

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dick Griffin

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Griffin, Dick (Trombonist)
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dick Griffin,
Dates:	February 19, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:17:50).
Abstract:	Trombonist, composer, and painter Dick Griffin (1940 -) has played with the Sun Ra Arkestra and Rahsaan Roland Kirk, in addition to leading his own bands. Griffin released his first album as a leader, <i>The Eighth Wonder</i> , in 1974. This was followed by <i>Now is the Time</i> in 1979, <i>A Dream For Rahsaan</i> in 1985, <i>All Blues</i> in 2003, and <i>Time Will Tell</i> in 2011. He is also an accomplished painter. Griffin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 19, 2014, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_058
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Composer, trombonist and artist Dick Griffin was born in Fannin, Mississippi on January 28, 1940. He began playing the trombone in the seventh grade and sang in a doo-wop group as a teenager. His first professional break came while he was still in high school, when his group, the Sputniks, was selected to open for Sam Cooke. He graduated from Jackson State University in 1963 and later earned his M.S. degree in music education and trombone from Indiana University.

In the mid-1960s, Griffin performed with the Sun Ra Arkestra and began a longtime collaboration with saxophonist Rahsaan Roland Kirk. His first album with Kirk was *The Inflated Tear*, which came out in 1968. Griffin has also worked with many other musicians, including Charles Mingus, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Marvin Gaye and Michael Jackson. Griffin released his first album as a leader, *The Eighth Wonder*, in 1974. This was followed by *Now is the Time* in 1979, *A Dream For Rahsaan* in 1985, *All Blues* in 2003, and *Time Will Tell* in 2011. He has played at such prestigious events as the 1980 Olympics, and with symphony orchestras such as the Harlem Philharmonic and the Symphony of the New World. He has also performed in several Broadway shows, including *The Wiz*, *Me & Bessie*, *Raisin*, and *Lena* (starring Lena Horne). He has made television appearances in the United States on shows such as "The Today Show", "Soul", "Faces", "The Ed Sullivan Show", and "Like It Is". In the 1980s, Griffin composed *World Vibration Suite*, which was premiered by the Brooklyn Philharmonic.

In addition to playing music, Griffin has also served as a professor of music. He has taught at Wesleyan University and the State University of New York at Old Westbury. Griffin is also an accomplished painter. He has had group and solo exhibitions in cities all over the world, including Vienna, Tokyo, and Nairobi.

Griffin lives in New York City.

Dick Griffin was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 19, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dick Griffin was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on February 19, 2014, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Trombonist, composer, and painter Dick Griffin (1940 -) has played with the Sun Ra Arkestra and Rahsaan Roland Kirk, in addition to leading his own bands. Griffin released his first album as a leader, *The Eighth Wonder*, in 1974. This was followed by *Now is the Time* in 1979, *A Dream For Rahsaan* in 1985, *All Blues* in 2003, and *Time Will Tell* in 2011. He is also an accomplished painter.

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:

Griffin, Dick (Trombonist)

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Griffin, Dick (Trombonist)--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Trombonist

Composer

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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 Dick Griffin, February 19, 2014. 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 Dick Griffin, Section A2014_058_001_001, TRT: 1:36:46 ?

Dick Griffin was born James Richard Griffin on January 28, 1940 in Fannin, Mississippi to Ruby Mae Griffith O'Banner and Lieutenant Johnson. His maternal family history extends to his great grandmother Molly who was of Native American ancestry and was born into slavery. His maternal grandparents were Bob and Minnie Griffin. Born out of wedlock, Griffin was raised by his mother in Jackson, Mississippi's Under-The-Hill neighborhood. He had a limited relationship with his father. Griffin's last name differs from his mother's maiden name due to a typographical error on his birth certificate. He describes his mother as a domestic worker who maintained a well-kept home. When Griffin was a year old, she married Griffin's stepfather, Otha O'Banner. As a young boy, Griffin was responsible for various household chores and taking care of his younger sisters. He describes his childhood dog, Kilroy. In junior high, Griffin began working on a beer truck, selling Pabst Blue Ribbon in black neighborhoods.

Video Oral History Interview with Dick Griffin, Section A2014_058_001_002, TRT: 3:03:41 ?

Dick Griffin talks about his half siblings. When Griffin was seven years old, his stepfather was killed in a car accident. He recalls his embarrassment at receiving free lunch as a schoolboy. Griffin attended Fairview Baptist Church. He also rolled the dice with friends. He recalls listening to a neighbor play guitar and taking piano lessons. He began playing trombone in junior high school. Griffin's singing group at Lanier High School in Jackson, Mississippi was chosen to open for Sam Cooke in 1957. Griffin saw many acts at the Mississippi State Fair. He remembers working for a black café and grocery store owner. Griffin describes his mother's value for education and her decision to move the family out of Jackson's Under-The-Hill neighborhood. In high school, he played piano in a band and developed his ear for music. Griffin talks about his musical childhood friend, Freddie Waits, and recalls his encounters with racial discrimination as a teenager. Griffin went to Utica Junior College in Utica, Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Dick Griffin, Section A2014_058_001_003, TRT: 3:28:18 ?

