

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marshall Thompson

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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>	Thompson, Marshall
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marshall Thompson,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 6, 2000
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2000
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:55:05).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Drummer and singer Marshall Thompson (1940 - ) began playing the drums as a child on the corner of 47th Street and St. Lawrence Avenue in Chicago, Illinois, later becoming a member of the musical group, The Chi-Lites in the 1960s. Thompson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 6, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2000_038
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Marshall Thompson grew up on Chicago's South Side. As a child, he played his snare drum on the corner of 47th Street and St. Lawrence Avenue, thus beginning a lifelong love of music.

Growing up, Thompson would try to sneak into the Regal Theater only to be thrown out. He persisted, landing a job in 1960 as the house drummer for the Regal Theater and even performing as backup for Gladys Knight in 1967. In 1960, he and other musicians formed the Chi-Lites. Initially, the group's name was the Hi-Lites. They soon achieved notoriety with half a dozen singles issued on the local Dakar and Ja-Wes labels. Because their name conflicted with that of another local group, they changed their name, aligning themselves with Chicago.

For more than thirty years, the Chi-Lites have been one of the main purveyors of the Windy City sound. Their first hit, "Let Me Be The Man My Daddy Was," made the national charts. But it was songs "Have You Seen Her" and "Oh, Girl" that catapulted the Chi-Lites to fame. In February of 2004, the Chi-Lites received a Grammy Award for their work on Beyoncé Knowles' song "Crazy in Love," which won the Best R&B Song award. In 2006, the Chi-Lites released an album called, *Christmas Time At Momma's House*. The album also features radio disc jockey, Herb Kent.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marshall Thompson was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on July 6, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Drummer and singer Marshall Thompson (1940 - ) began playing the drums as a child on the corner of 47th Street and St. Lawrence Avenue in Chicago, Illinois, later becoming a member of the musical group, The Chi-Lites in the 1960s.

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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:

- Thompson, Marshall
- Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)
- Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

- African Americans--Interviews
- Thompson, Marshall--Interviews
- African American musicians--Interviews
- Drummers (Musicians)--Interviews
- Street entertainers--United States--Interviews
- Knight, Gladys, 1944-
- African American singers--Interviews
- Rhythm and blues musicians--United States--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Doo-wop (Music)

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Concert tours

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Musicians--Travel--Interviews

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African Americans--Music--History and criticism

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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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Chi-Lites (Musical group)

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## Occupations:

Drummer

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Singer

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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 Marshall Thompson, July 6, 2000. 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Marshall Thompson, Section A2000\_038\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Marshall Thompson narrates photos depicting the Chi-Lites during various stages of their career. Thompson then describes the musical backgrounds of his mother, father, and uncle. He explains that being surrounded by music from an early age helped him to have a successful music career. Thompson tells stories of growing up on the South Side of Chicago, remembering in particular the eclectic street performers. He talks about performing in high school talent shows, which cemented his desire to be in show business. Thompson then details his big break into show business, when as a teenager, he played drums for a Gladys Knight concert in Chicago. Thompson recalls disguising himself as a member of the band and volunteering to play when Knight's hired drummer struggled with the music. He says this opportunity gave him the confidence he needed to be a successful performer.

African American musicians--Interviews.

Drummers (Musicians)--Interviews.

Street entertainers--United States--Interviews.

Knight, Gladys, 1944-.

African American singers--Interviews.

Rhythm and blues musicians--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Doo-wop (Music).

Concert tours.

Musicians--Travel--Interviews.

African Americans--Music--History and criticism.

Video Oral History Interview with Marshall Thompson, Section A2000\_038\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Marshall Thompson discusses his early interests in the doo-wop singing style, and recalls emulating the style in his first singing groups, which he first formed in elementary school. Thompson talks about continuing to sing in these groups throughout high school, which eventually led to the formation of the Chi-Lites. He discusses the qualities that enabled the Chi-Lites to succeed, and explains how they were able to be popular on both the pop and R & B charts. Thompson then talks about life on the road with the Chi-Lites, highlighting their time spent in Los Angeles struggling to make ends meet. He credits touring conditions with bringing the band closer together. After discussing the other three members of the Chi-Lites individually, Thompson outlines the group's future plans and reacts to their induction into the Rhythm & Blues Foundation Pioneer Award hall of fame.

Video Oral History Interview with Marshall Thompson, Section A2000\_038\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:09 ?

After a brief explanation of the Rhythm & Blues Foundation Pioneer Award hall of fame, Marshall Thompson delves into the early years of the Chi-Lites's history. He explains how they formed from the splinters of two different groups, how they first got funding to enter a recording studio, how they got their name, and how he helped to construct their image. Thompson details the success of the Chi-Lites's first record, which led to nationwide tours of famous theaters. He explains that the Chi-Lites often toured with groups from other cities, and says that each city had its own distinctive sound. After relating a story about how he helped the Jackson Five, Thompson talks about some memorable songs from the Chi-Lites's catalogue, including his favorite song, and an unexpected hit. Thompson discusses the long-term success of the Chi-Lites, and believes that it will continue into the future. He then talks about some of the artists who influenced his music career.

Video Oral History Interview with Marshall Thompson, Section A2000\_038\_001\_004, TRT: 0:26:19 ?

Marshall Thompson describes the prominent role his late wife, Constance Strong Thompson, played both in his personal life and in the professional life of the Chi-Lites. Thompson explains her role as manager of the group, crediting her with the group's long-term financial success. He tells a humorous story that illustrates how much money the Chi-Lites were making at the peak of their success. Thompson then becomes reflective, considering the importance of self-belief and self-confidence as they relate to success in show business. He discusses positive contributions the Chi-Lites and black music have made to society. Thompson then voices his concerns about the future of the black community, particularly what he sees as a lack of discipline in African American children. Thompson then discusses his legacy, saying he wants to be remembered as someone who brought joy to people as an entertainer.