Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with A. Grace Lee Mims

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator: Mims, A. Grace Lee
Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with A. Grace Lee Mims,
Dates: February 14, 2014
Bulk Dates: 2014
Physical Description: 5 Uncompressed MOV video files (2:30:09).
Abstract: Radio host and vocalist A. Grace Lee Mims (1930 - ) has hosted “The Black Arts” and “Artslog” on Cleveland’s WCLV-FM radio for over thirty years. She is an accomplished vocalist and has been a voice teacher at the Cleveland Music School Settlement since 1980. Mims was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 14, 2014, in East Cleveland, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification: A2014_071
Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Radio host and vocalist A. Grace Lee Mims was born on July 17, 1930 in Snow Hill, Alabama to musicians Arnold W. and Alberta Grace Edwards Lee. Mims graduated valedictorian from Snow Hill Institute, which was founded by her grandfather. She went on to attend and graduate from Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia, and later received her MLS degree from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio.

Upon graduation, Mims married Howard A. Mims. She was also hired as a librarian in Detroit, Michigan before moving to Cleveland, where she worked at several branches of the Cleveland Public Library. Mims was employed as head librarian at Glenville High School for ten years, where she coordinated the Black Arts Festival, established the most extensive collection of books on African American history and culture in the State of Ohio, and helped found the first Afrocentric lecture course in the Cleveland Public Schools. In 1976, she created and became hostess and producer of “The Black Arts” on WCLV-FM, Cleveland’s classical music radio station. From 1980 to 2010, Mims produced and hosted WCLV’s “Artslog,” a daily five-minute show of interviews. Also in 1980, she was hired as a voice teacher at the Cleveland Music School Settlement.

Mims has served as soprano soloist at Fairmount Presbyterian Church and with the William Appling singers, as well as throughout the Cleveland area. She was a member of The Cleveland Orchestra Chorus and Chamber Chorus under Robert Shaw, and performed with The New York Bass Violin Choir. In addition, Mims has recorded two albums: “Spirituals,” a solo record, and “A Spirit
Speaks” with her family’s jazz-folk ensemble, The Descendants of Mike and Phoebe.

Mims has received numerous honors, including an honorary doctorate of music from Cleveland State University in 1999. In 2007, she was the honoree of the Greater Cleveland Chapter of The National Coalition of the 100 Black Women, Inc., and a recipient the Cleveland Arts Prize Martha Joseph Award in 2011. Mims has also served on many arts-related boards, including the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Cleveland Orchestra’s Community Project, the Cleveland Arts Prize Committee, the Western Reserve Historical Society's Black History Archives and The Rainey Institute. Mims and her husband ran the Cleveland Hampton Institute Alumni Scholarship program for over thirty years.

A. Grace Lee Mims was interviewed by "The HistoryMakers" on February 14, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with A. Grace Lee Mims was conducted by Larry Crowe on February 14, 2014, in East Cleveland, Ohio, and was recorded on 5 Uncompressed MOV video files. Radio host and vocalist A. Grace Lee Mims (1930 - ) has hosted “The Black Arts” and “Artslog” on Cleveland’s WCLV-FM radio for over thirty years. She is an accomplished vocalist and has been a voice teacher at the Cleveland Music School Settlement since 1980.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

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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.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:
Mims, A. Grace Lee

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews.

Mims, A. Grace Lee --Interviews.

African American librarians--Interviews.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

Women radio producers and directors--Ohio--Cleveland--Interviews.

African American musicians--Interviews.

**Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

**HistoryMakers® Category:**

MediaMakers

**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**

A. Grace Mims describes her family background. Her maternal grandfather, William James Edwards, attended Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. His experiences at the school inspired him to found Snow Hill Industrial and Normal Institute in Snow Hill, Alabama in 1893. Mims’ mother, Alberta Edwards Lee, was born in Snow Hill in 1902. A piano prodigy, she attended the New England Conservatory of Music, Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama. Mims’ father, Arnold Lee, was born during the late 19th century in Selma, Alabama. He attended Tuskegee Institute, where he studied electrical engineering. Lee met Mims’ mother in Snow Hill, Alabama, after which the two eloped in Nashville, Tennessee. Mims also describes how her parents’ love of music influenced her childhood.

