

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Adam Wade

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wade, Adam
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Adam Wade,
Dates:	April 27, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:56:51).
Abstract:	Actor, singer, and stage producer Adam Wade (1935 -) was the first African American to host a game show on television, "Musical Chairs." Wade recorded hit singles as a singer and his television acting credits included, "Sanford & Son," and, "Good Times." Wade was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 27, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_168
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Adam Wade was born Patrick Henry Wade on March 17, 1935 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Pauline Simpson and Henry Oliver Wade, Jr. Wade was raised by his grandparents in Pittsburgh's East Liberty neighborhood and graduated from Westinghouse High School in 1952. He went on to attend Virginia State College, but married his high school sweetheart and soon left school in order to support his young family.

Wade started singing while still in high school. In 1958, he got his first opportunity to record for the Coed Records label in New York City. Two years later, he moved to New York full-time, and within six months, he was singing at the city's most prestigious club, the Copacabana. Wade's first hit, "Ruby," was released that same year. He had three top ten singles in 1961: "Take Good Care of Her," "The Writing on the Wall" and "As If I Didn't Know." Wade had less success after moving over to Epic Records later that year. In the late 1960s, he shifted his focus to acting. Wade began doing commercials and voice-over work. In 1970, he starred in the film *Wanderlove*. Wade had a number of supporting roles in films in the early 1970s, and he began to be featured on television, in soaps like *The Guiding Light* and black-oriented sitcoms like *Sanford & Son* and *Good Times*.

In 1975, Wade began hosting the television game show *Musical Chairs*, becoming the first black game show host. In 1978, he restarted his recording career. Wade also starred in an all-black production of *Guys and Dolls* in Las Vegas, Nevada. In 1983, Wade and his wife, Jeree Wade, started their own production company called SONGBIRD'S UNLIMITED PRODUCTIONS. They have produced many African American historical revues, including the off Broadway musical, *Shades of Harlem* which opened at the Village Gate in New York in 1983 and recently stopped touring in 2005. In the 1980s and 1990s, Wade continued to appear regularly on stage and screen including an episode of *Hill Street Blues*. In April of 2007, Wade began the national tour of the hit Broadway play, *The Color Purple*, playing the role of "Old Mister Johnson". Wade has also taken turns as a director, writer and producer. He has received Audelco and Clio Awards for his work.

Over forty years after leaving college, Wade returned to school, earning his B.A. degree from Lehman College and his M.A. degree from Brooklyn College. He works as an adjunct professor of speech and theater at Long Island University and Bloomfield College.

Wade has been married to his wife, Jeree, for twenty-five years.

Adam Wade was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 27, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Adam Wade was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 27, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Actor, singer, and stage producer Adam Wade (1935 -) was the first African American to host a game show on television, "Musical Chairs." Wade recorded hit singles as a singer and his television acting credits included, "Sanford & Son," and, "Good Times."

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:

Wade, Adam

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wade, Adam--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Actor

Singer

Stage Producer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|MusicMakers

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 Adam Wade, April 27, 2007. 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 Adam Wade, Section A2007_168_001_001, TRT: 0:29:01 ?

Adam Wade was born on March 17, 1935 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Pauline Nelson Simpson and Henry Wade, Jr. Wade's paternal great-grandfather married a German woman in Nashville, Tennessee. They were forced to flee to the Caribbean after an encounter with the Ku Klux Klan, and left Wade's paternal grandfather, Henry Wade, Sr., in Nashville. He married Wade's paternal grandmother, Helen Jones Wade, in West Virginia, and settled in Pittsburgh, where Wade's grandfather worked as a chauffeur for the Mellon family. His paternal grandmother was a healer who made medicines from the herbs in her garden. As a child, Wade contracted scarlet fever, but recovered completely under her care. In Pittsburgh, Wade's maternal grandfather, George Nelson, owned a tailor shop, where his maternal grandmother, Lurnia Nelson, was a domestic. When Wade was three years old, his mother abandoned him, and he lived in foster care until being adopted by his paternal grandparents.

African American families--Pennsylvania--Pittsburgh.

