

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

Floyd Newman, 2012

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*Floyd Newman:* – gonna be on both songs. Couple a weeks passed by, and Jim Stewart called me and said, “Floyd, you know the guy you had playing the piano and organ?” I said, “Yeah.” “Do you think that he could come up here and at least do demo sessions on some songs?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “You think he can?” I said, “I know he can.” He said, “I’m asking you that because, see, Booker is getting ready to go to college, and we won’t have a pianist or an organist.” And from that point on, folks, Isaac Hayes went on to become internally known famous. That’s right. That’s how he got there.

*Male Interviewer:* Did you keep playing – were you still active in Stax after Al Bell came in, in the ’70s?

*Floyd Newman:* No. I wasn’t there at that time.

*Male Interviewer:* You wasn’t there, and so you –

*Floyd Newman:* No, see, Al Bell came in when they went into bankruptcy. That’s when he came in. I was gone.

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And Isaac gave him – and Isaac told me this. We had a close relationship because of me getting in him into Stax and all that. So he told me a lotta things. He gave them \$350,000.00 to keep from going bankrupt. It didn’t happen. It went bankrupt, anyway. Yeah.

*Female Interviewer:* Well, what did you do for your church?

*Floyd Newman:* My church?

*Female Interviewer:* When you all were going into a new church to raise funds?

*Floyd Newman:* Oh, I added to the funds. I bought –

*Female Interviewer:* How’d you do it?

*Floyd Newman:* How’d I do it? Outta my bank account. *[Laughs]*

*Female Interviewer:* What did you do?

*Floyd Newman:* No, no. Once again, you try to get into figures. I don't get in figures.

*Female Interviewer:* I'm not talking about funds. What did you do the first time?

*Floyd Newman:* I played a concert. I played on concert of some of the people at church told a young lady that – a friend of mine that I was a jazz musician, and that maybe –

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you talk to Floyd, you may talk to him to come and do a concert. So I did a concert, and I told them I wasn't gonna charge. And what I did, I paid my musicians out of my pocket. And I told 'em whatever money's made for the concert and make a long story short, I believe the jazz concerts were about a couple a hours or something like that, and all the money was made as I just said, it went into the church fun.

*Female Interviewer:* And it was the first time they had ever experienced that in the church \_\_\_\_\_?

[Crosstalk]

*Floyd Newman:* That was the first time –

*Female Interviewer:* – know you were a musician.

*Floyd Newman:* No. Some people been sitting behind me in church for years. “We been sitting behind you all – didn't know you was a musician.” I just happened to be one that don't walk around telling people I am. If you can do something, some people find out anyway, one way or another because somebody say, “You know, he does – he plays that.” And that's –

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even quicker than you around bragging.

*Male Interviewer:* Did you ever play in church, or no?

*Floyd Newman:* Yeah, I played in church. That was at church that the concert.

*Female Interviewer:* The first time?

*Floyd Newman:* Yeah. That was the benefit of the church fund. As this young lady here said –

*Female 2:* Seed money.

*Floyd Newman:* – to help the church. It was getting ready to rebuild or do an addition on it, instead of rebuild. They had to do an addition on instead of rebuild. They added to the other church, the older church where I had been all my life. My grandparents had been members here, and my parents, and I became a member, also.

*Male Interviewer:* And when was that concert?

*Floyd Newman:* When I became a member?

*Floyd Newman:* No. When was that concert you were talking about? The jazz concert you did –

*Female 2:* About 2003 or '04 or something like that.

*Floyd Newman:* It was 'cause it's the only one of them things I passed out about my last time. It was somewhere like that time.

*Female Interviewer:* First time ever playing in this church.

*Male Interviewer:* Wow.

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*Floyd Newman:* She was the vocalist.

*Male Interviewer:* Okay. Who else was in the \_\_\_\_\_?

*Floyd Newman:* She hasn't said anything about that. She was my vocalist, not only at the church, to benefit the church, we played many gigs together, this young lady right here. Quite a few,

*Female Interviewer:* You used to do gigs in the schools.

*Floyd Newman:* Yeah, yeah, right.

