

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Skip Cunningham

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cunningham, Skip
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham,
Dates:	February 7, 2019
Bulk Dates:	2019
Physical Description:	10 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:16:46).
Abstract:	Entertainer Skip Cunningham (1936 -) toured with the Billy Williams Revue and made numerous appearances on The Merv Griffin Show and The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson, and was featured in Eubie! on Broadway and in Evolution of the Blues. Cunningham was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 7, 2019, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2019_013
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Entertainer Skip Cunningham was born on April 24, 1936 to Geneva Davis and William Henry Cunningham in Chicago, Illinois. He graduated from Morgan Park High School and attended the University of Illinois at Navy Pier, before transferring to Woodrow Wilson Junior College where he received his A.A. degree in 1956.

In 1941, at the age of five, Cunningham started tap lessons at the Sadie Bruce Dance School in the Bronzeville area of Chicago. Starting at the age of eight, he performed throughout the city and won several dance competitions. He visited California in 1956, where he won a talent contest that earned him a week-long engagement performing at the Moulin Rouge on the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles. In 1957, while still in Los Angeles, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and completed basic training at Fort Lewis in Tacoma, Washington. He was stationed at Fort Gordon in Georgia and Fort Banks in Winthrop, Massachusetts, where he found a talent agent and joined the American Guild of Variety Artists. In 1959, Cunningham completed his military service. He returned to Chicago, where he secured a role performing in the Billy Williams Revue. Over the next two years, the group toured Canada, New York, New Orleans and Las Vegas, where they established a six-month residency, before returning to New York City in 1961. Cunningham left the group and secured General Artist Corporation as his agent. During this period, he made appearances on television shows like *On Broadway Tonight*, *The Merv Griffin Show*, and *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*. As an entertainer, he performed with Tony Bennett, Nat King Cole, Bob Hope, Jerry Lewis, Richard Pryor, and Frank Sinatra. He was also a recording artist for such labels as Kapp Records, Coral Records, and Motown.

In 1968, Cunningham moved to Los Angeles, where he began performing on cruise ship circuits and making various television and movie appearances. Cunningham was featured on episodes of *Sanford and Son* and *The Richard Pryor Show*. He also performed briefly in *Eubie!* on Broadway and in a production of *Evolution of the Blues* at the Drury Lane Theater at the Water Tower Place in Chicago in 1980. In 1984, Cunningham worked on

the films, *The Cotton Club* and later *Taps*, in 1989. Cunningham also worked for the Los Angeles Unified School District to teach performance arts and African American history. In 2002, Cunningham was cast in the David Whitfield production of *Forgotten Treasures* with Marla Gibbs and Lou Myers. Cunningham was then selected to perform for the 2003 Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Telethon, along with Fayard Nicholas, Arlene Kennedy and Arthur Duncan. Cunningham appeared with Century Ballroom Presents The Masters of Lindy Hop & Tap, before retiring from the stage in 2009.

As a tap master, Cunningham was awarded the Chicago Human Rhythm Project Juba Award, Rhythm Tap Hall of Fame Master Tapper Award, and the Los Angeles Tap Festival Leonard Reed Longevity Award.

Skip Cunningham was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on February 7, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Skip Cunningham was conducted by Harriette Cole on February 7, 2019, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 10 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Entertainer Skip Cunningham (1936 -) toured with the Billy Williams Revue and made numerous appearances on The Merv Griffin Show and The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson, and was featured in Eubie! on Broadway and in Evolution of the Blues.

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:

Cunningham, Skip

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Cunningham, Skip--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Entertainer

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Skip Cunningham, February 7, 2019. 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 Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_001, TRT: 1:29:02 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_002, TRT: 2:27:58 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_003, TRT: 3:29:02 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_004, TRT: 4:28:31 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_005, TRT: 5:30:20 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_006, TRT: 6:29:05 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_007, TRT: 7:30:24 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_008, TRT: 8:30:37 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_009, TRT: 9:11:39 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Skip Cunningham, Section A2019_013_001_010, TRT: 10:10:08 ?