Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Irma P. Hall

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator: Hall, Irma P.
Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Irma P. Hall,
Dates: March 12, 2008
Bulk Dates: 2008
Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:55:35).
Abstract: Stage actress and film actress Irma P. Hall (1935 - ) has starred in numerous films and television shows as well as founded the African American Repertory Theater in DeSoto, Texas. Hall was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 12, 2008, in Dallas, Texas. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification: A2008_045
Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Stage and film actress Irma P. Hall was born Irma Dolores Player on June 3, 1935, in Beaumont, Texas. In 1942, her family moved to the South Side of Chicago, Illinois where she was raised. Hall was introduced to the entertainment industry at the age of seven when her father, a jazz musician, began to take her with him when performing at clubs and local events. After graduating from high school, Hall went on to attend Briar Cliff College in Sioux City, Iowa where she was selected for her first acting role in a theatrical production of "Amahl and the Night Visitors." Afterwards, she transferred to Texas College in Tyler, Texas and pursued her B.A. degree in foreign language education with a focus in French and Spanish.

Hall taught in the Dallas, Texas school system for twenty years until she was discovered by actor and director Raymond St. Jacques. She was performing at a poetry reading when he offered her a role in one of his films, "Book of Numbers" (1973). In 1972, Hall co-founded the Dallas Minority Repertory Theatre and starred in a production of "Happy Endings." After starring in several more productions, Hall realized her calling as an actress and officially retired from teaching in 1984. When her mother fell ill, Hall took a leave from acting and moved back to Chicago. After her mother's death in 1987, Hall returned to acting, starring in numerous stage productions such as "Member of the Wedding," "Black Girl," and "Steppin' Out." For the Dallas Minority Repertory Theatre, she wrote a play, "Gentle Fire" which was based on her poetry. In 1996, Hall was featured alongside Robert Duvall and James Earl Jones in the film "A Family Thing." Her performance won her Best Supporting Actress Awards from the Chicago Film Critics Association and the Kansas City Film Critics Circle. She went on to star in several films including "Nothing to Lose" (1997), "Soul Food" (1997) and "Beloved" (1998). In 2000, Hall starred in the revival of the Lorraine Hansberry play, "A Raisin in the Sun." Later, in 2004, Hall appeared in the films "The Ladykillers" and "Collateral." She was also cast in the 2008 Tyler Perry film, "Meet the Browns."

Hall has been nominated and has received several awards for her acting including a NAACP Image Award for
Best Supporting Actress for her role in "Soul Food." In 2004, she won the prestigious Prix du Jury from Cannes Film Festival for her performance in the "The Ladykillers" while she was still recovering from a devastating car accident. Since then she has been inducted into the Texas Film Hall of Fame and has opened the African American Repertory Theatre in DeSoto, Texas so she can share her knowledge with and train the new generation of black actors.

Irma P. Hall was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 12, 2008

**Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with Irma P. Hall was conducted by Denise Gines on March 12, 2008, in Dallas, Texas, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Stage actress and film actress Irma P. Hall (1935 - ) has starred in numerous films and television shows as well as founded the African American Repertory Theater in DeSoto, Texas.

**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:**

Hall, Irma P., 1937-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

**Subjects:**
African Americans--Interviews
Hall, Irma P., 1937---Interviews

African American actresses--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers
EntertainmentMaker

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 Irma P. Hall, March 12, 2008. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/9/2011 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, March 12, 2008
Irma Hall slates the interview and discusses her family background. Hall was born in Beaumont, Texas on June 3, 1935, to Josephine and Samuel Player V. Josephine was from Tyler, Texas and Samuel was from Shreveport, Louisiana. Many of Hall's older relatives were former slaves who would tell Hall stories about their enslavement. Josephine was very dedicated to education and believed in a life of charitable and community service. Hall recalls memories of her mother teaching her how to do flips and bringing her Hershey Kisses. Her father, Samuel, worked as a mechanic and a musician. He used the saxophone and music to escape from his life in Louisiana.