Dick Griffin describes the Civil Rights Movement in Jackson, Mississippi. He was a classmate of James Meredith, and his cousin, Miller Green, was a Freedom Rider. Griffin himself worked on voter registration. He remembers the assassination of Medgar Evers in 1968. Griffin became serious about the trombone after meeting Sun Ra in 1960 at the Pershing Ballroom in Chicago, Illinois. He would later play with Sun Ra's band at Slug's Saloon in New York City, New York. Griffin talks about Sun Ra's background as well as his own musical development under the bandleader. While working for Sun Ra, Griffin also played at the Village Vanguard with Rahsaan Roland Kirk. Other musicians Griffin saw in New York included Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, and Charles Mingus, whom he met at the Five Spot. Griffin also talks about learning to arrange music at Utica Junior College in Utica, Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Dick Griffin, Section A2014_058_001_004, TRT: 4:32:25 ?

Dick Griffin played with Charles Mingus for about two years from 1970 to 1971. Nearly fired by Mingus, Griffin impressed the bassist with his ability to follow key changes. Griffin talks about his friendship with Mingus, built over many late night phone calls. Throughout their long friendship, Griffin observed Mingus' musical genius, his value for respect, his family background, and his temper. Griffin describes lying to Mingus on one occasion to take a higher-paying weekend gig with the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Big Band. Griffin also worked for the house band at the Apollo Theater in New York City, New York. Prioritizing his paying job at the Apollo cost Griffin his position in the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Big Band. Griffin moved to New York City in August of 1967,

a month after the death of John Coltrane for whom he hoped to play. Griffin talks about his initial interest in multiphonics while playing with Sun Ra and the development of his technique. Griffin's had a son, Jakubu Griffin, with his wife in 1970.

Video Oral History Interview with Dick Griffin, Section A2014_058_001_005, TRT: 5:31:30 ?

Dick Griffin describes his musical development under Rahsaan Roland Kirk. Griffin was featured on nine of Rahsaan's albums. He describes Rahsaan's background, musicianship, and personality. While in the house band at the Apollo Theater, Griffin saw acts like The Temptations, The O'Jays, and Gladys Knight and the Pips. He compares the management styles of Sun Ra, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, and Charles Mingus. Griffin's first album, 'The Eighth Wonder,' was released in 1974 with Strata-East Records, an independent record label. Griffin describes the leadership at Strata-East, and the company's difficulty fulfilling large orders. In 1980, Griffin received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to compose 'World Vibration Suite.' He describes the difference between jazz and classical trombone. He also talks about playing with the Symphony of the New World. In the 1980s, Griffin was commissioned by Max Roach to write two string quartets which quartets premiered at the 2011 Vision Festival.

Video Oral History Interview with Dick Griffin, Section A2014_058_001_006, TRT: 6:30:02 ?

Dick Griffin displayed talent in art and music as a youth. The death of his childhood friend, drummer Freddie Waits in 1989, inspired Griffin to take his art seriously and he started to paint again. Griffin talks about his early art career and his first exhibition at the Ottawa Jazz Museum in 1990. He also talks about his teaching career which included positions at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, and at SUNY Old Westbury in Old Westbury, New York. Griffin describes how a masterclass with HistoryMaker Ed Clark transformed his artwork and his career. He also talks about a yearlong hiatus from painting and his training as an artist. During his music career, Griffin played for Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Count Basie, Frank Foster, Lena Horne, and more. He talks about his relationship Thelonious Monk as well as the incredible musicians he has seen perform including Coleman Hawkins, Miles Davis, and the Modern Jazz Quartet. He describes his friend and mentor, Donald Byrd.

Video Oral History Interview with Dick Griffin, Section A2014_058_001_007, TRT: 7:25:32 ?

Dick Griffin talks about his work as a visual artist. He prefers to keep music and art distinct in order to fully appreciate each. Griffin reflects upon life's opportunities and upon demographic shifts in jazz from black to white. He also talks about the manifestation of black creativity and innovation as seen in gospel music, the blues, jazz, and hip-hop. Griffin laments the restricted creative freedom of jazz musicians whose careers have led them into academia. He concludes by talking about his legacy, how he would like to be remembered and his values.

Video Oral History Interview with Dick Griffin, Section A2014_058_001_008, TRT: 8:09:36 ?

Dick Griffin plays the trombone and narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Dick Griffin, Section A2014_058_Griffin_Dick_06_MED_001, TRT: 0:59:02