, songwriter, and R & B singer James Ingram (1952 - 2019) was a multiple Grammy Award winner. Some of Ingram's hit songs included "Just Once," "Yah Mo B There;" he also co-wrote Michael Jackson's "P.Y.T." Ingram was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 25, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_272
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

R&B vocalist James Ingram was born on February 16, 1952, in Akron, Ohio to Alistine and Henry Ingram. Ingram was interested in music at an early age and became a self-taught musician, inspired by his musical idol, jazz organist Jimmy Smith. In the 1970s, Ingram began performing in the Akron band Revelation Funk under leader John Birkett and alongside Bernard Lawson, Sr. The group opened for the Ohio Players and performed with a variety of other Akron funk bands, including Axis and the Silky Vincent Group.

In 1973, when Ingram was seventeen years old, the group traveled to Los Angeles, California, hoping to find further opportunities to perform. Although the group met with some success, recording the track "Time is on Our Side" for the soundtrack to the film *Dolemite*, the band was unable to sustain itself, and the group returned to Ohio. Ingram stayed behind, playing music around Los Angeles and eventually performing backup vocals and playing keyboards for Ray Charles. Ingram's career as a musician began to take off, and in the mid-1970s, he began working as soul artist Leon Haywood's musical director.

In the late 1970s, Ingram had a reputation for his work as a studio session vocalist in Los Angeles, and soon grabbed the ear of legendary ex-Motown songwriter Lamont Dozier. Dozier offered Ingram the opportunity to contribute vocals and material for some of his releases, and Ingram's "Love's Calling" gained some airplay. Another musical legend, composer and musical director, Quincy Jones, heard a demo of Ingram performing a track entitled "Just Once," and quickly offered the singer the opportunity to perform on his 1980 album *The Dude*. "Just Once," re-recorded with Quincy Jones, became Ingram's first massive hit, winning Ingram Grammy Awards for Best Male Pop Vocal and Best R&B Vocal, as well as a nomination for Best New Artist.

Ingram signed to Quincy Jones's Qwest Records and recorded his own solo material with production work from Jones, and, in 1982, released his first solo single, "One Hundred Ways." The song reached #14 on the U.S. charts. After co-writing Michael Jackson's hit "P.Y.T.," Ingram released his debut album *It's Your Night* in 1983, selling

850,000 copies and working with such musical artists as Ray Charles, Michael McDonald, Patti Austin, Anita Baker, Nancy Wilson and Kenny Rogers. Ingram joined another large group of popular artists in performing on the 1985 record “We are the World,” the same year as he was awarded a Grammy Award for his Michael McDonald duet “Yah Mo B There.”

In 1986, Ingram’s second album *Never Felt So Good* was released alongside the singles “Always” and “Never Felt So Good.” He joined singer Linda Ronstadt for 1987’s gold-selling hit “Somewhere Out There,” and released his third album, entitled *It’s Real*, on Warner Brothers in 1989. The album featured the hit title track, written by legendary songwriter Thom Bell.

In 1990, Ingram appeared on Quincy Jones’ R&B mega-ballad “The Secret Garden,” and one year later released his own greatest hits disc entitled *The Power of Music*. In 1993, Ingram released his fourth LP, *Always You* and continued writing and performing individual singles throughout the 1990s. In 1999, Ingram released *Forever More: The Best of James Ingram*, and in 2006, participated in *Celebrity Duets*, a reality television program.

Ingram continues to perform annually on the “Colors of Christmas” Tour and regularly tours throughout southeast Asia, where he is one of the most popular U.S. artists to this day.

Ingram passed away on January 29, 2019.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James Ingram was conducted by Cheryl Butler on September 25, 2007, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Musician, songwriter, and R & B singer James Ingram (1952 - 2019) was a multiple Grammy Award winner. Some of Ingram's hit songs included "Just Once," "Yah Mo B There;" he also co-wrote Michael Jackson's "P.Y.T."

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## 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®.

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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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

## Persons:

Ingram, James

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ingram, James--Interviews

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African American musicians--Interviews

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African American singers--Interviews

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Lyricists--Interviews

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Rhythm and blues musicians--United States--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Musician

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Songwriter

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R & B Singer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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## 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 James Ingram, September 25, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with James Ingram, Section A2007\_272\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:24 ?

James Ingram was born on February 16, 1952 in Akron, Ohio to Alistine Wilson Ingram and Henry Ingram, Sr. Ingram's paternal great-grandparents, Georgeanne McClain Macklin and Henry Macklin, owned a large farm in Macon, Georgia, where Ingram's father grew up. Ingram's mother was raised in Milton, Florida by her aunt and uncle, Ethel Levins and Will Levins. In Akron, Ingram grew up in a strict, religious household, and attended the Wooster Avenue Temple Church, where his father was a deacon. There, music was influential in the lives of Ingram and his siblings; and, although his parents only allowed them to play to gospel music, Ingram listened to popular music on his friend's radio against his father's wishes. Ingram ran track at Akron's Robinson Elementary School and East High School, where he also began his musical career with his first two bands, Sharp and the G Clefs and Revelation Funk. He often snuck into nightclubs to perform while underage.

African American musicians--Interviews.

African American singers--Interviews.

Lyricists--Interviews.

Rhythm and blues musicians--United States--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with James Ingram, Section A2007\_272\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:18 ?