*Female Interviewer:* \_\_\_\_\_ would call me and **Irvin Resin** and –

*Floyd Newman:* Right. And, see, the \_\_\_\_\_ or somebody came up with some kind of fund that would fund musicians who wanted to play in the

schools, give a concert in \_\_\_\_\_ schools. So we did some school concerts.

*Female Interviewer:* Was it elementary or junior high school?

*Floyd Newman:* High school. Yeah, high school. Yeah. We did one at Overton. We did done at Melrose, and some other schools.

*Female Interviewer:* And what's the other musicians that you know that's a member of your church that's well known?

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*Floyd Newman:* You talking about –

*Female 2:* **Errol Toggs.**

*Female Interviewer:* Errol Toggs.

*Floyd Newman:* Oh, Errol. Yeah, Errol was the base player with us.

*Female Interviewer:* And he was with the blues –

*Floyd Newman:* Yeah, but we changed up on drums and base players somewhere along the way, and there's a lotta people dying that get connected with me, too many. [Laughs] But all the other guys died was in the band, they done, also.

*Female Interviewer:* \_\_\_\_\_?

*Floyd Newman:* Yeah. Everybody. So I'm here for some purpose, y'all.

*Female Interviewer:* Well, you're doing a good one right now.

*Male Interviewer:* You are. And I'm just curious. You've been in Memphis all your life. You've been all over the world playing. You're still in Memphis. What is your feeling about the city and music in the city today?

*Floyd Newman:* Well, let me tell you what I learned. Traveling is quite educational. It lets you know what to do and what –

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not to do. I left the band – \_\_\_\_\_ I talked about with Sam Cook. I left Sam Cook band. See, I told you, I left school at the end of the

semester. I went out there for a moment, and I did not like what I was seeing. Here are all these musicians, Solomon Byrd, and all these guys. They wasn't making no money. They had all these big names. It was a singing group out there. I can't think of the name of it right now. And they were getting \$350.00 a week, and had to pay for the hotel rooms. That was ridiculous. Now when I got out there –

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the guy who was in charge told me, said, "You know, you were recommended 'cause somebody called us from network and told us to hire you. Said, "Do you wanna be the band leader?" I said, "No." He said, "I make money right." I said, "No." See, I knew I wasn't gonna stay out there \_\_\_\_\_ looking at every day. Solomon Byrd was borrowing money from me every day. Not because he didn't have it. He had traveler's checks all the time. And when we stopped, we'd all stop, we'd stop at a truck stop that would not accept traveler's checks evidentially. He always paid me back, but I'd sit there on the bus and I looked around, and hear everybody laughing and giggling going on, and talking. We was having a good time. Musicians, being – a group of musicians gonna be a lotta laughing and talking. And I enjoyed it, but it came to a point where I decided, well, no, I couldn't wait to get back to Memphis.

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I came right back, went right back to my job at the plantation then, and made up my mind that – see, Emerson Able was in my band at the Plantation Inn, and he told me, "You gonna make it, man." And he made that statement because he knew when my schedule was. From 9:00 to 4:00, getting to bed at 4:30, get up at 6:00, drive to Russ College. Leave Russ College at 2:00, come back to Stax, and be there until about 8:00, and then leave there and go to the Plantation Inn and start all over again. I said, "Oh, yeah, I'm gonna make it. I ain't gonna have no problem. None at all." And I did not. Thank goodness, God, I never became ill, never had an accident on the highway, and every day practically when we went down that highway – and I had five people riding with me every day going down there.

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Some of 'em were some people that went to high school with my wife. But, anyway, it was very educational, but I came to a point where I was through with the road. It was a lotta money, a lotta

money. Isaac was paying us a lot of money. He was. Not only was he paying you every night, he paid for your hotel room. You didn't have to buy – pay for nothing but food you ate. That's it. You didn't have to buy nothing. Isaac paid for everything. Even had a hospitality room in the hotels that were stock full of food and beverages. He took care of us. He did. He really did. Now due to the fact that we were so close and –

