

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Freda Payne

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Payne, Freda
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Freda Payne,
Dates:	April 28, 2005 and October 7, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:44:39).
Abstract:	Stage actress and singer Freda Payne (1942 -) pressed twenty-one albums, including the hit single, Band of Gold. Payne was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 28, 2005 and October 7, 2005, in Los Angeles, California and West Hollywood, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_113
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer and actress Freda Charcelia Payne was born September 19, 1942, in Detroit, Michigan, to Frederick and Charsilee Payne. Payne attended Palmer Elementary School and Crossman Elementary School; she also modeled and took ballet and Afro-Cuban dance. In 1956, while at Hutchins Middle School, Payne appeared on the nationally televised *Ted Mack's The Original Amateur Hour*; singing jingles, she was featured on WJR radio's *Make Way for Youth*, in addition to many other local television and radio shows. Payne's mother spurned a contract from the then unknown Barry Gordy. When she graduated from Central High School in 1959, Payne began touring with Pearl Bailey's musical review and sang with the Duke Ellington Band. Payne's first album was *After the Lights Go Down* for ABC's Impulse Records in 1962.

Moving to New York City in 1963, Payne made appearances on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*, *The Merv Griffin Show* and *The Dick Cavette Show*. In 1964, Payne joined the Four Tops, Billy Eckstine, and Nipsey Russell on the Quincy Jones Tour. Payne was understudy for Leslie Uggams in Broadway's *Hallelujah Baby!* in 1967; she also performed in the Equity Theatre production of *Lost in the Stars*. Stardom for Payne began when she signed with Invictus Records, a label run by her old Detroit friends Brian Holland, Edward Holland, Jr., and Lamont Dozier (formerly of Motown) in 1969. Payne's smash single *Band of Gold*, released in 1970, was ranked #1 in the United Kingdom and #3 in the United States; it was her first gold record. Payne's other hits included *Deeper and Deeper*, *You Brought Me Joy*, and the anti-war, *Bring the Boys Home*.

As her star kept rising, Payne began appearing in television specials and touring the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan. Although she left Invictus in 1973, Payne continued recording, pressing twenty-one albums, including several remakes of *Band of Gold*. In 1974, Payne made the cover of *Jet* magazine after she was dubbed a Dame of Malta, by the Knights of Malta and the Sovereign Military, and Hospital Order of St. John of Jerusalem by the Prince of Rumania. Payne hosted *Today's Black Woman*, a talk show, in 1980 and 1981, before joining the cast of Duke Ellington's *Sophisticated Ladies* in 1982. Payne also starred in productions of *Ain't Misbehavin'* with Della Reese, *The Blues in the Night*, *Jellies Last Jam* with Gregory Hines and Savion Glover in the 1990s. Payne's

film appearances include: *Private Obsession* in 1995; *Sprung* in 1997; *Ragdoll* in 1999; *The Nutty Professor II: The Klumps* in 2000; and *Fire and Ice* in 2001.

Returning to her jazz roots, Payne later toured with Darlene Love in a critically acclaimed revue entitled Love and Payne.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Freda Payne was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 28, 2005 and October 7, 2005, in Los Angeles, California and West Hollywood, California, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Stage actress and singer Freda Payne (1942 -) pressed twenty-one albums, including the hit single, Band of Gold.

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:

Payne, Freda

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Payne, Freda--Interviews

African American women singers--Interviews

African American actresses--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

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 Freda Payne, April 28, 2005 and October 7, 2005. 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 Freda Payne, Section A2005_113_001_001, TRT: 0:28:33 ?

Freda Payne was born on September 19, 1942 in Detroit, Michigan. Her mother, Charsilee Hickman Farley, born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1920, had a grandfather who played in a popular band in the South around the turn of the century. Payne's mother moved to Detroit when she was three years old, and, after graduating from High School of Commerce, worked for the city as a clerk in the Detroit Housing Commission and was an avid bridge player. Payne's father, Frederick Payne, was born in Ashville, North Carolina in the 1910s. His family had connections to the Vanderbilts; a great-grandfather worked for them as a butler and an aunt had collected many of their family artifacts, but threw them down a well. Payne's father moved to Detroit as a young man and worked for the Ford Motor Company. Payne's parents likely met at Bethel A.M.E. Church, right next door to her father's apartment, which they both attended. Though the pair divorced when Payne was three years old, she still saw her father on weekend visits.

African American women singers--Interviews.

African American actresses--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Freda Payne, Section A2005_113_001_002, TRT: 0:28:46 ?

Freda Payne grew up with her sister, singer HistoryMaker Scherrie Payne, in Detroit, Michigan. In their predominately black neighborhood, they frequented the Regent Theater to watch movie stars Aubrey Hepburn and Dorothy Dandridge, and witnessed occasional fights between couples, including their maternal grandmother and step-grandfather. Shy and tomboyish, Payne began school at Palmer Elementary and studied piano at Detroit Institute of Musical Arts when she was five. After moving to a different neighborhood, she attended Caroline Crossman Elementary, then Hutchins Middle School where she had her first starring role in 'Amahl and the Night Visitors.' Her uncle introduced her to jazz and classical music. At twelve, Payne stopped taking piano lessons after discovering her talent for singing, which she displayed by winning local talent contests. At age thirteen, she appeared on 'Ed McKenzie's Saturday Night,' a locally televised dance party, then on Ted Mack's 'The Original Amateur Hour' at fourteen.