James Ingram and his siblings were banned from listening to music other than gospel, but often played contemporary music when their father, Henry Ingram, Sr., was not home. While in high school, Ingram played the keyboard in a band called Sharp and the G Clefts, and also sang in the choir at the Wooster Avenue Temple Church in Akron, Ohio. In 1973, he moved to Los Angeles, California with his next band, Revelation Funk, which took inspiration from the Ohio Players. The band quickly gained popularity in the nightclubs of Los Angeles,

where they were known for their custom outfits and funk sound. Revelation Funk went on to be cast in the movie 'Dolemite.' After the band dissolved, Ingram decided to stay in Los Angeles with his wife, Debbie Robinson Ingram. He became the keyboardist for A Different Bag, with whom he toured Japan as the opening act for musicians Ike Turner and Tina Turner.

Video Oral History Interview with James Ingram, Section A2007\_272\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

James Ingram met Ray Charles in 1976 while playing music with Joe Webster, who was the son of Charles' backup singer and Reverend Dr. Mable John. Impressed with his work, Charles asked Ingram to play the organ on two of his singles, "I Can See Clearly Now" and "Anonymous Love." Following this, Ingram began singing backup for recording artists, playing keyboard for Dick Clark's 'Oldies But Goodies' show and singing demos for ATV Music Publishing. One of those demos was "Just Once," which became Ingram's first single. After it was released on Quincy Jones' album, 'The Dude,' Ingram gained widespread acclaim as a singer. He toured with Jones and singer Patti Austin, and won his first Grammy Award for "One Hundred Way," which was also released on 'The Dude.' Ingram signed to Jones' label, Qwest Records, and began touring internationally. Ingram and his wife, Debbie Robinson Ingram, had six children, and purchased their first home in Los Angeles, California thanks to his success as a musician.

Video Oral History Interview with James Ingram, Section A2007\_272\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:58 ?

James Ingram won his first Grammy Award for the single "One Hundred Ways," which was released on Quincy Jones' album, 'The Dude.' Following this success, Ingram turned to songwriting. One of his most well-known songs was Michael Jackson's "P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing)," which he co-wrote with Jones. Wanting to sing more, Ingram began studying with vocal coach Seth Riggs; and, in 1983, released his first solo album, 'It's Your Night.' Ingram co-wrote the album's title song with songwriting duo Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil. The music was influenced by artists like singers Ray Charles and James Brown, and the Ohio Players funk band. For Ingram's next project, he performed on the single "We Are the World" with other artists to raise relief funds for Africa. His collaborators on the single included Harry Belafonte, Quincy Jones, Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie. In 1989, Ingram began his first tour as a solo artist alongside singer Patti LaBelle, who taught him to interact comfortably with his audience.

Video Oral History Interview with James Ingram, Section A2007\_272\_001\_005, TRT: 0:27:51 ?

James Ingram recorded several duets that were used as the theme music for feature films over the course of his career. The first of these duets was "How Do You Keep the Music Playing," which Ingram performed with Patti Austin for the film 'Best Friends.' His next film theme song was "Somewhere Out There," which he sang with Linda Ronstadt and Natalie Cole for the film 'An American Tail.' This song won two Grammy Awards, and was nominated for another two Grammy Awards and a Golden Globe. Ingram's second album, 'Never Felt So Good,' was released in 1986, and produced by Keith Diamond. In 1993, Ingram performed the Academy Award nominated song "The Day I Fall In Love" with Dolly Parton for the film, 'Beethoven's 2nd,' which Ingram co-wrote with Carole Bayer Sager and Clif Magness. Ingram became an internationally recognized artist, and toured the Philippines and Jamaica. While in Manila, the Philippines' capital, he required a police escort because of the number of fans he attracted.

Video Oral History Interview with James Ingram, Section A2007\_272\_001\_006, TRT: 0:29:03 ?

James Ingram collaborated with singers Kenny Rogers and Kim Carnes on the

song “What About Me?”, which was listed on four Billboard singles charts. Ingram then released his third album, ‘It’s Real,’ with producer Thom Bell. As his success grew, Ingram appeared on numerous talk shows, including ‘The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson.’ Ingram had several mentors throughout his career, such as his manager Dick Scott, producer Quincy Jones and singer Harry Belafonte. In addition to working with his notable mentors, Ingram also collaborated with such artists as singer Gerald Levert and his father, The O’Jays’ singer Eddie Levert, for whom Ingram played the organ as a youth in Akron, Ohio. Ingram’s primary mentor and collaborator was music producer Quincy Jones. Ingram was signed to Jones’ label, Qwest Records, and the two also recorded together, including the single “The Secret Garden” in 1990. The following year, Ingram released his greatest hits album, ‘The Greatest Hits: The Power of Great Music.’

Video Oral History Interview with James Ingram, Section A2007\_272\_001\_007, TRT: 0:20:54 ?

James Ingram collaborated with dancer Debbie Allen to produce plays like ‘The Bayou Legend’ at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Ingram wrote music for the shows, and performed the role of the minister in ‘Brothers of the Knight.’ Allen also co-wrote the song “Mercy” on Ingram’s inspirational record, ‘Stand (In the Light).’ Beyond his career in the music industry, Ingram also worked with actor Harry Belafonte and former gang member Darren “Bo” Taylor to create gang prevention programs, which consisted of workshops that taught life management skills to youth. Ingram reflects upon his artistic influences, including Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye; his legacy; and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by sharing a message to future generations.