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he told the world that Floyd Newman took me to Stax. I remember him saying it like that 'cause the manager said, "Floyd, everywhere we go, when they interview Isaac, they always say, 'How did you get to Stax?' He said, 'Floyd Newman took me to Stax.'" And that's in all the books I have of his life story when he died. When he passed it was in the obituary thing and everything, and it's in his cookbook 'cause a lotta people said, "Did he ever deny?" I said, "He never have." I said, "A lotta people be looking for a denial, but he has never denied me," which was really nothing I could do about it if he had. But he truly took care of us. I was flying. Everybody else was on the bus. I was fortunate enough to be teaching at Oak Haven High School. See I was teaching during this time when I'm with Isaac. So a lotta people say –

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"How can you teach school and travel with Isaac?" I said, "Well, you know what? A lotta people don't realize musicians work on weekends. That means superstars also. So I got a whole week of teaching school. Oak Haven was five minutes from the airport. I'd leave there at lunchtime. Take my aunt to the airport and leave with my buddies who worked over there. And when I gotta out of school at 2:30, I went straight to the airport and got on the plane." Guy said, "Man, your wife don't see you from Friday mornings till Monday evening." I said, "Yeah, but she laugh all the way to the bank."

[Laughter]

I said, "Now –" see, 'cause what was happening, I'd take clothes. I didn't wear no suit and tie. I was one of those people that taught school that wore a suit, shirt, and I tie. I had 25 suits. And I could wear a different suit in a month's time, and nobody would ever see it, again. I just like enjoyed clothes like that. My mother and father –

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had me looking like I was on a fashion show as a child, so – but, anyway, I would take clothes for the bandstand, and I'd get on the plane going to the play somewhere, Emerson Able and I, we were the only two that were flying. And see, when I got off the plane on Monday mornings, I'd come straight to Oak Haven. Go ahead and sit down, relax, about a hour or so, for the kids come in. So I was leaving Oak Haven on Friday evenings, and coming back to Oak Haven on Monday mornings. That was my schedule with Isaac. Yeah.

*Male Interviewer:* That's cool. Did you have any great students you remember?

*Floyd Newman:* Huh?

*Male Interviewer:* Did you have any great students you taught?

*Floyd Newman:* I run into students every day. None of 'em became well-known or anything, but –

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I was just an individual that was– even after I became let's see, alter on, I went to Memphis State and got me a master's in \_\_\_\_\_ and guidance. In later years, I dropped band and became a guidance counselor. In Memphis, and in also Tunica, in Memphis and in also Tunica. See my wife and I retired. When we retired from Memphis City School, we both went to Tunica and I had worked in Tunica before I acquired a job in Memphis City Schools. And I was a guidance counselor in Tunica, but I got along. I had a very good rapport with the students, and –

*Female Interviewer:* How did Howard Grimes hook up with you?

*Floyd Newman:* I met Howard at Stax. Howard was the first drummer at Stax to record. But what happened –

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Jim Stewart evidentially didn't like something. Well, I don't know. He made a statement. I won't say what he said, but anyway, Howard, they cut Howard loose and then somebody recommended Al. That's how Al got there. But Howard was the first drummer there. Everybody liked Howard. Howard left there and went straight to Willie Mitchell's studio and became a star

over there. And he was a star at Stax, but when the owner don't like you, you gotta get up and go.

*Female 2:* \_\_\_\_\_ James Harvey. He didn't go into music. He's a city councilman, James Harvey.

*Male Interviewer:* Mm-hmm, James Harvey.

*Floyd Newman:* You know who she's talking about?

*Male Interviewer:* I, yes.

*Floyd Newman:* He was one of my students there at \_\_\_\_\_. *[Laughs]* He tells everybody that. "Mr. Newman." I run into him all the time at different party and difficult places. My wife be with me, he said, "Yeah, Mr. Newman."

*[0:15:00]*

He had them little old \_\_\_\_\_ in the palm of his hand. The little girls was crazy about 'em. We hated him.

*[Laughter]* We hated him 'cause I mean \_\_\_\_\_ literally. He's \_\_\_\_\_ all the little girls, they was harmless \_\_\_\_\_. He said, they just carrying on. There was a little seventh grade girl he said, "We all liked her so we used to always say, '\_\_\_\_\_.'" The little girl, they don't like us. They like Mr. Newman."

