

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Nancy Wilson

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Wilson, Nancy, 1937-2018
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Nancy Wilson,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 15, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:53:21).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Singer Nancy Wilson (1937 - 2018) was a multi Grammy Award winning singer who recorded more than fifty albums, including 'How Glad I Am,' 'The Two of Us' and, 'Love, Nancy.' Wilson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 15, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_328
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Nancy Wilson was born on February 20, 1937 in Chillicothe, Ohio, to Olden Wilson, an iron foundry worker, and Lillian Ryan. Wilson attended Burnside Heights Elementary School and developed her singing skills by participating in church choirs. She attended West High School in Columbus, Ohio where she won a talent contest and was rewarded with a role as a host for a local television show. She then went on to attend Ohio's Central State University where she pursued her B.A. degree in education.

In 1956, Wilson auditioned and won a spot as a vocalist for Rusty Bryant's Carolyn Club Band. Afterwards, she moved to New York where she began working as a secretary at the New York Institute of Technology. While in New York, Wilson became friends with jazz saxophonist "Cannonball" Adderley who introduced her to her manager John Levy. With Levy's help, she landed a record deal with Capitol Records and released her songs "Guess Who I Saw Today" and "Sometimes I'm Happy." After touring and performing at the Coconut Grove in Los Angeles, California and the Sahara Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada, Wilson's album *Tell Me The Truth* was released, and the following year, she won a Grammy Award for her album *How Glad I Am*. Wilson was the host of the *Nancy Wilson Show* from 1967 to 1968 and has appeared on several television shows and films throughout her career including *I Spy* and *The Cosby Show*.

After Wilson won her second Grammy Award with her album the *Nancy Wilson Show*, she went on to record overseas in Japan. In 1983, she was declared the winner of the annual Tokyo Song Festival. During the 1980s, Wilson released several albums including *The Two of Us*, *Forbidden Lover* and her fifty-second released album *A Lady With A Song*. Wilson was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1991 and in 1992, she was presented with the Whitney Young Jr. Award by the National Urban League. In 1994, after winning the Turner Broadcasting Trumpet Award for Outstanding Achievement, her album *Love, Nancy* was released. In the late 1990s, she became involved with MCG Jazz, a youth education program and a non-profit, minority-directed, arts and learning organization located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Wilson was inducted into the Big Band and Jazz

Hall of Fame in 1999 and from 1996 to 2005, she was the host of the Washington, D.C based radio program, *The Jazz Profiles*. In 2007, Wilson celebrated her seventieth birthday with an all-star event hosted by Arsenio Hall.

Wilson passed away on December 13, 2018.

Nancy Wilson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 15, 2007.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Nancy Wilson was conducted by Merri Dee on November 15, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Singer Nancy Wilson (1937 - 2018) was a multi Grammy Award winning singer who recorded more than fifty albums, including 'How Glad I Am,' 'The Two of Us' and, 'Love, Nancy.'

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# 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®.

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# 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.

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# Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

## Persons:

Wilson, Nancy, 1937-2018

Dee, Merri (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wilson, Nancy, 1937-2018 --Interviews

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African American singers--Interviews

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Women jazz singers--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Singer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

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## 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 Nancy Wilson, November 15, 2007. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Nancy Wilson, Section A2007\_328\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:56 ?

Nancy Wilson was born on February 20, 1937 in Chillicothe, Ohio to Lillian Ryan Manis and Olden Wilson. Wilson's paternal great-grandmother was Native American, and her paternal grandfather, Albert Wilson, was a construction worker in Georgia. Born in Hephzibah, Georgia, Wilson's father was a chef at a restaurant in Columbus, Ohio, and later worked as a supervisor for The Jeffrey Manufacturing Company. Wilson's parents divorced when she was five years old, and she and her brother, Michael Wilson, grew up with their father and stepmother, Bertha Trout Wilson, in Chillicothe. In their household, Wilson was the oldest of six children, including her four half-siblings. She developed her vocal talent from an early age, performing spirituals and secular songs at the Baptist church with the encouragement of her paternal grandmother, Anna Jackson Wilson. Wilson attended a one-room schoolhouse through the eighth grade, and then matriculated to the majority white West High School in Columbus.

African American singers--Interviews.

Women jazz singers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Nancy Wilson, Section A2007\_328\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:18 ?

Nancy Wilson grew up in the Burnside Heights neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio, where she performed as a singer from an early age. She sang at venues like the Club Regal and the Hotel Litchford while a student at Columbus' West High School; and, when she auditioned for a singing contest, the production studio offered Wilson her own television show, 'Skyline Melodies.' She also recorded the song 'Caravan' with Rusty Bryant's band. Upon graduating, Wilson enrolled at Central State College in Wilberforce, Ohio, and continued to perform with Bryant's group before pursuing a solo career. With support from Ohio musicians like Cannonball Adderley, she moved to New York City in 1959, and secured a deal with Capitol Records after a successful performance at Sylvia's Blue Morocco. John Levy became Wilson's manager, and David Cavanaugh produced her early albums. To supplement her income, she worked as a switchboard operator at the New York Institute of Technology. Later, entertainer Frank Silvera advised her about acting.

