

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dianne Reeves

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Reeves, Dianne
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dianne Reeves,
Dates:	September 24, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	9 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:23:15).
Abstract:	Jazz singer Dianne Reeves (1956 -) toured as a lead vocalist with Sergio Mendes and Harry Belafonte. She received five Grammy Awards for Best Jazz Vocal Performance. Reeves was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 24, 2016, in Denver, Colorado. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_060
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Jazz singer Dianne Reeves was born on October 23, 1956 in Detroit, Michigan. Her father passed away when she was two years old, leaving Reeves to be reared by her mother, Vada Swanson, and maternal family members in Denver, Colorado. Reeves' uncle, Charles Burrell, was a bassist in the Colorado Symphony who introduced Reeves to jazz. While attending Denver's George Washington High School, Reeves sang in a big band that performed at the National Association of Jazz Educators' convention, where Reeves was discovered by her future mentor, jazz trumpeter Clark Terry. After high school, Reeves briefly studied music at the University of Colorado, before moving to Los Angeles, California in 1976.

In Los Angeles, Reeves studied with vocal coach Phil Moore, and performed with Caldera's Eddie del Barrio, jazz pianist Billy Childs, and her cousin, George Duke. In 1981, Reeves toured internationally with Brazilian musician Sergio Mendes. Her first album, *Welcome to My Love* was released by Palo Alto Records in 1982. Then, between 1983 and 1986, Reeves toured as a lead vocalist with Harry Belafonte, who introduced her to West African and West Indian rhythms. She signed with Blue Note Records in 1987, and released *Dianne Reeves*, an album that held the number one spot on contemporary jazz charts for eleven weeks. Reeves released a series of albums with Blue Note, including *I Remember*, *Never Too Far*, *Art & Survival*, *Quiet After the Storm*, *The Grand Encounter*, *That Day...* and *Bridges*.

Starting in 2001, Reeves received Grammy Awards for Best Jazz Vocal Performance for her consecutive albums, *In the Moment -- Live in Concert*, *The Calling: Celebrating Sarah Vaughn*, and *A Little Moonlight*, produced by Arif Mardin. Reeves appeared as a jazz singer in George Clooney's historical drama, *Good Night, and Good Luck*; and recorded the soundtrack for which she received her fourth Grammy for Best Jazz Vocal in 2006. *Beautiful Life*, produced by Terri Lyne Carrington and released by Concord Records in 2014, featured covers of songs by Bob Marley, Fleetwood Mac and Marvin Gaye, and guest artists such as Esperanza Spalding, Gregory Porter, Lalah Hathaway and Robert Glasper. Reeves received the 2015 Grammy Award for Best Jazz Vocal Performance for the album.

Reeves recorded and performed with Wynton Marsalis, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and sang as the featured soloist with Sir Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic. Reeves was also the first vocalist to perform at the famed Walt Disney Concert Hall; and she performed at the White House on multiple occasions such as President Barack Obama's State Dinner for the President of China as well as the Governor's Ball. Reeves was a recipient of honorary doctorate degrees from the Berklee College of Music and the Julliard School. In 2018, the National Endowment for the Arts designated Reeves a Jazz Master – the highest honor the United States bestows on jazz artists.

Dianne Reeves was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 24, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dianne Reeves was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 24, 2016, in Denver, Colorado, and was recorded on 9 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Jazz singer Dianne Reeves (1956 -) toured as a lead vocalist with Sergio Mendes and Harry Belafonte. She received five Grammy Awards for Best Jazz Vocal Performance.

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:

Reeves, Dianne

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Reeves, Dianne--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Jazz Singer

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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 Dianne Reeves, September 24, 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 Dianne Reeves, Section A2016_060_001_001, TRT: 1:30:16 ?

