

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Herbie Hancock

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Hancock, Herbie, 1940-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Herbie Hancock,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 13, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:18:03).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Pianist and music composer Herbie Hancock (1940 - ) was a fourteen time Grammy Award-winning artist. He played with numerous jazz ensembles and released over forty albums. Hancock was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 13, 2014, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_260
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Pianist and composer Herbert Jeffrey "Herbie" Hancock was born on April 12, 1940 in Chicago, Illinois to Winnie Belle and Wayman Edward Hancock. Hancock began to study music at age seven, and performed a Mozart piano concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra by age eleven. He played jazz in high school and double-majored in music and electrical engineering at Grinnell College.

In 1960, Hancock was discovered by trumpeter Donald Byrd. After two years of session work with Byrd, as well as Phil Woods and Oliver Nelson, he signed with Blue Note Records as a solo artist. Hancock's 1963 debut album, *Takin' Off*, was an immediate success, and produced the hit "Watermelon Man." Subsequent albums on Blue Note included *Maiden Voyage*, *Empyrean Isles*, and *Speak Like a Child*, among others. In 1963, trumpeter Miles Davis invited Hancock to join the Miles Davis Quintet alongside Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams, where he stayed for five years. Hancock also composed the score to Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow Up*, which led to a successful career in feature film and television music.

After leaving the Davis Quintet, Hancock established his own sextet and recorded several albums, including 1971's *Mwandishi*. He then formed a new band called The Headhunters and, in 1973, recorded *Head Hunters* for Columbia Records, which became the first jazz album to go platinum. Hancock produced eleven albums that were included in the pop charts during the 1970s. He also recorded and performed with the group V.S.O.P. in the late 1970s, toured with trumpeter Wynton Marsalis in 1980, and then collaborated with producer Bill Laswell in the mid-1980s. Hancock later moved to the Verve record label and formed a band to record 1996's *The New Standard*. He then released *I+I* with Wayne Shorter in 1997. Hancock reunited with The Headhunters in 1998 and, that same year, collaborated with a number of artists on his multiple Grammy Award-winning album *Gershwin's World*. His albums in the 2000s included *Future2Future*, *Directions In Music: Live at Massey Hall*, *Possibilities*, *The Imagine Project*, and *River: The Joni Letters*, which won him the Grammy Award for Album of the Year in 2008. Hancock has been named by the Los Angeles Philharmonic as Creative Chair For Jazz. He also serves as Institute Chairman

of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, and as the 2014 Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University. In addition, he is a founder of The International Committee of Artists for Peace, and was designated an honorary UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador in 2011.

In all, Hancock has released over forty albums and received fourteen Grammy Awards. He also received an Oscar Award for composing the score to 1986's *Round Midnight*. His other honors include a Soul Train Music Award, a U.S. Radio Award, and multiple BMI Film Music Awards and MTV Video Awards. He was also awarded the "Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres" by French Prime Minister Francois Fillon.

Herbie Hancock was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 13, 2014.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Herbie Hancock was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on November 13, 2014, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Pianist and music composer Herbie Hancock (1940 - ) was a fourteen time Grammy Award-winning artist. He played with numerous jazz ensembles and released over forty albums.

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## 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®.

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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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Hancock, Herbie, 1940-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Hancock, Herbie, 1940---Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Pianist

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Music Composer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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## 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 Herbie Hancock, November 13, 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).

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## 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 Herbie Hancock, Section A2014\_260\_001\_001, TRT: 1:34:42 ?

Herbie Hancock was born on April 12, 1940 in Chicago, Illinois to Winnie Griffin Hancock and Wayman E. Hancock, Sr. His father was raised by his mother and stepfather, Louis Hancock, in Albany, Georgia, while Hancock's mother was born in Americus, Georgia. They met and married in Chicago, where Hancock's father worked in the stockyards and owned a grocery store. Later, he worked as a government meat inspector. Hancock began his education at Forrestville Elementary School, and admired musicians like Muddy Waters, Memphis Slim, Lightnin' Hopkins and Hank Ballard and The Midnighters. He had an older half-sister, Earline Hancock Greenfield; an older brother, Wayman E. Hancock, Jr.; and a younger sister, Jean Hancock, who became a songwriter and computer systems consultant at IBM. At this point, Hancock talks about the watermelon and vegetable vendors in his neighborhood, who inspired him to compose the jazz standard 'Watermelon Man.' He also talks about his mother's undiagnosed bipolar disorder.

Video Oral History Interview with Herbie Hancock, Section A2014\_260\_001\_002, TRT: 2:34:12 ?