Video Oral History Interview with Adam Wade, Section A2007_168_001_002, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Adam Wade lived in a foster home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from the age of three years old. He often helped his foster mother, Miss Tillman, in the kitchen, where he listened to 'Kraft Music Hall' and 'Your Hit Parade' on the radio. While in foster care, Wade began his education at the Larimer School. His paternal grandparents brought him to St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church, and eventually adopted him as their son. From that time, Wade performed in neighborhood plays; attended Negro League baseball games; and played imaginative games in his dark basement. He attended John Morrow Elementary School in the East Liberty neighborhood of Pittsburgh. After moving to the neighborhood of Homewood, he enrolled at Westinghouse High School, where he swam and played basketball. There, an Italian girl attended the segregated African American prom, and a riot nearly resulted. Soon after, Wade participated in a protest of Pittsburgh's segregated swimming pool, which was shut down rather than integrated.

Video Oral History Interview with Adam Wade, Section A2007_168_001_003, TRT: 0:30:02 ?

Adam Wade played basketball at Westinghouse High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with future professional players Chuck Cooper and Maurice Stokes. Their team lost the state championship game to Farrell High School in Farrell, Pennsylvania two years in a row. Upon graduation, Wade studied health education at Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia on a basketball scholarship. He took on small jobs to support himself, including sewing and babysitting for other students and faculty. After three years, Wade left college to marry his high school sweetheart in Pittsburgh. He worked at Kaufmann's department store and as a sewage tunnel construction worker, before finding a research position under Jonas Salk, who created the polio vaccine. Wade also sang with his friend Richard Baugh at local venues. In the late 1950s, the duo travelled to New York City to sell Baugh's music and audition for record companies, and garnered the interest of Coed Records, Inc.

Video Oral History Interview with Adam Wade, Section A2007_168_001_004, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Adam Wade sang his friend, Richard Baugh's compositions for Coed Records, Inc. in New York City. The company was not interested in the songs, but offered Wade a recording contract as a vocalist. With the encouragement of his

employer, polio researcher Jonas Salk, Wade signed with Coed Records, Inc. He recorded several hit singles, including 'Tell Her For Me' and 'Ruby' from the film 'Ruby Gentry.' With the rise of disco music, Wade found it difficult to obtain work, and decided to transition to acting. He studied at the Al Fann Theatrical Ensemble with actresses Vernee Watson-Johnson and Kim Fields, and his mentor, Adolph Caesar. He performed in stage productions with Al Fann's company, and for Douglas Turner Ward at the Negro Ensemble Company. Wade obtained a role in a Getty Oil commercial; and, soon after, was cast in blaxploitation films like 'Shaft' and 'Gordon's War,' which was directed by Ossie Davis. He was also hired as Raymond St. Jacques' stunt and photo double in 'Come Back, Charleston Blue.'

Video Oral History Interview with Adam Wade, Section A2007_168_001_005, TRT: 0:29:34 ?

Adam Wade hosted 'Musical Chairs' in 1975, thus becoming the first African American game show host. The show combined the traditional game of musical chairs with song lyric trivia questions. Wade was recommended for the role by producer Don Kirshner, who he met through drummer William Elliott. To prepare for the role, he bought a new suit; studied the rule book; and talked to Tony Brown, who was a talk show host on 'Tony Brown's Journal.' In 1979, Wade filmed a pilot for a television adaptation of 'Uptown Saturday Night' with actor Cleavon Little, but it was rejected by First Artists Production Company Ltd. During the 1980s, Wade performed in numerous stage productions, commercials and voiceover roles. While acting in 'Looking Back,' a Micki Grant tribute show, Wade was persuaded by Grant to finish his college degree. He earned a bachelor's degree at New York City's Lehman College, and a master's degree in theatre history and criticism at Brooklyn College.

Video Oral History Interview with Adam Wade, Section A2007_168_001_006, TRT: 0:28:59 ?

Adam Wade played the role of Old Mister in a national production of 'The Color Purple,' which opened in 2007 at the Cadillac Palace Theatre in Chicago, Illinois. He acted alongside Felicia Fields, Michelle Williams and Jeannette Bayardelle, under the direction of Gary Griffin. Rehearsal for the production took place at the Hubbard Street Dance Chicago studio. In addition to his acting career, Wade authored several books, including a science fiction novel, 'Elsim.' At the time of the interview, he planned to write about Herman Roberts' Roberts Show Lounge in Chicago, which was a center of African American entertainment on the South Side. Wade married his second wife, Jeree P. Wade, who was also a singer, and the couple eventually settled in Montclair, New Jersey. Wade reflects upon his hopes for the African American community; his life and legacy; and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.