

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Randy Duncan

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Duncan, Randy, 1958-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Randy Duncan,
Dates:	November 15, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:45:36).
Abstract:	Choreographer and dancer Randy Duncan (1958 -) was a three-time recipient of Chicago's prestigious Ruth Page Award for Outstanding Choreographer of the Year (1988, 1990, and 1992), among numerous other awards and his works were performed internationally. Duncan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 15, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_142
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Renowned choreographer and dancer Randy Louis Duncan was born on December 14, 1958 in Chicago, Illinois. Growing up and attending public schools on Chicago's west side, Duncan's career began at age fifteen with the Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theatre. Duncan later began formal dance studies with Geraldine Johnson, followed by classes at the Sammy Dyer School of Theater, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and Illinois State University. Duncan credits Harriet Ross and Joseph Holmes with much of his inspiration.

Drawing upon ballet, jazz dance, and modern dance for his choreography, Duncan created works that have been performed by numerous dance companies including the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago, River North Dance Company and Gus Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago as well as companies in Seattle and Tel Aviv. In 1987, Duncan choreographed for the first all-African American cast of *A Chorus Line*. Duncan's musical theater credits include *Guys and Girls*, *Street Dreams*, *West Side Story*, *Carousel*, *Hello Dolly*, and *Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope*. He has taught and judged dance competitions throughout North America, Europe and the Middle East. Duncan's classes in jazz dance have taken him to Mexico, England, France, Amsterdam, and Israel.

Duncan has been a three-time recipient of Chicago's prestigious Ruth Page Award for Outstanding Choreographer of the Year (1988, 1990, and 1992). In 1994, Duncan won the Jazz Dance World Congress Award. He regularly serves on panels for the National Endowment for the Arts, the Illinois Arts Council, Arts Midwest and the Illinois Arts Alliance. Other awards include the 1999 Artistic Achievement Award from the Chicago National Association of Dance Masters, and the 2000 Black Theater Alliance Award for Best Choreography.

An avid supporter of HIV/AIDS causes, Duncan has donated his time and choreography to *Dance for Life*, creating world premieres for Chicago's largest dance benefit for HIV/AIDS. His television ballet, *Urban Transfer*, was produced and distributed nationwide by PBS-TV's WTTW. Duncan's first major motion picture by Paramount

Pictures, *Save the Last Dance*, earned him a nomination for the American Choreography Award for dance on film.

Duncan was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 15, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Randy Duncan was conducted by Linda Williams on November 15, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Choreographer and dancer Randy Duncan (1958 -) was a three-time recipient of Chicago's prestigious Ruth Page Award for Outstanding Choreographer of the Year (1988, 1990, and 1992), among numerous other awards and his works were performed internationally.

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:

Duncan, Randy, 1958-

Williams, Linda (Interviewer)

Stegner, Terry (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Duncan, Randy, 1958- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Dancer

Choreographer

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 Randy Duncan, November 15, 2006. 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 Randy Duncan, Section A2006_142_001_001, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Randy Duncan was born on December 14, 1958 in Chicago, Illinois to Betty Mason Boglin and Ernest Duncan. Duncan's paternal family had Cherokee and Irish ancestry, while his maternal great-great-grandmother was Cree. Duncan's maternal grandparents, Berbie Martin Henderson and Hezekiah Henderson, Jr., were sharecroppers in Twist, Arkansas, where his mother was born. After they moved to Chicago, his grandmother worked as an elevator operator and baker. Duncan's parents met when his mother was a young girl, and she had the first of her seven children at fifteen years old. After Duncan's parents separated, he was raised by his maternal grandparents in North Lawndale on Chicago's West Side. With his grandparents' support, Duncan pursued his interests in gymnastics, musical theater and dance. Duncan's father died in an accident when Duncan was fourteen years old. Although he was unfamiliar with his father's relatives as a child, he reunited with the Duncan family in Indianapolis, Indiana as an adult.

Video Oral History Interview with Randy Duncan, Section A2006_142_001_002, TRT: 0:30:18 ?

