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: Armelia McQueen

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen,

Dates: April 3, 2008

Bulk Dates: 2008

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:51:31).

Abstract: Actress Armelia McQueen (1952 - ) has performed on Broadway in such musicals as "Ain't Misbehavin,'" "Jesus Christ Superstar," and "Hair." Her film and television credits include "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.

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 Betacam SP videocassettes. Actress Armelia McQueen (1952 - ) has performed on Broadway in such musicals as "Ain't Misbehavin," "Jesus Christ Superstar," and "Hair." Her film and television credits include "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
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Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

EntertainmentMakers

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 8/11/2011 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, April 3, 2008

Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_001, TRT: 0:30:11 2008/04/03

Armelia McQueen begins the interview by discussing her family history. McQueen describes her mother, Kathleen McQueen, as being jovial. McQueen did not know her biological father but considers her stepfather, Robert Brown,
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to be her true father. Her mother died when McQueen was seventeen, causing her stepfather to become the caretaker of the children. She shares a story about Brown's tumultuous childhood. Due to her mother’s death, McQueen and her siblings were forced to work in order to provide for the family. McQueen recalls her family eating dinners together, a theme she believes was common in the African American community at this time. In search of job opportunities, McQueen and her family moved to Brooklyn, New York from North Carolina.

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_001, TRT: 0:30:10 2008/04/03

Armelia McQueen details her teenage years in Brooklyn, New York. She then recalls her ambition to become an actress from an early age. Her family was not supportive of her decision to become an actress. She was an average student at Central Commercial High School in New York City. She describes meeting people and performing as a singer in Manhattan. After graduating from high school, McQueen briefly studied at the Brooklyn Conservatory as a classical singer. When she left the conservatory in 1965, she studied fashion at Fashion Industry School in New York City. After the fashion institute, she studied dramatics at Herbert Berghof, Studio in New York. While at Herbert Berghof, she studied with Earle Hyman. McQueen details her early acting career in New York City during the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

New York (N.Y.)--Social life and customs.
African American actresses.
Hyman, Earle, 1926-
Acting--Study and teaching--New York (N.Y.).

Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_002, TRT: 0:28:22 2008/04/03

Armelia McQueen discusses the beginning of her musical theater career in rock operas. She left her family in Brooklyn, New York to go on the road with various musical productions. She remembers touring being tedious but worthy financially. McQueen's first performance was in the rock opera, “Tommy.” McQueen was overweight during this period of her career and remembers the pressure she felt in the United States to lose weight; she did not experience this in Europe or Africa. She was then cast in “Jesus Christ, Superstar.” This performance was followed by a role in “Hair.” While performing in South Africa, she observed the apartheid atmosphere and a Jewish cast member was harassed by the government. “Jesus Christ, Superstar,” was not performed in Tennessee due to the mixed race cast.

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_003, TRT: 0:28:22 2008/04/03

Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_004, TRT:
Armelia McQueen discusses performing in a South African production of “Hair.” Due to the apartheid restrictions, the African American cast members were not allowed to travel. This was the first time South African audiences had seen African Americans and Caucasians perform together in the nude. Once McQueen concluded her role in “Hair,” she received her first film role in as Ann in “Sparkle.” McQueen traveled to Paris, France to perform in the Fats Waller musical, “Ain’t Misbehavin’.” She remembers the Parisian audience being receptive to the cultural aspects of the play due to their knowledge of jazz music. McQueen believes that African Americans were more interested in the plot of “Dreamgirls,” than that of “Ain’t Misbehavin’.”

Apartheid--South Africa.
Sparkle (Motion picture).
Ain't Misbehavin'
Jazz--Analysis,appreciation--France--Paris.
Musical theater entertainers.

Video Oral History Interview with Armelia McQueen, Section A2008_072_001_005, TRT: 0:29:14 2008/04/03

Armelia McQueen discusses the musical “Ain’t Misbehavin,” directed by Richard Maltby. “Ain’t Misbehavin’” is about Fats Waller's life. All of the characters in the musical were created by the actors, who utilized Fats Waller's music as an influence. McQueen sings “Oh Daddy Squeeze Me” and she then describes working with Ken Page, the lead character who played Fats Waller. She describes the difference in performing on Broadway versus touring.

McQueen discusses Andre DeSheilds’ acting method. To create the characters of “Ain’t Misbehavin,” McQueen referenced the characteristics of people in her life. In 1980, she was cast in the television adaptation of, “Ain’t Misbehavin’.” This television adaptation went on to win an Emmy. McQueen moved to Los Angeles, California from New York City for work.

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 2008/04/03

Armelia McQueen continues to describe her role in the NBC adaptation, of “Ain’t Misbehavin’.” She recalls the original cast members of the musical wanted to keep the same cast for the NBC special, but certain cast members of the musical were replaced due to a change in production. She goes into great detail about the cast changes and how this can affect the production as a whole. McQueen contemplates her growth as an actor and how growing older in show business is perceived. She believes that African American actors should be involved in every avenue of the motion picture industry. Through involvement, African Americans will be able to learn the industry. African American history is very important to McQueen, and she notes the importance of learning this history. McQueen shares advice to aspiring actors and actresses breaking into
the motion picture industry.
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