*[Laughter]*

*Female 3:* Did you hear James Harvey say, "He can sing"?

*Floyd Newman:* Oh, yeah?

*Female 3:* Yeah.

*Floyd Newman:* No, he never showed that ability there. I forgot what his instruction he was playing, but I'd run into him at schools all the time and they said, "Mr. Newman," first thing **they** said, "My children in the band, too, also." A lot of 'em, and that happened with a lot of 'em. But I worked at those three schools Oak Haven. When I went to Oak Haven, Oak Haven was all white. It had integrated faculty, but it was all white students

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And I guess during that being our first year there, they brought in

blacks from a subdivision called Get Well Gardens, brought in about 200 blacks. And so it was no longer all white, but the band was all white when I went there. It was an all-white band. Yeah. They were all very good musicians. They really played. We enjoyed each other. And in the band room, the band room and Oak Haven was the only building that did not have air conditioning, and we were not perspiring. We were sweating. There is a difference. And the kids, we had to go – the band room sitting at the edge of the football field. So we were going outside getting under the bleachers, \_\_\_\_\_ shade, and cool to practice.

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So those kids went home and told their parents that, “We is the only building, all the other buildings have air condition, we up in there. Mr. Newman had to take us outside –” and make a long story short, those parents told their parents – those students told their parents. The parents got together, went to Sears and bought air conditioning units for every window in the band room. The parents did that. But before they did it, they had a little yard sale, the parents in the Oak Haven area, where they would just get lawn mowers, refrigerators, all kinda stuff, and they had brought a truck up there to haul it to people’s homes. And they made money and they put air conditioning in that band room for their children.

*Female Interviewer:* How did integration effect you and the kids?

*Floyd Newman:* No way at all. It’s the way you carry –

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yourself. I never had a problem. Like I said, I went to Oak Haven. Oak Haven was all white band, and I had a fantastic cooperation and backing, musical friendship. It was wonderful. The kids were super. They were. They really were. I enjoyed it. They enjoyed me. Yeah.

*Male Interviewer:* What year did you go to Oak Haven?

*Floyd Newman:* I can’t – I don’t remember that. I really don’t. I don’t. Yeah. But let’s see. I don’t even remember how many years I was there, either. But I was there for a few years I know more than two or three, I’m sure. And then I went to Humes.

*Female Interviewer:* Do you have any children?

*Floyd Newman:* Who?

*Female Interviewer:* Have you got any children?

*Floyd Newman:* Yes.

*Female Interviewer:* How many you go?

*Floyd Newman:* I have four.

*Female Interviewer:* Do they do music?

[0:19:00]

*Floyd Newman:* No.

*Female Interviewer:* Not a one?

*Female 3:* Yeah.

*Floyd Newman:* Not a one. Wait a minute, **Jean**, let me finish. Let me finish. My oldest – I have two daughters and two sons. My oldest son was playing coronet, which is a like a trumpet, and he was in the band and thing very well in high school. Even played a solo concert at church. But they brought in the band director who had just finished college, and that meant that he was not no more than about three or four years older than some of them. You coming out of college \_\_\_\_\_ with high school stud, 16-17, 18, and my son says, “Dad, we’re not learning anything. He’s cracking jokes and laughing and talking and talking about people’s mommas and all that kinda stuff in a humorous way.” He said, “I’m not learning anything.” I said, “Well, do you wanna stop?”

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He said, “Yes.” So he got out the band. And that was the end of his musical career. My youngest son now is a – he’s not playing an instrument. He had one all that time, but he possessed it. He just never played it. He never did get that far. All, though is – I say you just wasted time, and music is not for everybody. To play an instrument is not for everybody. College is not for everybody. You have to think about that, when people don’t succeed. Well let’s show you. It was in his blood. Up until not too long ago, he was with Sony as an A&R or a vice president. I said, “Well, you didn’t learn how to play so and so and so, but it’s in your body.” You know what I said,”

[Laughter]

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I said, "But you know where you got this from, don't you?"  
"Yeah, dad. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I know where I got it from."  
I said, "I just want you to know that." But anyway, he's with  
another company now where he's part owner, which is – what's  
the name of the company?