Video Oral History Interview with Nancy Wilson, Section A2007\_328\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:05 ?

Nancy Wilson signed a contract as a solo vocalist with Capitol Records, where manager John Levy and producer David Cavanaugh furthered her career. In New York City, she met musicians Arthur Prysock and Al Hibbler, and performed at clubs like Basin Street East and the Waldorf Astoria. Wilson recorded with pianist George Shearing on her early album, 'The Swingin's Mutual,' and with trumpeter Billy May on 'Something Wonderful,' which included her hit song, "Guess Who I Saw Today." While touring internationally, Wilson received letters from drummer Kenneth Dennis; and, upon her return to the United States, they married in Compton, California. Dennis joined Wilson's band, which also featured the Freddy Martin orchestra and conductor Ronnell Bright. Wilson had a son, Kenneth Dennis, Jr., before they divorced. In 1964, Wilson recorded live at the Cocolanut Grove nightclub in Los Angeles. After acting in the 'I Spy' television series in 1966, she made frequent appearances on programs like 'The Carol Burnett Show.'

Video Oral History Interview with Nancy Wilson, Section A2007\_328\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:34 ?

Nancy Wilson first listened to vocalists like Billy Eckstine, Big Maybelle and Ruth Brown as a young girl in Columbus, Ohio. Later, she recorded with Cannonball Adderley for her fourth album on Capitol Records, 'Nancy Wilson/Cannonball Adderley.' Wilson won Grammy Awards for the song "(You Don't Know) How Glad I Am," and for her albums, 'R.S.V.P. (Rare Songs, Very Personal)' and 'Turned to Blue.' Following the death of her brother, Anthony Wilson, Wilson was baptized by Reverend Wiley Burton, whom she married one month later in Las Vegas, Nevada. Burton and Wilson had two daughters, Samantha Burton Majied and Sheryl Burton Wells; and, at the time of the interview, two grandsons, Sol Majied and Shane Wells, who were born a week apart. Wilson remembers her manager, John Levy, whom she employed for most of her career; and disc jockeys Sid McCoy and Johnny Magnus, who contributed to her success by giving her songs frequent air time. She also talks about the music industry at the time of the interview.

Video Oral History Interview with Nancy Wilson, Section A2007\_328\_001\_005, TRT: 0:26:16 ?

Nancy Wilson won her first Grammy Award in 1964 for the song '(You Don't Know) How Glad I Am.' From the 1980s, Wilson performed as a trio with drummer Roy McCurdy and pianist Llew Matthews, with whom she travelled to Japan to record with bassist John B. Williams for the Sony Corporation. Later, in the United States, she joined Columbia Records, and collaborated with bassist Randy Jackson and drummer Andre Fischer. At this point in the interview, Wilson talks about the development of her songs, including 'Guess Who I Saw Today,' which was originally recorded by Carmen McRae; and 'You Can Have Him,' which was written by Irving Berlin. She also describes her favorite vocalists, including Sarah Vaughan and Jimmy Scott, and her notable performance reviews. Wilson received the Whitney Young Award from the Chicago Urban League, and performed with singer Clifton Davis at the United Negro College Fund's inaugural 'Lou Rawls Parade of Stars.' Her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame was unveiled in 1991.

Video Oral History Interview with Nancy Wilson, Section A2007\_328\_001\_006, TRT: 0:31:12 ?

Nancy Wilson continued her involvement with the United Negro College Fund following her performance in the inaugural 'Lou Rawls Parade of Stars.' Wilson was active with the National Minority AIDS Council, and served with her husband, Reverend Wiley Burton, in the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, a teaching facility of the Bidwell Training Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Through the guild, she recorded albums like 'A Nancy Wilson Christmas.' Wilson remembers recording with pianists Ramsey Lewis and Gene Harris, and saxophonist Cannonball Adderley; and performing with singers James Ingram and Kenny Lattimore. At the time of the interview, she was recording a new album of original material. Wilson talks about the hip hop genre; and her song, '(You Don't Know) How Glad I Am.' She also reflects upon her life and legacy, her hopes for the African American community and how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Nancy Wilson, Section  
A2007\_328\_NANCY\_WILSON\_06\_MED\_002, TRT: 0:02:55 ?

This tape contains footage of Nancy Wilson and Merri Dee wish Clarence Walrden a happy birthday.