

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Melba Moore

PERSON

Moore, Melba

Alternative Names: Melba Moore; Beatrice Melba Smith

Life Dates: October 29, 1945-

Place of Birth: New York, New York, USA

Work: Brooklyn, NY

Occupations: Stage Actress;

Biographical Note

Singer, stage actress, and musical singer Melba Moore was born Beatrice Melba Smith on October 29, 1945 in New York City. The daughter of Detroit bandleader, Ted Hill, Moore was raised by mother, Gertrude Melba Smith and stepfather, Clement Leroy Moorman, also professional musicians. As a youth, Moore's passion was dancing, however, when her stepfather made her take piano lessons, she began to admire jazz and blues pianists. Moore attended Newark, New Jersey's Waverly Elementary School and Cleveland Junior High School. After graduating from the High School of Performing Arts, she enrolled in Montclair State Teachers College. Later, Moore went on to earn her B.A. degree in music.

Moore returned to the Newark Public Schools and student taught at the Pershine Avenue Elementary School. As a teacher, Moore began to perform with other teachers that formed a cultural performance group called Black Voices. In 1968, Moore began to work at various studios in Manhattan where she provided background vocals for the likes of Frank Sinatra and Aretha Franklin. While working at one such session, Moore was encouraged to audition for the Broadway musical Hair in 1968. She succeeded Diane Keaton in the lead role in 1969.

Moore went on to play recurring roles in several hit Broadway productions including Purlie, which she won a Tony Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Musical, Incent Black, Timbuktu and Les Misérables. In 1975, alongside her then-husband Charles Huggins, Moore formed Hush Productions and signed R&B artist Freddie Jackson. That same year, she released her Grammy-nominated, debut album entitled Peach Melba. Throughout the 1980s, Moore made appearances on several television and movie productions including Ellis Island. In 2003, she was featured alongside Beyoncé Knowles and Cuba Gooding, Jr. as "Bessie Cooley" in The Fighting Temptations.

Moore lives in New York City.

Melba Moore was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 28, 2010.

Related Entries

Arts High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Waverly Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Cleveland Junior High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

St. Thomas the Apostle School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]