

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Armelia McQueen

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McQueen, Armelia
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen,
Dates:	April 3, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:51:31).
Abstract:	Actress Armelia McQueen (1952 - 2020) performed in Broadway musicals like 'Ain't Misbehavin,' 'Jesus Christ Superstar,' and 'Hair.' Her film and television credits included 'Sparkle,' 'Ghost,' and 'Living Single.' McQueen was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 3, 2008, in Los Angeles , California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_072
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Actress Armelia McQueen was born on January 6, 1952 in Southern Pines, North Carolina to James and Kathleen McQueen. McQueen's parents divorced, and her mother married Robert Brown in New York. As a child, McQueen was raised in Brooklyn, New York where she performed in church plays. She attended P.S. 44 and P.S. 258 and graduated from New York City's Central Commercial High School in 1969. Afterwards, McQueen briefly enrolled at the Fashion Industry School, where she majored in fashion design. In 1972, she attended the Herbert Berghoff Drama School.

McQueen's acting career began when she was hired for a role in the production of, *Hot & Cold Heroes*. She was then hired in 1976 for the role of Tune Ann in the cult classic film *Sparkle*. Then, in 1978, she made her Broadway debut in the original production of, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, appearing alongside Irene Cara, Ken Page and Nell Carter. She went on to win a Theatre World Award for Best Debut Performance and appeared in several Broadway productions, including *Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Dance* and *Harrigan and Hart*. She also appeared with the national touring companies of the following shows: *South Pacific*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Hair*. During the 1980s, McQueen made several appearances in various films, made-for-television movies and sitcoms including *Mr. Belvedere*, *Frank's Place*, *Action Jackson* and *No Holds Barred*.

Later in 1990, she was featured as Whoopi Goldberg's on screen sister when she starred in the film *Ghost*. McQueen continued her work throughout the 1990s by appearing in episodes of *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Martin* and *Living Single*. She was nominated for the Best Supporting Actress Cable Ace Award for her role as Red Queen on the Disney Channel series, *Adventures in Wonderland*. Her other credits include *Bulworth*, *All About the Andersons*, *JAG* and *That's So Raven*. McQueen currently lives in Los Angeles, California.

Armelia McQueen was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 3, 2008.

McQueen passed away on October 3, 2020.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Armelia McQueen was conducted by Jacques Lesure on April 3, 2008, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Actress Armelia McQueen (1952 - 2020) performed in Broadway musicals like 'Ain't Misbehavin,' 'Jesus Christ Superstar,' and 'Hair.' Her film and television credits included 'Sparkle,' 'Ghost,' and 'Living Single.'

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:

McQueen, Armelia

Lesure, Jacques (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McQueen, Armelia--Interviews

African American actresses--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actress

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

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, April 3, 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 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).

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 Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_001, TRT: 0:30:11
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Armelia McQueen was born on January 6, 1952 in Southern Pines, North Carolina to Kathleen McCall Brown and James McQueen. Her maternal

grandmother, Mary McCall, was a widow in North Carolina, where McQueen's mother was born. McQueen did not know her birth father, but had a close relationship with her stepfather, Robert Brown, Sr., who was from South Carolina. He and McQueen's mother had two sons, and moved to Brooklyn, New York when McQueen was young. There, her stepfather worked at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, while her mother studied to become a beautician. McQueen grew up in a racially segregated community, although some of the shops in her Brooklyn neighborhood had white or Chinese proprietors. McQueen and her family belonged to the People's Institutional A.M.E. Church in Brooklyn, where she sang in the choir. She attended P.S. 44 Marcus Garvey Elementary School, and then J.H.S. 258 Nathaniel Macon Junior High School; and, at the time of the interview, remained close with her childhood friends.

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

African American fathers.

New York (N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

Child labor--New York (State)--New York

African Americans--Migrations--History.

Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_002, TRT: 0:30:10
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Armelia McQueen attended J.H.S. 258 Nathaniel Macon Junior High School in Brooklyn, New York, where her music teachers encouraged her vocal talent. She went on to study at the Central Commercial High School in Manhattan. During that time, McQueen took voice lessons from Lyndon Hoffman Caldwell, a member of the People's Institutional A.M.E. Church; and participated in the All-City Glee Club. She aspired to a career in show business, but her friends and relatives discouraged her ambitions. Caldwell advised her to enroll at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, where she honed her musical skills. After one year there, she briefly attended New York City's Fashion Institute of Technology, before pursuing a career in acting. McQueen was a student at the Herbert Berghof Studio in New York City, where she studied under actor Earle Hyman, when her mother passed away in 1969. From that time, McQueen helped support her stepfather and two brothers. She had her first professional role in the 'Hot and Cold Heroes' showcase.

