

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Geoffrey Holder

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Holder, Geoffrey, 1930-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Holder,
Dates:	April 16, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:51:47).
Abstract:	Dancer, film actor, stage director, and painter Geoffrey Holder (1930 - 2014) danced on Broadway, the Metropolitan Opera Ballet, and his own dancing troupe. In addition to his dancing activities, Holder had a prolific career in film, acting, producing, costume designing, and directing. Holder was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 16, 2003, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_081
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Artist, dancer, and choreographer, Geoffrey Holder, was born in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, on August 20, 1930. While in Port-of-Spain, Holder attended Queens Royal College, but received much of his education in dancing and painting from the Holder Dance Company, his older brother Boscoe's dance troupe.

Holder premiered in his brother's dance company at the age of seven, and by 1947, he was in charge of the troupe. After being seen by dancer Agnes de Mille in 1952, Holder was invited to New York to audition; to finance the trip for himself and his troupe, he sold twenty of his paintings. After failing to receive a sponsorship to tour and perform, Holder began teaching at the Katherine Dunham School of Cultural Arts. In 1954, Holder made his first Broadway performance as Samedi in *House of Flowers*. For the next two years, Holder appeared as a principal dancer on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera Ballet and continued to work with his own troupe through 1960. Holder also continued to paint, and in 1957 was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship; that same year brought his first film role, *All Night Long*, a modern retelling of *Othello*. Roles continued to come in, with Holder playing Baron Samedi in the James Bond film *Live and Let Die* and Punjab in *Annie*. In more recent years, Holder appeared in the Eddie Murphy film *Boomerang*.

Not limited to his acting and painting, Holder also directed; his production of *The Wiz*, an all-black retelling of *The Wizard of Oz*, earned him Tony Awards for best director and best costume design. Holder also wrote *Black Gods, Green Islands*, an illustrated collection of Caribbean folklore, and *Geoffrey Holder's Caribbean Cookbook*. Holder and his wife, dancer Carmen DeLavallade, met and married while Holder was performing in *House of Flowers* in 1955; the couple lived and worked in New York City.

Holder passed away on October 5, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Geoffrey Holder was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 16, 2003, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Dancer, film actor, stage director, and painter Geoffrey Holder (1930 - 2014) danced on Broadway, the Metropolitan Opera Ballet, and his own dancing troupe. In addition to his dancing activities, Holder had a prolific career in film, acting, producing, costume designing, and directing.

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:

Holder, Geoffrey, 1930-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Holder, Geoffrey, 1930- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Dancer

Painter

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Geoffrey Holder, April 16, 2003. 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 Geoffrey Holder, Section A2003_081_001_001, TRT: 0:29:14 ?

Geoffrey Holder opens this segment with tales of his precocious childhood.

Holder describes his life in Trinidad in the 1930s and 1940s as a budding painter and dancer whose artistic endeavors were fully encouraged by his parents.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Holder, Section A2003_081_001_002, TRT: 0:26:52 ?

Geoffrey Holder details his transition from childhood to young adulthood and the great life changes after he took over his brother's dance troupe. A successful performance in the Puerto Rican Dance Festival led to Holder's introduction to famed choreographer, Agnes de Mille. That meeting eventually led to Holder making his debut on the stage at the Metropolitan Opera Ballet. He also met his future wife, Carmen DeLavallade.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Holder, Section A2003_081_001_003, TRT: 0:28:46 ?

Geoffrey Holder recalls several highlights from his professional career. He made his debut as a director for the stage version of 'The Wiz' in 1975. He ended up winning two Tony Awards, best director and best costume design for the Broadway play. Holder also shares his personal philosophy on the significance of art and cultural expression.

Video Oral History Interview with Geoffrey Holder, Section A2003_081_001_004, TRT: 0:26:55 ?

Geoffrey Holder wraps up the interview with his thoughts on child rearing and the wonderful black performers who worked with and mentored him, such as Josephine Baker, Pearl Bailey and Eartha Kitt. Holder doesn't focus on how he will be remembered, saying "I don't care. I don't care as long as they spell my name correctly!"