

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Stan Lathan

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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>	Lathan, Stan
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Stan Lathan,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 23, 2004 and June 25, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003 and 2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:04:34).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Television producer Stan Lathan (1945 - ) was the executive producer and director of the HBO series Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry; the co-creator of Russell Simmons's Def Comedy Jam. Lathan was also responsible for developing the concept for Def Poetry Jam on Broadway, which won a Tony Award in 2003 for best Special Theatrical Event., and went on to tour nationally and in Europe. Lathan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 23, 2004 and June 25, 2003, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_139
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Director and television producer Stan Lathan was born on July 8, 1945, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The youngest of three children, Lathan attended public school in Philadelphia and went on to attend Pennsylvania State University, earning his B.A. degree in 1967.

Lathan began his directing career with the popular African American PBS series *Say Brother*; he then began directing episodes of *Sesame Street* in 1969 while working with well-known film director William Greaves. Over the following decades, Lathan directed numerous hit shows, including *The Redd Foxx Show*, *Hill Street Blues*, *Miami Vice*, *Martin*, and *It's Garry Shandling's Show*. Lathan also directed a number of dance specials for PBS featuring Mikhail Baryshnikov, Alvin Ailey, Martha Graham's Dance Company, and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Lathan also executive produced and directed *Cedric "The Entertainer" Presents* and produced and directed *It's Black Entertainment*, a two-hour musical documentary for Showtime. Lathan did not limit himself to television; he directed *Beat Street*, and *Save the Children*, both feature-length motion pictures, as well as served as executive producer for *Gridlock'd* and *How To Be A Player*.

Lathan went on to become the executive producer and director of the HBO series *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry*, and served as the co-creator of *Russell Simmons' Def Comedy Jam*. Lathan was also responsible for developing the concept for *Def Poetry Jam on Broadway*, which won a Tony Award in 2003 for best Special Theatrical Event., and went on to tour nationally and in Europe.

Lathan was honored with four NAACP Image Awards and The National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters Award for his achievements. Lathan served on the Board of Directors of the RUSH Philanthropic Arts Foundation and on the Board of Visitors for the School of Communications at Pennsylvania State University.

Lathan and his wife, Marguerite, were residents of Beverly Hills.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Stan Lathan was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 23, 2004 and June 25, 2003, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Television producer Stan Lathan (1945 - ) was the executive producer and director of the HBO series Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry; the co-creator of Russell Simmons's Def Comedy Jam. Lathan was also responsible for developing the concept for Def Poetry Jam on Broadway, which won a Tony Award in 2003 for best Special Theatrical Event., and went on to tour nationally and in Europe.

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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:

Lathan, Stan

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lathan, Stan --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:

Television Producer

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

EntertainmentMakers

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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 Stan Lathan, April 23, 2004 and June 25, 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).

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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 Stan Lathan, Section A2003\_139\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:57 ?  
Television producer Stan Lathan shares tales from his early hardscrabble life in

Philadelphia's projects. Lathan talks about living with a single mother after his father abandoned the family when Lathan was just three years old. He explains how he was able to entertain himself with storytelling and spending time with friends. Lathan also describes his elementary and junior high school years.

Video Oral History Interview with Stan Lathan, Section A2003\_139\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:58 ?

Television producer Stan Lathan regales shares memories from his childhood in the projects of Philadelphia. His most vivid memories are of the Philadelphia music scene, and his small part in the precursor group to the Delfonics as a high school boy. Lathan also details other aspects of his life from elementary school through high school. Lathan then recounts his experiences at Penn State University in the 1960s and explains his growing interest in film during graduate school at Boston University. He also talks about his work at radio stations in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Boston.

Video Oral History Interview with Stan Lathan, Section A2003\_139\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:59 ?

Television producer Stan Lathan details the earliest days of his television career, explaining how the medium developed and was influenced by the Civil Rights Movement. He outlines his career progression from working as a stage director for the Ohm Theater Workshop to directing the acclaimed public television series 'Say Brother'. Lathan also details his experience at WGBH in Boston, which led to many future television directing assignments with such noteables as Alvin Ailey and Judith Jamison.

Video Oral History Interview with Stan Lathan, Section A2003\_139\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:38 ?

Television producer Stan Lathan discusses his developing style as a director during the 1970s and explains how his work in theater influenced his television career. Lathan then details his work on the music documentary 'Save the Children' and the famed television show 'Sanford and Son'. Lathan tells of his creative relationship with Redd Foxx and discusses his public image as being more than a director of "black" themed material.

Video Oral History Interview with Stan Lathan, Section A2003\_139\_001\_005, TRT: 0:20:55 ?

Television producer Stan Lathan details life behind the camera, explaining how he adapted from working on the East Coast to working on television shows based in Hollywood. He describes the various shows he directed, such as 'Hill Street Blues', 'Def Comedy Jam', 'The Steve Harvey Show' and 'Sanford and Son'. Lathan describes some of the successes and challenges he had while working on the shows, and discusses his burgeoning reputation as a producer as well as a director.

Video Oral History Interview with Stan Lathan, Section A2003\_139\_002\_006, TRT: 0:22:52 ?

Stan Lathan narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Stan Lathan, Section A2003\_139\_002\_007, TRT: 0:31:03 ?

Television producer Stan Lathan describes his partnership with Def Jam Recordings founder Russell Simmons and the birth of their smash hit TV comedy, 'Def Comedy Jam'. Lathan also details several other comedy projects of note, including his work on Richard Pryor's seminal performance, 'Live at the Sunset Strip' and his feature film directorial debut 'Amazing Grace' with Moms Mabley.

Video Oral History Interview with Stan Lathan, Section A2003\_139\_002\_008, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Television producer Stan Lathan discusses his work with Charles Dutton on the television series 'Roc', which broadcasted live. Lathan describes the impetus behind the creation of the television series 'Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry', another venture with Russell Simmons. Lathan explains how the success of the show led to 'Def Poetry Jam on Broadway', which won a Tony Award and

went on a world tour.

Video Oral History Interview with Stan Lathan, Section A2003\_139\_002\_009, TRT: 0:16:27 ?

Television producer Stan Lathan discusses his future career plans and talks about his hopes for African American directors on the rise, such as John Singleton and F. Gary Gray. Finally, Lathan discusses his daughter Sanaa's career as a Broadway actress and shares some thoughts on his life and legacy.