Dianne Reeves was born on October 23, 1956 to Vada Burrell Swanson and Duronza Reeves in Detroit, Michigan. Her maternal great-grandparents migrated from Kansas to Denver, Colorado, where her great-grandfather was a minister at Shorter Community A.M.E. Church, and her grandmother, Denverado Howard Burrell, was born in 1898. Reeves' maternal grandparents married in Texas, then moved to Toledo, Ohio, where Reeves' mother was born in 1924. Reeves' mother grew up in a racially mixed neighborhood of Detroit with eight siblings, including bassist Charles Burrell. A graduate of Cass Technical High School, she later worked as a nurse. Reeves' father was born in 1922 in Social Circle, Georgia. A singer, he also served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He passed away when Reeves was an infant; and, soon after his death, her family relocated to Denver's Park Hill neighborhood. While attending Denver's Cure d'Ars Catholic School, Reeves confronted a teacher who insulted Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Dianne Reeves, Section A2016_060_001_002, TRT: 2:27:39 ?

Dianne Reeves attended Cure d'Ars Catholic School and Hamilton Junior High School in Denver, Colorado. Frustrated with the school's inattention to African American history, Reeves and her fellow students organized a peaceful sit-in. The school responded by arranging an unmediated meeting, at which white parents accosted Reeves, who represented the demonstrators. However, the protest was a success, and the school incorporated African American history into its curriculum. During this time, Reeves also discovered her singing talent. Her choral teacher, Bennie Williams, arranged for students of all races to sing together, including renditions of Native American poems. Reeves recalls the sense of freedom that she experienced while performing. Reeves' uncle, bassist Charles Burrell, and her great aunt, pianist Ida Howard, taught Reeves music by female jazz musicians, including Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith. Reeves also describes the significance of Denver's Five Points neighborhood for black performers in the 1960s.

Video Oral History Interview with Dianne Reeves, Section A2016_060_001_003, TRT: 3:30:47 ?

Dianne Reeves attended George Washington High School in Denver, Colorado. There, she joined the school's concert choir, as well as a jazz vocal ensemble, the Madrilaires. With the choir, she traveled to Europe to perform for Prince Charles of Wales. Outside of school, Reeves formed a jazz band, the Mellow Moods. At this time, she also performed with her uncle, bassist Charles Burrell, who introduced her to the records of jazz instrumentalists and vocalists; and corresponded with her cousin, keyboardist George Duke. After being selected for Denver's city-wide choral program, Reeves sang "Quia Respexit," an aria from Johann Sebastian Bach's 'Magnificat,' using improvisational techniques she learned from listening to Sarah Vaughan, whom Reeves later met while performing at the Wichita Jazz Festival. At the National Association of Jazz Educators conference in Chicago, Reeves met trumpeter Clark Terry, who connected her with jazz musicians such as Roland Hanna and Louie Bellson, with whom she performed.

Video Oral History Interview with Dianne Reeves, Section A2016_060_001_004, TRT: 4:31:41 ?

Dianne Reeves completed her senior year at Denver's George Washington High School while performing regularly with her uncle, bassist Charles Burrell; and at the Tool Shed, a basement venue at The Warehouse nightclub in Denver. There, she once substituted for Ella Fitzgerald, who had altitude sickness. Reeves describes the evolution of jazz standards in the 1970s, when she became

interested in the Latin music of Milton Nascimento and Flora Purim. In 1977, Reeves briefly attended the University of Colorado Denver's music school before joining Free Life, a band organized by Philip Bailey of Earth, Wind and Fire. For the opportunity, she moved to Los Angeles, where Larry Dunn, Bailey's bandmate, recruited her to his group, Caldera. In Los Angeles, she also collaborated with her cousin, keyboardist George Duke; trained with band leader Phil Moore; and formed the band Night Flight with Billy Childs. She talks about the challenges faced by female musicians like herself and her friend, Terri Lyne Carrington.

Video Oral History Interview with Dianne Reeves, Section A2016_060_001_005, TRT: 5:31:02 ?