Edwards, William James, 1869-1950.
Tuskegee Institute.
African American parents.
New England Conservatory of Music.
Fisk University.
Alabama State University.
Childhood and youth--Music.
Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute (Ala.).

A. Grace Lee Mims describes her parents’ careers. Her mother, Alberta Edwards Lee, studied music at the New England Conservatory of Music, Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama. She went on to work as a choir instructor at Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute in Snow Hill,
Alabama. Arnold Lee studied electrical engineering at Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, and traveled to find work through much of Mims’ childhood. He served as the band director of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University’s band prior to Mims’ birth. Mims also describes her parents’ personalities and her siblings in detail, including the musical band they formed while they were children. Mims describes her childhood school, Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute, as well as how her teachers and parents influenced her college and career decisions. Mims describes how her home town church influenced her love of music, and shares her knowledge of gospel music, negro spirituals, and African Americans who shaped American music.

African American parents--Education.
Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute (Ala.).
Music teachers.
Vocational guidance--Alabama--Snow Hill.
African American families--Alabama--Snow Hill.
African American churches--Alabama--Snow Hill.

Video Oral History Interview with A. Grace Lee Mims, Section A2014_071_001_003, TRT: 3:29:00 2014/02/14

A. Grace Lee Mims describes memories of her grandfather, William James Edwards. Edwards’ experiences at Tuskegee Institute inspired him to found Snow Hill Industrial and Normal Institute in 1893. Mims describes the school’s influence on her home town of Snow Hill, Alabama. Mims describes her experiences in high school and at Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. Mims talks about meeting her husband, Howard Mims, as well as his being drafted to serve in the Korean War. Mims then describes the early careers of her and her husband, including her experiences at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Music School Settlement, and as Head Librarian at Glenville High School. Mims describes her civic involvement in Cleveland and reflects upon her husband’s legacy.

African American grandfathers.
Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute (Ala.).
Tuskegee Institute.
Edwards, William James, 1869-1950.
Hampton Institute.
United States--Armed Forces--African Americans.
Case Western Reserve University.
Cleveland Music School Settlement.

Video Oral History Interview with A. Grace Lee Mims, Section A2014_071_001_004, TRT: 4:29:04 2014/02/14

A. Grace Lee Mims describes her experiences performing as a vocalist with the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus, a professionally trained, all-volunteer chorus. Mims also talks about her role as a vocalist for The Descendants of Mike and Phoebe, her family’s band. The group
toured from 1973-1983, and released an album in 1974. Mims also
talks about “The Black Arts,” a radio show she began producing and
for Cleveland’s WCLV-FM classical music station in 1976. Mims
briefly describes memories of her nephews, filmmakers Spike Lee and
Malcom D. Lee. She then describes her experiences performing as a
soprano for both the Fairmount Presbyterian Church and the William
Appling Singers. Mims then reflects upon the state of Cleveland’s arts
community, contemporary musical culture, and her philosophies on
teaching and music.
Cleveland Orchestra. Chorus.
African American singers.
WCLV (Radio station : Cleveland, Ohio)--Radio programs.
Lee, Spike.
Lee, Malcolm D., 1970-
William Appling Singers & Orchestra.
Art and community--Ohio--Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with A. Grace Lee Mims, Section A2014_071_001_005,
TRT: 5:36:48 2014/02/14

A. Grace Lee Mims reflects upon her career, legacy, and hopes and
concerns for the African American community. Mims considers her
influence on the future of classically-trained musical artists with the
A. Grace Lee Mims Vocal Scholarship. This $10,000 annual
scholarship began in 2010 with the Cleveland Foundation, for
graduate students in Ohio working towards degrees in music
performance or music education in order to preserve Negro Spiritual
singing. Mims talks about the life and legacy of her late husband
Howard A. Mims, and the influence of the cultural center at Cleveland
State University that was named in his honor.

Cleveland Foundation--Learning and Scholarship.

Cleveland State University.
Spirituals (Songs)--Study and teaching.