

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Vy Higginsen

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Higginsen, Vy
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Vy Higginsen,
Dates:	May 16, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:24:19).
Abstract:	Stage producer and radio personality Vy Higginsen (1945 -) became the first woman on prime time radio for WBLS. Higginsen also wrote, "Mama I Want To Sing," which, became the longest running black off-Broadway musical. As an author, Higginsen's published works include: "Mama I Want to Sing," "This is My Song," "The Positive Zone," and, "Harlem Is." Higginsen is also CEO and founder of the Mama Foundation for the Arts, an organization dedicated to the preservation of gospel music and black history. Higginsen was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 16, 2001, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_036
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Producer, author, playwright and radio personality, Vy Higginsen has been instrumental in making a place for minorities and women in the media and the arts. Higginsen was born in Harlem to a minister father and devout Christian mother. Even though her father died when she was an infant, the family continued their involvement in the church where a young Higginsen was profoundly influenced by its sights, sounds and vocal traditions.

Higginsen attended the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, believing that she wanted a career as a buyer. Not long after, she decided that the fashion industry was not for her and was hired by Ebony Magazine, becoming its first female sales representative. During her tenure there, Higginsen became increasingly interested in radio and enrolled at a school for broadcasting. The well-known radio personality Frankie Crocker recruited Higginsen to WBLS. She became the first woman on prime time radio. During this time, Higginsen also launched a lifestyle magazine, *Unique NY*.

It was while vacationing in the Caribbean that Higginsen and husband Ken Wydro developed the idea of writing a musical partially based on the life of Higginsen's sister, well-known African American singer Doris Troy. Debuting in 1983, *Mama I Want To Sing*, became the longest running black off-Broadway musical. Higginsen also co-wrote and produced *Sing! Mama 2* and *Born to Sing! Mama 3*. As an author, Higginsen's published works include: *Mama I Want to Sing*, *This is My Song*, and *The Positive Zone* and *Harlem Is*.

Higginsen is presently studying for the ministry and serves as the CEO of the Mama Foundation for the Arts, an organization dedicated to the preservation of gospel music and black history.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Vy Higginsen was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 16, 2001, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Stage producer and radio personality Vy Higginsen (1945 -) became the first woman on prime time radio for WBLS. Higginsen also wrote, "Mama I Want To Sing," which, became the longest running black off-Broadway musical. As an author, Higginsen's published works include: "Mama I Want to Sing," "This is My Song," "The Positive Zone," and, "Harlem Is." Higginsen is also CEO and founder of the Mama Foundation for the Arts, an organization dedicated to the preservation of gospel music and black history.

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:

Higginsen, Vy

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Higginsen, Vy--Interviews

African American radio broadcasters--Interviews.

African American theatrical producers and directors--Interviews.

Authors and publishers--Interviews.

Fashion Institute of Technology (New York, N.Y.).

Troy, Doris, 1937-2004.

Mothers and daughters.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Stage Producer

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Vy Higginsen, May 16, 2001. 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 Vy Higginsen, Section A2001_036_001_001, TRT: 0:28:29 ?

Stage playwright Vy Higginsen details her early life and family history. She discusses her life in the Bronx as one of four siblings and her mother's struggles to keep her family intact. She also discusses her childhood personality and lists the schools she attended in the Bronx.

African American radio broadcasters--Interviews.

African American theatrical producers and directors--Interviews.

Authors and publishers--Interviews.

Fashion Institute of Technology (New York, N.Y.).

Troy, Doris, 1937-2004.

Mothers and daughters.

Video Oral History Interview with Vy Higginsen, Section A2001_036_001_002, TRT: 0:31:00 ?

Playwright Vy Higginsen details her sister Doris Troy's career as a singer and how she was mesmerized by it. Higginsen explains how tagging along with her sister on travels and adventures later came to influence her play, *Mama, I Want to Sing*. Higginsen also recalls her stint at the Fashion Institute of Technology and uncanny luck in landing a position as the first woman DJ at WLIB radio.

Video Oral History Interview with Vy Higginsen, Section A2001_036_001_003, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Playwright Vy Higginsen discusses her early taste of celebrity as New York City's first black female DJ on WBLS. She also details her courtship with future husband, Ken Wydro and his encouragement to transfer her family story to the stage. Higginsen then recalls the creative process of her musical, *Mama, I Want to Sing*.

Video Oral History Interview with Vy Higginsen, Section A2001_036_001_004, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Playwright Vy Higginsen discusses the motivation behind her creation of the first hugely successful and long running musical, *Mama, I Want to Sin'*. She details her family's involvement in all aspects of the play, front and backstage. Higginsen also reflects on the other projects which flowed from the success of *Mama*.

Video Oral History Interview with Vy Higginsen, Section A2001_036_001_005, TRT: 0:24:40 ?

Playwright Vy Higginsen expresses deep concern about the negative influences on America's youth, black youth in particular. She also reflects upon her career and the influence her mother had upon her life's choices.