Irma Hall discusses her parents and her family. Josephine and Samuel Player V met at Texas College in Tyler, Texas where Samuel performed in the college band. After Josephine became pregnant with Hall, she and Samuel moved to Beaumont, Texas. Hall recalls that when she started elementary school in Texas, they immediately moved her up to the second grade. Her best friend was a little girl named Mary Louise Herman. Her father worked at the Rum Boogie club in Memphis, Tennessee, which was owned by bluesman John Louis Walker. When she was seven, Hall and her family moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1942. Hall remembers how her mother was pushed off a bus for not saying "yes, sir" to the driver.

Irma Hall describes her childhood in Chicago, Illinois where the family moved as World War II began. Her mother and father began taking catechism classes and were baptized as Catholics. Performing songs like “A Tisket a Tasket” and “Five O’Clock Whistle,” Hall would earn $10 on the trains. She recalls that she was terrified of her teacher, Sister Estelle at her Catholic elementary school, Corpus Christi Elementary School. Her parents encouraged her creativity; she took ballet, tap, and studied Afro-Cuban dancing. Her high school, Corpus Christi High School was across the street from a movie theater, and she would go to see the comics, movies, and newreels. The Player family was friends with Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday. Harris speaks about her higher education. She attended Briar Cliff College in Sioux City, Iowa, and then transferred to Texas College in Tyler, Texas to study education.
Irma Hall discusses her high school years in Chicago, Illinois. She met writers like Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks. After that, she began to write every day. As a member of the Bud Billiken Club, Hall sold copies of the "Chicago Defender," a black newspaper. At the age of fifteen, Hall became a member of the NAACP. Hall then describes her first performances in acting. At Briar Cliff College, she performed in a production of "Amahl and the Night Visitors." Hall then transferred to Texas College, a historically black Methodist college in Tyler, Texas. There she studied foreign language education, concentrating on French and Spanish. She met her husband Shed William Hall at Texas College, and they married in 1956. Her daughter was born a year later. Hall recalls that before she began teaching full time in Dallas, Texas, she was a substitute teacher in Greenville, Texas.

Irma Hall discusses teaching in Dallas, Texas in 1963. She commuted to Dallas from Plano, Texas to teach at Booker T. Washington Technical School. President Kennedy's assassination in Dallas upset her and the students. She transferred to Zumwalt Junior High School in Dallas to work as a public relations officer. She encountered a black newspaper "Dallas Express" suffering from grammatical errors. She offered her services as a teacher to help with the mistakes and became the entertainment editor. Hall describes how she met director Raymond St. Jacques for a piece in the "Dallas Express." He attended her poetry reading and cast her in his film, "Book of Numbers." She worked as an actress until 1987 when she left acting to care for her dying mother. After her mother's death, Hall wrote and starred in the play "Gentle Fire." While filming "Uncle Tom's Cabin," she would have long conversations with costar Avery Brooks.

Irma Hall discusses her acting career. After receiving the Chicago Film Critic
Association's Best Supporting Actress Award in 1996, Hall finally realized that she was an actress. For one of her most notable roles as Mama Joe in "Soul Food," she won a NAACP Image Award in 1997. She felt a connection to the role because of the similarities between Mama Joe and her own mother, Josephine. Hall received the Prixe du Jury from the Cannes Film Festival for her performance in "The Ladykillers" with Tom Hanks. Hall states that she could not attend Cannes because she was recuperating from a January 2004 car accident. Her other accolades include induction into the Texas Film Hall of Fame. Hall describes the African American Repertory Theatre in DeSoto, Texas, where she trains black actors which she hopes will be her legacy. Hall believes that everyone has an obligation to nurture the talent God gives them. Hall advises that the African American community remember its strength, even in the face of adversity.

African American actresses.
African American in motion pictures.
Soul food (Motion picture).
Cannes Film Festival.
African American families.
African American theater--Texas.
African Americans--Religion.
Hanks, Tom.
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People--Awards.