

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gus Solomons jr

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Solomons, Gus, Jr., 1940-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gus Solomons jr,
Dates:	October 7, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:29:47).
Abstract:	Dancer and choreographer Gus Solomons jr. (1938 -) created over 165 dance pieces for his two companies, The Solomons Company/Dance and PARADIGM. He was known for his analytical approach, architectural concepts, and use of video and other forms of media. Solomons was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 7, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_054
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Dancer and choreographer Gus Solomons jr was born on August 27, 1938 in Cambridge, Massachusetts to Olivia Stead Solomons and Gustave Solomons, Sr. He attended Cambridge High and Latin School before enrolling at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1956, where he studied architecture. During this time, he began studying dance as a student of Jan Veen and Robert C. Gilman at the Boston Conservatory of Music.

Upon graduation, Solomons moved to New York City to dance in Oscar Brown, Jr.'s musical *Kicks and Company*, with choreographer Donald McKayle. Solomons joined McKayle's company shortly after, and began taking classes at the Martha Graham School. Solomons' interest in postmodernism developed further at Studio 9, where he shared space with other modern dance colleagues and worked with avant-garde experimentalists, some of whom went on to form the Judson Dance Theater collective. While at Studio 9, Solomons caught the attention of Martha Graham's student Pearl Lang, who cast him in *Shira* in 1962. In 1965, postmodern choreographer Merce Cunningham asked Solomons to join his company. There, Solomons created roles in *How to Pass Kick Fall and Run*, *RainForest*, *Place*, *Walkaround Time*, and partnered with Sandra Neels in *Scramble*. In 1968, Solomons left Cunningham's company after sustaining a back injury. He then collaborated with writer Mary Feldhaus-Weber and composer John Morris on a dual-screen video-dance piece entitled *CITY/MOTION/SPACE/GAME* at WGBH-TV in Boston, produced by Rick Hauser. Solomons went on to found his own company, The Solomons Company/Dance, creating over 165 original pieces. He became known for his analytical approach and incorporation of architectural concepts as well as his exploration of interactive video, sound, and movement, as depicted in the piece *CON/Text*. In 1980, Solomons began writing dance reviews, which were published in *The Village Voice*, *Attitude*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. In 1996, he founded PARADIGM with Carmen de Lavallade and Dudley Williams. Solomons also worked as an arts professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts until 2013.

In 2004, Solomons was named the American Dance Festival's Balasaraswati/Joy Ann Dewey Beinecke Endowed Chair for Distinguished Teaching. He received the first annual Robert A. Muh Award from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and served as a Phi Beta Kappa Scholar in 2006.

Gus Solomons jr was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 7, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gus Solomons jr was conducted by Harriette Cole on October 7, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Dancer and choreographer Gus Solomons jr. (1938 -) created over 165 dance pieces for his two companies, The Solomons Company/Dance and PARADIGM. He was known for his analytical approach, architectural concepts, and use of video and other forms of media.

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:

Solomons, Gus, Jr., 1940-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Solomons, Gus, Jr., 1940- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Dancer

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 Gus Solomons jr, October 7, 2016. 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 Gus Solomons jr, Section A2016_054_001_001, TRT: 1:29:56 ?

Gus Solomons jr was born on August 27, 1938 in Boston, Massachusetts to Olivia Stead Solomons and Gustave Solomons, Sr. His paternal grandparents, Mary Solomons and William Solomons, migrated from Aruba to the United States in the late 1800s. They initially lived in Brooklyn, New York, where Solomons' father was born. His family later settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they lived next door to Solomons' maternal grandparents, Lillian Stead and Willis Stead. Solomons' father studied engineering at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, while his mother studied teaching at the Salem Normal School. After marrying, they settled in a majority-white neighborhood in Cambridge, where Solomons and his brother, Noel Solomons, attended the Longfellow School. At the age of four years old, Solomons realized that he wanted to become a performer during a service at the Rush Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church. He joined the Boston Children's Theatre, with whom he performed on Bob Emery's 'Small Fry Club' television show.

Video Oral History Interview with Gus Solomons jr, Section A2016_054_001_002, TRT: 2:30:41 ?

Gus Solomons jr attended the majority-white Longfellow School and Cambridge High and Latin School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he excelled academically. After graduating from high school, Solomons studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), although his true passion was performing. While in school, Solomons studied dance under Jan Veen and Robert C. Gilman at the Boston Conservatory of Music. He performed and choreographed for MIT's annual 'Tech Show,' and was cast in a production of the opera 'La Traviata' in Boston. After graduating from MIT, Solomons moved to New York City, where he was cast in Oscar Brown, Jr.'s musical, 'Kicks and Company.' Although the production was a financial failure, Solomons' talent was noticed in the dance community, and he was invited to join both the Martha Graham Dance Company and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. To supplement his income, Solomons also worked at the Barbara Dorn and Associates interior design firm.

Video Oral History Interview with Gus Solomons jr, Section A2016_054_001_003, TRT: 3:28:39 ?

Gus Solomons jr performed internationally with the Martha Graham Dance Company and Merce Cunningham Dance Company, which were based in New York City. At this point, Solomons talks about the history of modern dance and the influence of Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham on the genre. After three years with Cunningham, Solomons sustained a back injury that restricted his dancing. In 1969, he left the company to form Solomons Company Dance. While developing his choreography, Solomons worked directly with postmodern composers like Toby Twining and Ken Schafer, Jr. to create music based on the movements. The company received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, and Solomons used his loft apartment as the company's rehearsal space. Solomons Company Dance was part of the NEA Dance Touring Program, through which they taught and performed at universities. Around this time, Solomons also created the dual channel video dance, 'City Motion Space Game,' with WGBH-TV.

Video Oral History Interview with Gus Solomons jr, Section A2016_054_001_004, TRT: 4:30:23 ?

Gus Solomons jr choreographed the dual channel video dance 'City Motion Space Game' in 1968. Designed to be viewed from two angles simultaneously, the dance was broadcast live on two television channels in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1986, Solomons continued his exploration of video dance with 'CON/Text,' which was danced simultaneously on two stages, each of which included a live projection of the other performance. In the 1990s, Solomons collaborated with architect Scott De Vere on the installation

performances ‘Red Squalls’ and ‘Red Squalls II,’ which took place in the North Plaza of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City. Solomons began working as a dance critic for newspapers like the Village Voice in 1980, and joined the Bessie Awards Selection Committee in 1985. He was diagnosed with clinical depression in 1975, and struggled with his mental health throughout his career. After closing Solomons Company Dance in 1994, Solomons cofounded the Paradigm Dance Company in 1996.

Video Oral History Interview with Gus Solomons jr, Section A2016_054_001_005, TRT: 5:30:08 ?

Gus Solomons jr was clinically depressed at the height of his dance career. During this time, he created some of the Solomons Company Dance’s most well-known pieces. At this point in the interview, Solomons reflects upon his depression and how it influenced his work. In 1996, Solomons formed the Paradigm Dance Company with fellow dance legends Carmen De Lavallade and Dudley Williams. The company’s repertoire included dances like ‘A Thin Frost,’ which were designed by Solomons and various guest choreographers to fit the limits and abilities of the dancers’ aging bodies. In 2015, Solomons performed with Valda Setterfield in Eszter Salamon’s ‘Monument 0.1.’ As a member of the Dance/NYC advisory board, Solomons took part in the It Gets Better Project, which was an anti-bullying campaign for LGBTQ youth. Solomons reflects upon his life and legacy, and shares his advice to aspiring dancers. He also talks about the growth of opportunities for dancers of color.