New York (N.Y.)--Social life and customs.

African American actresses.

Hyman, Earle, 1926-.

Acting--Study and teaching--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_003, TRT: 0:28:22
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Armelia McQueen joined the touring company of 'The Who's Tommy,' a rock opera developed by The Who guitarist Pete Townshend and artistic director Des McAnuff. Cast as the nurse and understudy for The Acid Queen, McQueen appeared alongside actors Camille Saviola and Ted Neeley. While McQueen was away from home, her stepfather, widower Robert Brown, Sr., and younger brothers received support from their neighbors in Brooklyn, New York. In 1973, McQueen performed in the 'Jesus Christ Superstar' musical, which showcased her extensive vocal range. The following year, she traveled with the integrated company of 'Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical' to Lesotho and apartheid South Africa. McQueen describes the differences between audiences in the United States and Africa, where people were unaccustomed to rock opera productions. She also remembers the attitudes toward weight in the

entertainment industry, where larger actresses were often typecast as older female relatives.

Musical theater.

Body image--Social aspects--United States.

Jesus Christ Superstar (Musical).

Race relations--Tennessee .

Apartheid--South Africa.

African Americans in musical theater.

Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_004, TRT: 0:30:21
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Armelia McQueen appeared in an independent production of 'Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical' in Lesotho and South Africa in the early 1970s. On her return trip to the United States, she discovered her plane tickets were unpaid, but eventually was allowed to board. In 1974, McQueen had her first film role as Tune Ann, the next-door neighbor in 'Sparkle,' a musical drama featuring Irene Cara, Lonette McKee, Mary Alice and Phillip Michael Thomas. McQueen was impressed by Hollywood's entertainment industry; but, when the filming of 'Sparkle' ended, returned to stage acting in New York City. She joined the all-black company of 'Guys and Dolls,' which included Richard Roundtree, Maurice Hines, Jr., Debbie Allen and Leslie Uggams. Then, she successfully auditioned for playwright Murray Horwitz's Broadway production of 'Ain't Misbehavin',' which also starred Nell Carter, Andre De Shields, Ken Page and Charlayne Woodard. The televised version of the show garnered a Primetime Emmy Award.

Apartheid--South Africa.

Sparkle (Motion picture).

Ain't misbehavin'.

Jazz--Analysis, appreciation.

Musical theater entertainers.

Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_005, TRT: 0:29:14
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Armelia McQueen starred alongside Andre De Shields, Ken Page, Nell Carter and Charlayne Woodard in the Broadway musical 'Ain't Misbehavin',' which was directed by Richard Maltby, Jr. Based on the life of jazz pianist Fats Waller, the production featured a variety of characters developed by the cast members themselves. McQueen performed songs like "Squeeze Me" and "When the Nylons Bloom Again," the latter of which employed her training as an opera singer. In 1978, the original company disbanded, and De Shields and Woodard brought the production to London, England, while Alan Weeks and Debbie Allen took over their roles in the United States. The original cast reunited to film the 'Ain't Misbehavin'" NBC special, which won a Primetime Emmy Award. McQueen also toured with De Shields and Page in Paris, France, where the production was well received. In 1986, McQueen relocated with her stepfather, Robert Brown, Sr., to Los Angeles, California. She also describes her hopes for the black theater community.

Ain't misbehavin'.

Maltby, Richard, 1937-.

Waller, Fats, 1904-1943.

Method acting--History.

Emmy Awards--Nominees.

Page, Ken.

DeSheilds, Andre, 1946-.

African Americans in musical theater.

Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_006, TRT: 0:23:13
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Armelia McQueen acted in the Broadway production of 'Ain't Misbehavin',' and also starred in the musical's televised version. Directed by Don Mischer for NBC, the television program featured the musical's original cast and most of its original numbers, which the actors had developed themselves. The televised adaptation of 'Ain't Misbehavin" won the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Variety Series in 1982. At this point in the interview, McQueen talks about the changes in the entertainment industry during her career, as well as the differences between show business in New York City and Los Angeles, California. She describes her advice to aspiring entertainers, and her hopes for the black arts community. McQueen reflects upon her legacy, and concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.

Ain't misbehavin'.

Television producers and directors.

Television programs--Casting.

African American actors--Vocational guidance.

Musical theater--Television adaptations.

African Americans in the motion picture industry.

Waller, Fats, 1904-1943.