

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Robert DeBlanc

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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>	DeBlanc, Robert, 1954-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Robert DeBlanc,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 1, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:01:06).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Singer Robert DeBlanc (1954 - ) toured with Marvin Gaye and other acts worldwide. DeBlanc was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 1, 2007, in Henderson, Nevada. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_316
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer Robert Michael DeBlanc was born on September 21, 1954, in Los Angeles, California. He was born to a family of both Creole and African American heritage. DeBlanc first became interested in music while participating in an eighth grade chorus group. In 1972, DeBlanc graduated from Dorsey High School in Los Angeles, California. Afterwards, he enrolled at California State University-Los Angeles to pursue a degree in marketing. In the 1970s, DeBlanc was a regular guest at Mavericks Flat, a local music venue, where he was first noticed by music industry elites. He also worked full-time at McDonnell Douglas as an aircraft painter.

DeBlanc got his break in the music industry in 1976, when he auditioned as a background singer for Marvin Gaye. He and four other vocalists were chosen out of a hundred people, and he found himself on tour with one of the most popular artists in the world at that time. He performed with the group for two years, but left for personal reasons. DeBlanc joined other show bands and toured the world for several years. After touring the world, he decided to make Australia his home. In 1991, DeBlanc married his wife, Cheryl Ann, an Australian jazz singer, and they performed as a duo for several years all over Australia. They moved to the United States in the late 1990s and have been living in Las Vegas, Nevada, ever since. DeBlanc teaches and performs in Las Vegas as well as traveling with various established vocal groups. Since 2009, he has been singing with Little Anthony & The Imperials, a vocal group which has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Robert Michael DeBlanc was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 1, 2007.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Robert DeBlanc was conducted by Jacques Lesure on November 1, 2007, in Henderson, Nevada, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Singer Robert DeBlanc (1954 - ) toured with Marvin Gaye and other acts worldwide.

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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:

DeBlanc, Robert, 1954-

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

DeBlanc, Robert, 1954---Interviews

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African American singers--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:

## **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 Robert DeBlanc, November 1, 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).

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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 Robert DeBlanc, Section  
A2007\_316\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:24 2007/11/01

Robert DeBlanc was born on September 21, 1954 in Los Angeles, California to Louise Deville and Albert DeBlanc. His maternal ancestors came from France to Louisiana by way of Montreal, Canada. DeBlanc's mother was born in 1923 in Lake Charles, Louisiana, where she grew up with eight siblings on a farm. After moving to California, she worked at McDonnell Douglas, an aerospace manufacturer in Long Beach. DeBlanc's father, a barber, was born in New Iberia, Louisiana. He and DeBlanc's mother divorced when DeBlanc was young. In Los Angeles, DeBlanc grew up in a tight-knit community, where his maternal grandmother introduced him to Zydeco music. In Los Angeles, DeBlanc attended Virginia Road Elementary School, Alta Loma Elementary School, and then Audubon Junior High School, where he discovered his singing talent. At Susan Miller Dorsey High School, he aspired to play professional baseball, and developed an eclectic taste in music. DeBlanc saw Jimi Hendrix perform at the Los Angeles Forum in 1970.

Children of divorced parents--United States.

African Americans--Color--Social aspects.

African American families--California--Los Angeles.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert DeBlanc, Section  
A2007\_316\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:55 2007/11/01

Robert DeBlanc developed an eclectic taste in music while growing up in Los Angeles, California. Upon graduating from Susan Miller Dorsey High School in 1972, he attended California State University, Los Angeles for two years. Through his mother, he obtained a position with McDonnell Douglas, an aerospace manufacturer. At this time, he frequented Los Angeles' nightclubs, like Maverick's Flat, a creative performance space owned by football player Jim Brown and magazine owner John Daniels. There, DeBlanc witnessed the early performances of Howard Hewett, Chaka Khan and Richard Pryor. While DeBlanc initially hid his own singing talent, his friends and coworkers encouraged him to perform. On a whim,

DeBlanc auditioned for Marvin Gaye, who hired him as a backup singer. In 1976, DeBlanc began touring with Gaye, and performed at Radio City Music Hall in New York City for the first time. During his two years on tour, DeBlanc interacted frequently with celebrities like Muhammad Ali, Cab Calloway and Oscar Brown, Jr.

Nightclubs--California.

African Americans--Music.

Gaye, Marvin.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert DeBlanc, Section  
A2007\_316\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:43 2007/11/01

Robert DeBlanc toured as a backup singer for Marvin Gaye until the late 1970s. At this time, he was managed by John Daniels, who owned the Maverick's Flat nightclub in Los Angeles, California. Daniels organized a touring group called Beverly Hills, featuring DeBlanc, Howard Hewett and Gwen Brisco. With the group, DeBlanc traveled internationally, and performed at venues throughout Asia and Europe. He remembers the group's warm reception in Europe, where, at that time, American performers were highly esteemed. After Hewett left the group to pursue his recording interests in 1979, DeBlanc costarred in the 'Gwen Brisco Show' from 1980 to 1990. For the show, DeBlanc toured with a group of ten musicians. They became close, and had few disagreements. The show traveled twice to South Africa in the early 1980s, during the era of apartheid. DeBlanc remembers experiencing racial discrimination at a restaurant in Johannesburg, even though, as a foreigner, he was legally exempt from segregation.

African American entertainers.

Racism--South Africa.

Concert tours.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert DeBlanc, Section  
A2007\_316\_001\_004, TRT: 0:27:44 2007/11/01

Robert DeBlanc toured internationally with the 'Gwen Brisco Show,' including several trips to South Africa between 1980 and 1990. DeBlanc describes his conversation with a Boer South African man in 1984. In

the early 1990s, DeBlanc performed for eighteen months in 'Harlem Rhythm,' a show produced by choreographer Lester Wilson in Australia. There, DeBlanc met his wife, singer and vocal teacher Billie Cole, and decided not to return to Los Angeles, California. They performed in Australia as a duo, L.A. Style, for seven years. To support his aging mother, DeBlanc and Cole moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, where DeBlanc managed a men's clothing store, and then joined the city's entertainment industry. He signed a contract at the Luxor Las Vegas with his wife and a keyboardist. DeBlanc left the casino circuit in the early 2000s, and toured with Sonny Turner and Herb Reed of the original Platters. DeBlanc also reflects upon his life; his advice to aspiring entertainers; and how he would like to be remembered.

Racism--South Africa.

African American families.

Singing--Vocational guidance.

Music trade--Vocational guidance.

Video Oral History Interview with Robert DeBlanc, Section  
A2007\_316\_001\_005, TRT: 0:07:20 2007/11/01

Robert DeBlanc narrates his photographs.