Herbie Hancock grew up in Chicago, Illinois. He developed an interest in the piano at the home of his childhood friend, Levester Corley. On his seventh birthday, he received a piano from his parents, Winnie Griffin Hancock and Wayman E. Hancock, Sr. Hancock learned to read music from B. Maye Whalum, who was the music director at the Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church. He went on to take piano lessons with Bertha Jordan, who entered him in the Young People's Concerts contest when he was eleven years old. Hancock won first place, and was invited to play with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Chicago's Orchestra Hall, where he was required to learn a new piece at the last minute. At twelve years old, Hancock enrolled at the integrated Hyde Park High School. During this time, he attended a performance by Miles Davis and John Coltrane at Chicago's Regal Theater, and began studying the jazz music of pianist George Shearing. Hancock also talks about his early attempts to play sports.

Video Oral History Interview with Herbie Hancock, Section A2014\_260\_001\_003, TRT: 3:32:17 ?

Herbie Hancock attended Hyde Park High School in Chicago, Illinois, where he was inspired by classmate Don Goldberg's jazz trio. At the time, Hancock was studying George Shearing's music, and had begun improvising his own jazz compositions. He also attended events organized by the local Jack and Jill chapter, although he was not permitted to become a member. Hancock graduated from high school at sixteen years old, and then joined his friends, educator Donald M. Stewart and businessman James Lowry, at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa. To afford his tuition, Hancock's mother, Winnie Griffin Hancock, sold the family's land in Michigan. Hancock initially majored in engineering, but soon transferred to the music department, where he was mentored by Professor Norman Goodbrod. Upon graduating, Hancock returned to Chicago to work at the post office. After a two week engagement with Coleman Hawkins at the Maryland Hotel, he decided to pursue music full time.

Video Oral History Interview with Herbie Hancock, Section A2014\_260\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:46 ?

Herbie Hancock attended Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa, where he organized a jazz concert that featured trumpet players Bob Preston and John

Scott. Upon graduating, Hancock played piano at venues in Chicago, Illinois. In 1960, he was introduced to trumpeter Donald Byrd and saxophonist Pepper Adams, who invited him to perform with them at Curro's in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Impressed by his skills, Byrd invited Hancock to join the band in New York City. Upon arrival, he initially stayed at the Alvin Hotel, and then moved into an apartment on the West Side with bass player Laymon Jackson. During this time, Hancock developed a camaraderie with the jazz musicians in the area, including composer Teddy Charles. Eventually, Hancock moved to the Bronx, New York with Byrd, who counseled him about his contract with Blue Note Records. Byrd advised Hancock to retain the publishing rights to his compositions, including his first single, 'Watermelon Man.'

Video Oral History Interview with Herbie Hancock, Section A2014\_260\_001\_005, TRT: 5:37:25 ?

Herbie Hancock played with Donald Byrd's band at venues like the Five Spot Café and the Blue Coronet Club in New York City. During this time, Byrd introduced Hancock to musicians like Horace Silver, Bill Evans and Paul Chambers. In 1962, Hancock's first album, 'Takin' Off,' became an immediate commercial success. He was invited to perform with Mongo Santamaria, who recorded a Latin version of Hancock's hit song, 'Watermelon Man,' which became popular as well. Hancock earned thousands of dollars from the song's publishing royalties, and decided to buy a sports car at the suggestion of Donald Byrd. He was initially discriminated against by the car salesman, but nevertheless purchased an AC Cobra. At this point, Hancock talks about his admiration for pianists Chris Anderson and Billy Wallace, who helped him to develop his sound. In 1963, Hancock met drummer Tony Williams while touring with Eric Dolphy in Boston, Massachusetts. Together, they joined Miles Davis' Second Great Quintet in 1964.

Video Oral History Interview with Herbie Hancock, Section A2014\_260\_001\_006, TRT: 6:28:41 ?

Herbie Hancock played with Miles Davis' Second Great Quintet alongside drummer Tony Williams, bassist Ron Carter and saxophonists George Coleman and Wayne Shorter. Davis challenged the group to experiment with their sound to distinguish themselves from his First Great Quintet. Initially, the band struggled to fuse together their musical backgrounds, but over time they developed an improvisational style that highlighted the talents of each band member. During this period, Hancock improved as a performer under the guidance of Davis, who instructed him to play piano solos using only his right hand, which forced him to improvise and produce a different sound. The group went on to record the albums 'Live at the Plugged Nickel 1965,' 'Miles Smiles' and 'E.S.P.', which laid the foundation for post-bop jazz.