Randy Duncan knew little of his paternal family history beyond the musical talents of his paternal grandmother, Clifford Duncan. He was raised by his maternal grandparents, Berbie Martin Henderson and Hezekiah Henderson, Jr., on the West Side of Chicago, Illinois, where he attended Chicago's Joseph Medill Elementary School, and later Austin High School. There, they were eventually joined by Duncan's maternal great-grandmother, Annie Martin, who taught him about his Cree Native American heritage. While living with his grandparents, Duncan often spent time with his mother and siblings, with whom he replicated the acrobatics from 'The Bozo's Show.' This and other television programs, including 'The Avengers,' sparked Duncan's early interest in gymnastics and dance. When Duncan was in the eighth grade, he successfully auditioned for an all-city production of 'West Side Story.' He impressed the choreographer, who helped him obtain a scholarship to Chicago's Sammy Dyer School of the Theatre.

Video Oral History Interview with Randy Duncan, Section A2006_142_001_003, TRT: 0:30:06 ?

Randy Duncan attended Austin High School in Chicago, Illinois, where he excelled academically. Outside of school, he studied dance at the Sammy Dyer School of the Theatre. Duncan was also a member of the All-City High School Theatrical Troupe, where he was cast in productions of 'West Side Story,' 'Hello, Dolly!' and 'Carousel.' In 1974, Duncan graduated from high school, and joined the Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theatre. He briefly attended Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, where he served as a choreographer in the dance and theatre departments. Upon realizing that he could be paid to choreograph in Chicago, Duncan left school, and returned to Joseph Holmes' company. Duncan describes the company's history, including the careers of Joseph Holmes and associate director Harriet Ross, and their commitment to the Martha Graham technique of modern dance. From 1974, Duncan danced with the company for twelve years, and then served for seven years as its artistic director. He left the company in 1993.

Video Oral History Interview with Randy Duncan, Section A2006_142_001_004, TRT: 0:29:52 ?

Randy Duncan served as the artistic director of the Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Theatre in Chicago, Illinois from 1986 to 1993. In his early years as director, Duncan prepared for tours outside of Chicago by dismissing several dancers who lacked commitment, and holding a fundraiser with Oprah Winfrey at Chicago's Auditorium Theatre. Duncan also changed the company's style of dance. While founding director Joseph Holmes' choreography reflected the slower style of Martha Graham, Duncan was influenced by the choreography of Alvin Ailey and Ulysses Dove. Harriet Ross continued in her role as the

company's associate artistic director during Duncan's tenure as director. She taught classes, raised funds and served on the board of directors. When the company became strained financially in the early 1990s, Duncan left to become a freelance choreographer. He created dances such as 'A Tri-Fling,' 'Affection' and 'Initiation' for the Joffrey Ballet, and also taught at the Chicago Academy for the Arts.

Video Oral History Interview with Randy Duncan, Section A2006_142_001_005, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Randy Duncan toured with the Joseph Holmes Chicago Dance Company in Tel-Aviv, Israel, where they were the first arts group to perform after the Gulf War. The company was received warmly, and sold out every performance of their ballet, 'Aretha.' Duncan later became a freelance choreographer for dance companies such as the Joffrey Ballet, Gus Giordano Jazz Dance Chicago and the Bat-Dor Dance Company in Tel-Aviv. In 2000, Duncan served as the ballet choreographer for the film 'Save the Last Dance,' starring Julia Stiles. He recalls working with Stiles, who had almost no previous ballet training. Duncan also worked with Dance for Life, a fundraiser for the AIDS Foundation of Chicago. He describes several pieces of his choreography, including 'Ida,' a ballet about a day in the life of activist Ida B. Wells. Duncan reflects upon the difference between choreography and dance instruction, as well as the influence of choreographers like Alvin Ailey, Arthur Mitchell and Bill T. Jones on his own style of dance.

Video Oral History Interview with Randy Duncan, Section A2006_142_001_006, TRT: 0:17:15 ?

Randy Duncan describes the process of choreographing dances such as a 'A Tri-Fling,' which he created for the Joffrey Ballet. He often choreographed pieces for odd numbers of dancers, and used lighting to express the mood of the story. Duncan reflects upon his life and his plans for the future, such as choreographing a ballet in three acts. He also talks about professional dance at the time of the interview, including the career of hip hop choreographer Fatima Robinson, with whom he collaborated on the film 'Save the Last Dance.' Duncan concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.