

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Luigi Waites

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Waites, Lewis, 1927-2010
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Luigi Waites,
Dates:	October 7, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:20:58).
Abstract:	Music instructor and jazz drummer Luigi Waites (1927 - 2010) was the first jazz instructor in Omaha Public Schools and at Creighton University. Luigi Waites also has enjoyed a long and successful performing career, touring nationally and internationally, as well as playing with jazz legends such as Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Dinah Washington, Jean-Luc Ponty, James Brown, and Dizzy Gillespie. Waites was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 7, 2007, in Omaha, Nebraska. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_284
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Percussionist Luigi Waites was born Lewis Waites, on July 10, 1927, in Omaha, Nebraska. Waites' mother, Ione Lewis, married his stepfather, Grant Wallace, after Wallace's arrival in Omaha in the 1940s. Waites attended Omaha's Lake Elementary, Central High School and graduated from Technical High School. He also attended the Midwestern Conservatory of Music. Waites began performing

music while he was still in high school. At the onset of World War II, more Americans enlisted into the U.S. military, and Waites was limited to playing with musicians his own age. Dropping out of Omaha Technical High School, Waites was drafted in 1945. While in the services, Waites was taught to play drum licks by the great Elvin Jones at Camp Lee, Virginia. It was not until the end of the war that Waites began touring locally with adult musicians.

In 1947, Waites returned to Omaha and continued his career as a local musician. In addition, Waites toured regionally, performing in Iowa, North Dakota, Kansas and other parts of Nebraska. After briefly attending school in California in 1949, Waites enrolled at the Midwestern Conservatory of Music in downtown Chicago; that following year, he married Eva Jean Little. In the 1950s, Waites continued his career in music, but also worked daily at local factories. After working as stock personnel for the Omaha National Bank, Waites began teaching private lessons to aspiring artists. In the 1960s and 1970s, Waites was the organizer of a youth group called the Contemporaries which performed as a marching band for local and regional events.

Waites was the first jazz instructor in the Omaha Public Schools and at Creighton University. Waites also helped found Phyllis Hicks's "Steppin Saints." Waites was named Nebraska Arts Council's Artist of the Year in 1996; he is still playing and teaching, while enjoying his eighties. Waites, who toured internationally and performed in Europe during the 1990s, lived in Omaha, Nebraska and had six grown children.

Waites passed away on April 6, 2010 at the age of 82.

Luigi Waites was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 7, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Luigi Waites was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 7, 2007, in Omaha, Nebraska, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Music instructor and jazz drummer Luigi Waites (1927 - 2010) was the first jazz instructor in Omaha Public Schools and at Creighton University. Luigi Waites also has enjoyed a long and successful performing career, touring nationally and internationally, as well as playing with jazz legends such as Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Dinah Washington, Jean-Luc Ponty, James Brown, and Dizzy Gillespie.

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:

Waites, Lewis, 1927-2010

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Waites, Lewis, 1927-2010--Interviews

African American jazz musicians--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews

African American music teachers--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews

Percussionists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Jazz Drummer

Music Instructor

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers|EducationMakers

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 Luigi Waites, October 7, 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 Luigi Waites, Section
A2007_284_001_001, TRT: 0:29:27 2007/10/07

Luigi Waites was born on July 10, 1927 in Omaha, Nebraska to Ione Lewis Kelley and Sylvester Waites. His father's family originated in Ardmore, Oklahoma. His mother was born in 1900 in Chicago, Illinois, and moved to Omaha with her family shortly before the lynching of Will Brown in 1919. She graduated from Omaha High School, and worked as a seamstress and maid. Waites' mother married many times, but he did not share a close relationship with his stepfathers, nor his father. Waites grew up an only child during the Great Depression, and moved frequently. To earn extra money, he delivered groceries to his neighbors on the north side of Omaha. He also enjoyed listening to music on the family's Victrola. Waites' mother noticed his interest in drums, and bought him a snare drum for his twelfth birthday. Waites also describes the origin of his stage name, and remembers the

meatpacking factories in Omaha.

African American jazz musicians--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews.

African American music teachers--Nebraska--Omaha--Interviews.

Percussionists--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Luigi Waites, Section
A2007_284_001_002, TRT: 0:28:10 2007/10/07

Luigi Waites grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, where he attended the Lake School, Howard Kennedy Elementary School and Lothrop Elementary School. He often listened to the 'Grand Ole Opry' radio show, which inspired his early interest in the drums. He also enjoyed swing bands like Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, and admired the musical styles of jazz musician Count Basie, and drummers Sonny Greer and Louie Bellson, who performed with Duke Ellington. Waites began playing drums in a garage band with musicians Joe Genovesi and Charlie Genovesi. At fourteen years old, he played his first show with band leader Basie Givens at a homecoming dance at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Waites became frustrated with his music lessons at school, where the all-white faculty taught sentimental songs about slavery; and left Omaha Central High School to work as a musician in numerous clubs around the city. He later returned to Technical High School, but stopped attending there as well, and was soon drafted into World War II.

Video Oral History Interview with Luigi Waites, Section
A2007_284_001_003, TRT: 0:29:22 2007/10/07

Luigi Waites served in the U.S. Army from 1946 to 1947; and, under President Harry S. Truman, was assigned to one of the U.S. military's first desegregated units. He was stationed at Camp Stoneman in Pittsburg, California, where he was denied admittance to the Army band because of his inability to read music. Instead, he was assigned to dig ditches and clean barracks. After completing his service, Waites studied for two semesters at the Midwestern Conservatory of Music in Chicago, Illinois, before returning home to care for his sick mother, Ione Lewis Kelley, in Omaha, Nebraska. There, he found

work at a steel mill, and met and married Eva Little Waites. Waites went on to work at the Omaha National Bank, and played in Cliff Dudley's band at the local nightclubs. He also taught at the Swoboda Music Center, and became a spokesman for the Slingerland Drum Company and Simmons Drums. Waites describes his experiences at segregated clubs, and the discrimination endured by black musicians.

Video Oral History Interview with Luigi Waites, Section
A2007_284_001_004, TRT: 0:28:38 2007/10/07

Luigi Waites worked at the Omaha National Bank in Omaha, Nebraska for fifteen years. During this time, he organized The Contemporaries drum corps with the local youth. They often performed the 'Peter Gunn Theme,' Ahmad Jamal's 'Poinciana' and 'Anchors Aweigh.' During the 1970s, Waites began visiting schools across the country, in a total of thirty-eight states, where he taught children to play the drums during hour-long assemblies. When Waites returned to Omaha, he became a music teacher. He was the first person in Omaha to teach jazz music at an assembly in the public schools, and the first to teach a jazz class at Creighton University. In 1996, Waites was voted Artist of the Year by the Nebraska Arts Council. He recalls meeting jazz drummer Elvin Jones while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, and drummer Max Roach while attending the Midwestern Conservatory of Music in Chicago, Illinois. He also talks about meeting Buddy Rich and Bob Mintzer.

Video Oral History Interview with Luigi Waites, Section
A2007_284_001_005, TRT: 0:25:21 2007/10/07

Luigi Waites was awarded the key to the city in his hometown of Omaha, Nebraska in honor of his achievements as a jazz drummer and music instructor. The City of Omaha also named two holidays in Waites' honor. In reflecting upon his hopes for the black community, Waites talks about skin color discrimination amongst African Americans, and race discrimination within in the music industry, especially among promoters. Waites also describes a concert that he dedicated to his mother, Ione Lewis Kelley, who was in attendance. He reflects upon his music, including his affinity for drum instruments; as well

as his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered. Waites concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.