Female 3: EMI.

Floyd Newman: Yeah. Say that, again.

Female 3: EMI.

Floyd Newman: EMI. Which is like Sony, but he has a piece of the action now.  
And he's an A&R man, arranger, and everything. Every other  
week, he's in a different city – this is my youngest son –  
interviewing somebody. And he's enjoying himself. My oldest  
daughter's a millionaire. She's married to a millionaire. He was  
not a millionaire when they was married. He was just a brilliant,  
brilliant young man. I have to say that about him. He's a lawyer –

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corporate lawyer, and they were living in Chicago at that part are  
time, and then the company moved him to Atlanta after they got  
married. After they were married. And that's where he was from,  
so he's back with his parents then, and then he was so energetic  
and so brainy an smart and I mean really, really 100-percent  
brilliant young man in every area you could think about. Then  
they moved him to New Jersey. They live in New Jersey now, and  
he's retired recently, so he's gonna sit down and look at all his  
money that he and my daughter have. My other daughter, she lives  
in Los Angeles, and she's entered – trying to think of this  
company. It's called – it's a government program where you –  
she's a supervisor of this program where you get jobs for people.

[0:23:00]

She's a supervisor. She's so dynamic and so pretty. Both of my  
daughters could be movie stars. [Laughs]

Female Interviewer: And you \_\_\_\_\_.

*Floyd Newman:* That was by my first wife. This is my second life. She's the one with the handsome young men.

*Female Interviewer:* Oh, right.

*Floyd Newman:* And those are my kids, my two daughters, and my two sons.

*Female Interviewer:* What were –

*Floyd Newman:* My youngest son, he lives in Florida.

*Female 2:* Oldest.

*Floyd Newman:* Huh?

*Female 2:* Oldest son.

*Floyd Newman:* What'd I say?

*Female Interviewer:* Youngest.

*Male Interviewer:* Youngest.

*Floyd Newman:* No, I'm sorry. Erase that. Anyway, my oldest son lives in Florida, in Hollywood, Florida. He's in the casino business in Florida at Hard Rock in Hollywood, so they all doing very well. They're happy. I'm happy that they're happy. And that's life.

[0:24:00]

You don't know what your kids are gonna do. You can teach 'em all day and all night, but there's a peer pressure out there. How strong are your children?

*Female Interviewer:* So what do you recommend to anybody in life that's from your experience? What would be your words to pass out?

*Floyd Newman:* Well, you mean career-wise or what? Only thing I can say is maybe what you're talking about is that the children come along today, one of the main reasons some of them do not have a direction, and objective, they're not that much older than their parents. That is a problem. When a child has a child – a case, then was at Humes, a student one day –

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told me said, “Mr. Newman, my grandma once said you taught her.” The kids in the room fell on the floor said, “Man, what? Man, you know you’re old.”

*[Laughter]*

But you see – and she told me who her grandmother was. See, when I taught her grandma, – when her grandmother had her mother, she wasn’t but 16. Know what I’m saying? And the same thing happened again with these two. And to show you what you learn how to act in cases like that, I laugh with the kids. If I’d a denied it \_\_\_\_\_, which woulda been a lie,” they woulda brought it up again. They never mentioned it again. They never mention it. That was gone, ’cause I laughed with ’em ’cause it was the truth. I talked to her grandmamma, and, yeah, I’m old. *[Laughs]*

*Female Interviewer:* How old are you?

*Floyd Newman:* I’m 80 years old. I will be 81 in August, August the 17, and I’m glad to say it.

*[0:26:00]*

I’m not afraid. I’m not ashamed. Thank God ’cause God left me here to something else.

*Female Interviewer:* And our mom was 18.

*Male Interviewer:* You look good, and we thank you for sharing your stories with us.

*Floyd Newman:* Okay.

*Male Interviewer:* This has been great. And thank you very much.

*Floyd Newman:* All right. Thanks for coming. I have more to tell, but that’s enough for a day.

*[Applause]*

*[End of Audio]*