Dianne Reeves toured internationally with Sergio Mendes and Brasil '88 in the early 1980s. Her work with Mendes, a Brazilian musician, influenced her first album, 'Welcome to My Love,' which Billy Childs produced. She began performing with Harry Belafonte, whose selection of music by Caribbean and African artists expanded Reeves' repertoire. At this time, Reeves relocated to New York City, and was impressed with its cultural diversity. In 1985, she performed three sold-out shows at the Sounds of Brazil venue, and released her second record, 'For Every Heart,' with Palo Alto Records. Returning to Los Angeles in 1986, Reeves worked with her cousin, George Duke, who helped her obtain a meeting with Blue Note Records executive Bruce Lundvall. After a successful show at Santa Monica's At My Place, she signed a contract with Blue Note Records, and recorded her self-titled album, 'Dianne Reeves.' It included the song "Better Days," which Reeves wrote in memory of her grandmother, Denverado Howard Burrell, in 1978.

Video Oral History Interview with Dianne Reeves, Section A2016_060_001_006, TRT: 6:30:24 ?

Dianne Reeves recorded her self-titled album, 'Dianne Reeves,' with Blue Note Records in 1987. Her next album, 'Never Too Far,' incorporated social and political material inspired by her experiences in New York City and Los Angeles. The record included her cousin, George Duke's composition "Fumilayo," although Miles Davis also expressed interest in the song. Reeves met Davis for the first time at the Newport Jazz Festival in Saratoga Springs, New York, and he commented that she was perfectly in tune. Reeves was surprised by his remark, as she was more conscious of her rhythm than her pitch at that time. Reeves describes her preferred method of live performance, whereby she improvises with the other musicians on stage. In the mid-1990s, Capitol Records acquired ownership of Blue Note Records, and Reeves' contract transferred to EMI Records, which did not focus on jazz. However, Reeves returned to Blue Note Records after recording her album, 'Art and Survival,' which she describes as her strongest work.

Video Oral History Interview with Dianne Reeves, Section A2016_060_001_007, TRT: 7:28:53 ?

Dianne Reeves' album, 'Quiet After the Storm,' included a song written by Joe Zawinul, "The Benediction (Country Preacher)." Reeves went on to record 'Bridges,' followed by 'In the Moment,' a live album, for which she received her first Grammy Award in 2000. She encountered difficulty while developing her album, 'The Calling: Celebrating Sarah Vaughan,' as Reeves refused to work with one of the arrangers, who did not comply with her requests. The album's live recording featured conductor Patrick Gandy, and musicians Billy Childs, Mulgrew Miller and Romero Lubambo. After she performed with Rosemary Clooney in the early 2000s, George Clooney asked Reeves to record the music for his film, 'Good Night, and Good Luck.' Norman Lear of Concord Records produced the film's Grammy Award-winning soundtrack. Following her final album with Blue Note Records, 'When You Know,' Reeves sang in

‘Sing the Truth!,’ a concert honoring Nina Simone, alongside Angelique Kidjo, Lizz Wright and Simone’s daughter, Lisa Simone.

Video Oral History Interview with Dianne Reeves, Section A2016_060_001_008, TRT: 8:27:33 ?

Dianne Reeves performed with the second ‘Sing the Truth!’ tour, which featured music by female songwriters, like Abbey Lincoln, Odetta Gordon and Tracy Chapman. Reeves appeared with singers Dee Dee Bridgewater and Cassandra Wilson in a one night production of ‘A Tribute to Abbey Lincoln,’ at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Inspired by musician Terri Lyne Carrington’s ‘The Mosaic Project,’ Reeves’ next album, ‘Beautiful Life,’ featured artists like Lalah Hathaway and Gregoire Maret. It was her final collaboration with her cousin, George Duke, before his death in 2013. She also remembers her mother, who passed away in 2010. Reeves shares her perspective on the significance of collaboration in jazz music, and names musicians with whom she would like to work, such as Kendrick Lamar and Meshell Ndegeocello. Reeves concludes this part of the interview by describing her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Dianne Reeves, Section A2016_060_001_009, TRT: 9:25:00 ?

Dianne Reeves narrates her photographs.