Video Oral History Interview with Freda Payne, Section A2005_113_001_003, TRT: 0:28:24 ?

Freda Payne initially had to be coaxed to sing as a shy twelve year old. At fourteen, she flew to New York City for a taping of her appearance on Ted Mack's nationally syndicated 'The Original Amateur Hour.' She won second place with her rendition of 'From This Moment On.' While still a student at Central High School in Detroit, Michigan, she garnered success, singing on Don Large's local radio show 'Make Way for Youth' with The Three Debs. HistoryMaker Berry Gordy of Motown, a family acquaintance, wrote three songs for Payne and asked her to sign to the fledgling label but, upon reviewing the contact with her mother, she declined. Gordy approached Payne again after Motown was more established with the same results. Payne reflects upon his label's success and her career path. In 1959, after graduating from Central, she successfully auditioned for the Pearl Bailey Revue. As a backup singer, she toured with the show in Cincinnati, Ohio; New York City; and Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Freda Payne, Section A2005_113_001_004, TRT: 0:28:53 ?

Freda Payne's first performed professionally a backup singer in the Pearl Bailey Revue in 1959. As the youngest person on tour, she was assigned a chaperone. Though she disliked being required to wear the same scent and makeup as Bailey, she appreciated learning about show business from a veteran performer. The same family friend who recommended her for the Pearl Bailey Revue introduced Payne to Mercer Ellington, and he invited Payne to audition for his father, Duke Ellington. After she performed with his band in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Duke Ellington offered Payne a ten year contract with a fixed salary, which she turned down on her mother's advice. Payne recalls how she and other black performers, including Ellington, were not allowed to stay in the segregated hotels on the strip in Las Vegas during the early 1960s. Payne appeared with HistoryMaker Quincy Jones during Motown's rise in popularity. Payne's first album, 'After the Lights Go Down Low and Much More!!!' was released on Impulse! Records in 1964.

Video Oral History Interview with Freda Payne, Section A2005_113_001_005, TRT: 0:28:35 ?

Freda Payne's first and second recordings, in 1964 and 1965 respectively, were with Impulse! Records. In 1966, she recorded 'How Do You Say I Don't Love You Anymore' for MGM. Payne appeared on several talk shows. A frequent guest on 'The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson,' she once was on the show with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and HistoryMaker Harry Belafonte. While in Los Angeles, she was mistakenly rumored to be dating Marlon Brando when he gave her a ride home one evening. Payne was an understudy for Leslie Uggams in the 1967 Broadway show 'Hallelujah Baby!' and played her role several times during its run. While performing in Kurt Weill's play, 'Lost in the Stars,' she learned of King's assassination and witnessed the violent aftermath in New York City. That same year, she signed with the fledgling Invictus Records after its founders left Motown. Two of her most popular singles, 'Band of Gold' and 'Bring the Boys Home,' were produced for the label. Payne talks about the songs' meanings.

Video Oral History Interview with Freda Payne, Section A2005_113_001_006, TRT: 0:29:44 ?

Freda Payne re-recorded her anti-Vietnam War song 'Bring the Boys Home' twice, each time altering the lyrics to address more recent conflicts. In addition to her many hit singles, she appeared in several movie including 'The Book of Numbers.' In the early 1970s, Payne sued her label, Invictus. After a deal with ABC Records, she signed with Capitol Records in 1976 and recorded three albums while continuing to act. In the mid-1970s, Payne was named Dame of the Knights of Malta, a Roman Catholic lay religious order founded in 1099 in Jerusalem. She married Gregory Abbott in 1976 and had one son, Gregory Abbott, Jr. The couple later divorced. In 1980 and 1981, she hosted a talk show, 'Today's Black Woman.' Noted guests included Shirley Chisholm, Natalie Cole, and HistoryMakers Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., and Earl G. Graves, Sr. After the show's cancellation, she appeared in Duke Ellington's 'Sophisticated Ladies' and other shows including the cabaret 'Love and Payne' with Darlene Love.

Video Oral History Interview with Freda Payne, Section A2005_113_001_007, TRT: 0:23:00 ?

Freda Payne studied singers such as Nancy Wilson, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, and Eydie Gormie in her early career. She enjoys the music of singer Thelma Houston, who had the hit record 'Sunshower.' In sharing her thoughts about contemporary singers, Payne notes a focus on image that supersedes concern for technique. Payne considers how drugs and alcohol derailed the careers of many talented performers and attributes her success, in part, to

avoiding substance abuse. Payne talks about her hopes and concerns for the African American community, including curbing drug use. In response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the black community, Payne supports the Minority AIDS Initiative. Payne talks about her family, her health and workout regimen. She reflects upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Freda Payne, Section A2005_113_002_008, TRT: 0:28:44 ?
Freda Payne narrates her photographs.