

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Helen Turner-Thompson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Turner-Thompson, Helen
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Helen Turner-Thompson,
Dates:	March 19, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:24:26).
Abstract:	Gospel musician and piano instructor Helen Turner-Thompson (1931 -) worked with the choirs of numerous churches in the Cleveland, Ohio area, including Antioch Baptist Church, Mount Zion Congregational Church, Euclid Avenue Congregational Church and Shiloh Baptist Church. Nationally, she worked with other professional musicians in the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, the Gospel Music Workshop of America and the Center for Black Music Research. Turner-Thompson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 19, 2004, in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_029
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Minister of music, pianist and educator, Helen Turner-Thompson was born on January 7, 1931. Turner-Thompson has lived most of her life in Cleveland, Ohio. A product of the Cleveland Public Schools, she studied piano privately beginning in elementary school and held a number of professional jobs before graduating from Cleveland's Central High School. She also completed additional studies at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Turner-Thompson has worked with the choirs of numerous local churches, including Antioch Baptist Church, Mount Zion Congregational Church, Euclid Avenue Congregational Church and Shiloh Baptist Church. Nationally, she has worked with other professional musicians in the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, the Gospel Music Workshop of America and the Center for Black Music Research. Turner-Thompson, who currently resides in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, also teaches classical piano to area children and is a much sought-after clinician and workshop leader.

Turner-Thompson is the recipient of numerous honors and awards including the Gospel Pioneer Award, December 2006; the Inspirational Voices of Peace Founders Harp Award, September 2007; was honored by the Gospel Music Historical Society; the TallerWorks at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum; the Women's Clergy of Greater Cleveland; the Karamu Theatre and was named a Master Artist for the Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program of the Ohio Arts Council, working with individuals interested in studying the history and performance practices of the gospel music that developed during the first half of the twentieth century.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Helen Turner-Thompson was conducted by Regennia Williams on March 19, 2004, in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Gospel musician and piano instructor Helen Turner-Thompson (1931 -) worked with the choirs of numerous churches in the Cleveland, Ohio area, including Antioch Baptist Church, Mount Zion Congregational Church, Euclid Avenue Congregational Church and Shiloh Baptist Church. Nationally, she worked with other professional musicians in the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, the Gospel Music Workshop of America and the Center for Black Music Research.

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:

Turner-Thompson, Helen

Williams, Regennia (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Turner-Thompson, Helen--Interviews

African American pianists--Interviews

Gospel musicians--Interviews

African American music teachers--Ohio--Cleveland--Interviews

Cleveland (Ohio)--Social life and customs

African American business enterprises--Ohio--Cleveland

African Americans--Genealogy

Dorsey, Thomas Andrew

National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, Inc.

Cleveland Institute of Music

Gospel music--Ohio--Cleveland--History

Gospel music--Illinois--Chicago--History

Amazing grace (Hymn)

Cleveland, James

Religion and sociology--United States

Single-parent families--United States

Civil rights movement--Ohio--Cleveland

African American women authors

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Gospel Musician

Piano Instructor

HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Helen Turner-Thompson, March 19, 2004. 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 Helen Turner-Thompson, Section A2004_029_001_001, TRT: 0:30:28 ?

Helen Turner-Thompson gives an overview of her childhood and explains her adoption. She remembers her adopted mother's background and discusses the music shop that she owned. Turner-Thompson talks about the Cleveland, Ohio neighborhood where her mother's store was located and in which she grew up. Turner-Thompson briefly mentions her sister before talking about her grandparents and their children. Next, she discusses the African American entrepreneurship that was taking place during her upbringing around Cedar and Central Avenues and lists local businesses and clubs of the time. Helen Turner-Thompson talks about her early musical performances and names teachers and musicians that were influential to her career.

African American pianists--Interviews.

Gospel musicians--Interviews.

African American music teachers--Ohio--Cleveland--Interviews.

Cleveland (Ohio)--Social life and customs.

African American business enterprises--Ohio--Cleveland.
African Americans--Genealogy.
Dorsey, Thomas Andrew.
National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses, Inc.
Cleveland Institute of Music.
Gospel music--Ohio--Cleveland--History.
Gospel music--Illinois--Chicago--History.
Amazing grace (Hymn).
Cleveland, James.
Religion and sociology--United States.
Single-parent families--United States.
Civil rights movements--Ohio--Cleveland.
African American women authors.

Video Oral History Interview with Helen Turner-Thompson, Section A2004_029_001_002, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Helen Turner-Thompson talks about her early memories of Thomas Dorsey and remembers when his National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses was held in her hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. Next, she discusses the goals of the convention. Turner-Thompson remembers major players of the Chicago and Cleveland gospel music communities. She details her music education from elementary school through her time spent at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Turner-Thompson recalls her early days in being involved in gospel and discusses how she championed the genre by demonstrating songs in public settings. Next, she remembers gospel choir Wings Over Jordan's Sunday radio broadcasts and talks about the groups' history. She then expresses her opinion of the importance of improvisation within gospel music and segues into a discussion on 'Amazing Grace'.

Video Oral History Interview with Helen Turner-Thompson, Section A2004_029_001_003, TRT: 0:29:57 ?

Helen Turner-Thompson talks about 'Amazing Grace's' and the acceptance of the song by the African American community. She then remembers how, in the 1930s, changes started occurring in gospel music and talks about how the genre evolved further in the 1940s. Turner-Thompson recalls the career of James Cleveland and explains how his style introduced a new era of gospel. Next, she compares the Thomas Dorsey and James Cleveland workshops. Turner-Thompson talks about the instrumentation used in the different styles of gospel. She expresses her opinion on traditional and contemporary styles and refers to the term 'nu-gospel'. Turner-Thompson details her various duties in the community and discusses the women's past and present roles within the church.

Video Oral History Interview with Helen Turner-Thompson, Section A2004_029_001_004, TRT: 0:30:03 ?

Helen Turner-Thompson remembers her courtship and marriage to her husband. She explains how she was able to continue performing music as a military wife while living abroad. Next, she lists her children and grandchildren. Turner-Thompson talks about the various jobs she held and explains how she balanced her career with her role as a single mother. Then she discusses the church's opinions of the Civil Rights Movement and mentions how her hometown of Cleveland, Ohio was involved in the Movement. Turner-Thompson recalls how an underground economy helped the African American community during times of need. Then she explains ways arts attracted youth to the Civil Rights

Movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Helen Turner-Thompson, Section A2004_029_001_005, TRT: 0:24:13 ?

Helen Turner-Thompson talks about women African American writers' successes. She also mentions current female gospel musicians whom she enjoys. Helen Turner-Thompson shares her concerns about the future of gospel music. We are then treated to a short performance by Turner-Thompson before she narrates photos from throughout her life.

Video Oral History Interview with Helen Turner-Thompson, Section A2004_029_Turner-Thompson_Helen_06_MED_002, TRT: