

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with La Donna Tittle

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Tittle, La Donna, 1949-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with La Donna Tittle,
Dates:	March 17, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:01:04).
Abstract:	Radio personality La Donna Tittle (1949 -) worked as a radio personality for WNOV radio in Milwaukee, and the midday and evening shifts for WBMX, where she showcased rhythm and blues songs. Tittle also modeled, acted, and did voiceover work in commercials for Kraft, Ameritech, Crisco Oil and Fashion Fair. Tittle was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 17, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_041
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Radio personality LaDonna Tittle was born in Chicago. She attended Dunbar Vocational School in Chicago, graduating in 1964. She then attended Chicago State University, graduating in 1971 with a B.A. in art education and drama with a minor in journalism.

Tittle started her career in radio soon after college, working the midday and evening shifts on Chicago radio station WBEE the year she graduated. After a stint as a weekend radio personality for WNOV radio in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Tittle returned to Chicago in 1973 to work the midday and evening shifts for WBMX, where she showcased rhythm and blues songs.

Over the next three decades, Tittle made a name for herself not just on the airwaves of Chicago, but also as a model and an actress. She has done voiceover work in commercials for Kraft, Ameritech, Crisco Oil and Fashion Fair, and has acted in various religious and secular plays in Chicago, including productions for the city's Goodman and Steppenwolf theaters. She also appeared in the film *The Relic*.

Having served stints as an on-air personality for other Chicago radio stations, such as WJPC, WWHN, WNUA, and WGCI, Tittle is also a host and producer for the Web satellite radio station WGCR, which can be accessed in 294 countries. She is also pursuing a master's degree in art and communications from the Art Institute of Chicago. Tittle is the recipient of numerous public service awards, including the Operation PUSH Woman of the Year Award and the Black Radio Exclusive Air Personality Award.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with La Donna Tittle was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 17, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Radio personality La Donna Tittle (1949 -) worked as a radio personality for WNOV radio in Milwaukee, and the midday and evening shifts for WBMX, where she showcased rhythm and blues songs. Tittle also modeled, acted, and did voiceover work in commercials for Kraft, Ameritech, Crisco Oil and Fashion Fair.

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:

Tittle, La Donna, 1949-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Tittle, La Donna, 1949---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Radio Personality

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 La Donna Tittle, March 17, 2003. 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 La Donna Tittle, Section A2003_041_001_001, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

LaDonna Tittle describes her family background. Her father, James Tittle was born to Theresa Tittle in Topeka, Kansas in the early 1900s. Her mother, Juanita Tittle, was born in Puerto Rico in 1922, but raised in Wilmington, North Carolina by her adoptive parents. Juanita Tittle met and married James Tittle in Chicago, Illinois, and they gave birth to LaDonna Tittle on March 13, 1949. The Tittles lived on Chicago's South Side. Juanita Tittle managed the barbershop of radio disc jockey McKie Fitzhugh, and occasionally filled in for him as a disc jockey, while the family disciplinarian, James Tittle, owned pool halls. LaDonna Tittle visited her grandfather, Daddy Wiley, on Chicago's North Side often. She

also began working as a candy girl at the Regal Theater at the age of eleven. Tittle took drama classes under HistoryMaker Okoro Harold Johnson, who encouraged her to become an actress. After her parents separated in the 1960s, Tittle moved with her mother to the Robert Taylor public housing projects.

Video Oral History Interview with La Donna Tittle, Section A2003_041_001_002, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

LaDonna Tittle grew up in a strict household, and was occasionally taken care of by her “aunts.” These women took her to Emmett Till’s funeral, and to watch her maternal grandmother, a former Ziegfeld Girl, perform at the Blackstone Theatre. Tittle enrolled at Dunbar Vocational High School in 1960, where she was influenced by her teachers and the activities of the Civil Rights Movement. During her senior year, Tittle secured a job as a legal secretary. After graduating from Dunbar High School in 1964, Tittle enrolled at Loop Junior College and got married. Soon thereafter, her husband was killed while training to serve in the Vietnam War. Tittle transferred to Chicago State University, and majored in art and journalism. She also modeled for Gossard Lingerie, and did voice overs and television commercials. Tittle graduated with her B.S. degree in art education in 1971. In 1983, she became involved with the Chicago theater and music scenes and HistoryMakers Okoro Harold Johnson and Abena Joan Brown.

Video Oral History Interview with La Donna Tittle, Section A2003_041_001_003, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

In the late 1960s, LaDonna Tittle was invited to narrate public service announcements at WBEE-AM. The station hired her as an afternoon disc jockey in 1971. In 1973, Tittle was hired to work the midday and evening shifts at WBMX-FM. During this time, urban FM radio stations were gaining popularity. The number of disc jockeys hired for their on-air talent also increased, unionizing the industry. Tittle struggled in the male-dominated industry until she was hired by HistoryMaker John H. Johnson at WJPC-AM in 1978. Here, Tittle worked under Tom Joyner. Her popularity eventually led her to become the highest paid staff member at the station. In 1989, Johnson sold WJPC-AM, and Tittle went on to work part-time as an actress and a radio personality at WGCI-FM, again under Tom Joyner. It was here that Joyner conceptualized the “Tom Joyner Morning Show,” which became nationally syndicated. Tittle also talked about her voice, and the most distinct African American female voices in the radio industry.

Video Oral History Interview with La Donna Tittle, Section A2003_041_001_004, TRT: 0:30:26 ?

LaDonna Tittle described her radio and television personalities as fun, upbeat, and bold. As a radio personality, Tittle enjoyed making public appearances. While working for WJPC-AM, Tittle worked with George Clinton and the Parliament Funkadelics. She also enjoyed attending Johnson Publishing Company Celebrity parties, working a short shift, and eating in the cafeteria of the Johnson Building. As a personality at WBMX-FM, Tittle worked an eight-hour shift, and did her own production work. Tittle gathered news to prepare for her radio shows via a news wire. She also describes how disc jockeys select and cue music. A memorable moment from Tittle’s career includes the overnight opening of WJPC-AM. Tittle also remembered two photo shoots for ‘Jet’ Magazine: one where she wore a bikini made out of bumper stickers, and another where she wore a mink coat. HistoryMaker John H. Johnson sold WJPC for \$10 million in the 1990s. Tittle also talked about her satellite radio show, and the consequences of automated radio.

Video Oral History Interview with La Donna Tittle, Section A2003_041_001_005, TRT: 0:29:14 ?

LaDonna Tittle described her date with boxer Muhammad Ali, whom she met in the late 1960s. She encountered him again while at a boat party with her friend, HistoryMaker Melba Moore. In 1983, Tittle was selected to play Susan Drake in

“A Change is Gonna Come,” a production of HistoryMaker Okoro Harold Johnson for the ETA Creative Arts Foundation. Because she was working for WJPC-AM at the time, Tittle took a hiatus from the play when HistoryMaker John H. Johnson brought a suit against the Foundation, which was then called Ebony Theater. “A Change is Gonna Come” was well-received, and supported by individuals like HistoryMaker Dorothy Tillman and Redd Foxx. Tittle’s film and television credits include “Relic” and “Turks”; she also played Drew Bundini Brown’s landlady in “Ali,” which starred Will Smith. Tittle also acted in several stage productions, including “The Wild Duck” and “Black Bottom.” Tittle also talks about being a lottery ball in the Bud Billiken Day Parade, and the challenges of being an actress.

Video Oral History Interview with La Donna Tittle, Section A2003_041_001_006, TRT: 0:31:14 ?

LaDonna Tittle shares her hopes and concerns for the African American community. Tittle hopes to leave behind a legacy of one who fulfilled her potential. In addition, Tittle would like to be remembered as a good person; as a hardworking person; and someone who enjoyed having a good time, and the company of others. Tittle closes the interview by narrating her photographs.