

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marilyn McCoo

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McCoo, Marilyn
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marilyn McCoo,
Dates:	June 29, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	4 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:32:16).
Abstract:	Singer and actress Marilyn McCoo (1943 -) is an eight-time Grammy Award-winning singer and an original member of The 5th Dimension. She has also hosted television shows, appeared on Broadway, and acted in a number of movies. McCoo is co-author, with her husband Billy Davis, Jr., of <i>Up, Up and Away...How We Found Love, Faith and Lasting Marriage in the Entertainment World</i> . McCoo was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 29, 2014, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_178
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer and actress Marilyn McCoo was born on September 30, 1943 in Jersey City, New Jersey. Her parents, Mary and Waymon McCoo, were both doctors and moved the family to Los Angeles, California when McCoo was seven years old. She graduated from Dorsey High School and went on to attend the University of California-Los Angeles, where she received her B.S. degree in business administration.

In 1962, McCoo entered the Miss Bronze California beauty pageant where she won the Grand Talent award and met Lamonte McLemore, who asked her to join his singing group, the Hi-Fi's. She went on to perform with Ray Charles and record the single "Lonesome Mood." The Hi-Fi's disbanded in 1965, and that same year McCoo, McLemore, Florence LaRue, Ron Townson, and Billy Davis, Jr. formed The Versatiles. The group signed to the Soul City label, changed their name to The 5th Dimension, and recorded their first hit in 1966, "Go Where You Wanna Go." In 1967, they released "Up, Up, and Away," which won four Grammy Awards and was the title track to the 5th Dimension's first hit album. In 1969, The 5th Dimension released *The Age of Aquarius*. The album's first single, "Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In," became a mega-hit and occupied the number one spot on the charts for six weeks. It earned the group two more Grammy Awards, including Record of the Year.

In 1969, McCoo married bandmate Billy Davis, Jr., and in 1975, they left The 5th Dimension. Together, they released 1976's *I Hope We Get To Love In Time*, featuring the single, "You Don't Have to Be a Star (To Be in My Show)." The song went straight to number one on the Billboard Hot 100 and earned the duo a Grammy Award for Best R&B Performance by a Duo, Group or Chorus. McCoo and Davis went on to host *The Marilyn McCoo & Billy Davis Jr. Show* on CBS in 1977. In the 1980s McCoo hosted the music countdown show *Solid Gold*. She also had a recurring spot on the soap opera *Days of Our Lives* in the 1980s, and acted in a number of movies. She appeared on stage in productions of *Anything Goes*, *A...My Name is Alice*, *Man of La Mancha*, and the Broadway

production of *Show Boat*.

McCoo released a solo album, *Solid Gold*, in 1983, and then a gospel album in 1991 entitled *The Me Nobody Knows*; its title single went to number one on the gospel charts. She received another Grammy Award the following year for participating as a guest artist on Quincy Jones' *Handel's Messiah: A Soulful Celebration*, which won Best Contemporary Soul Gospel Album. In 2004, McCoo and Davis co-authored the book *Up, Up and Away...How We Found Love, Faith and Lasting Marriage in the Entertainment World*.

McCoo has also earned a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and The 5th Dimension was inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in 2002. She has received two honorary doctorate degrees and served on the boards of the Children's Miracle Network, the Los Angeles Mission, and the Cancer Research Foundation.

Marilyn McCoo was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 29, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marilyn McCoo was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 29, 2014, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 4 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Singer and actress Marilyn McCoo (1943 -) is an eight-time Grammy Award-winning singer and an original member of The 5th Dimension. She has also hosted television shows, appeared on Broadway, and acted in a number of movies. McCoo is co-author, with her husband Billy Davis, Jr., of *Up, Up and Away...How We Found Love, Faith and Lasting Marriage in the Entertainment World*.

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:

McCoo, Marilyn

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
McCoo, Marilyn--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Singer

Actress

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 Marilyn McCoo, June 29, 2014. 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 Marilyn McCoo, Section A2014_178_001_001, TRT: 1:28:07 ?

Marilyn McCoo describes her family history. Her mother, Mary Ellen Holloway McCoo, was born on January 14, 1913 in Charleston, South Carolina to Leticia Campbell Holloway and William Holloway. William Holloway was a Pullman porter and eventually moved his family to New Jersey. Inspired by Dr. Lena Edwards to pursue medicine, McCoo's mother attended Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee and later became an anesthesiologist. McCoo's father, Wayman McCoo, was born on March 9th, 1909 in Eufaula, Alabama to Anna Coffee McCoo and Thomas McCoo. Thomas McCoo was a doctor and a graduate of Leonard Medical Center who played a role in the integration of Eufaula, Alabama. Wayman McCoo also graduated from Meharry Medical School and became a general practitioner. Prior to becoming a doctor, Wayman McCoo pursued a singing career and sang with Fletcher Henderson. McCoo's parents met at school and moved to Columbus, Georgia before settling down in Los Angeles, California when McCoo was seven years old.

Video Oral History Interview with Marilyn McCoo, Section A2014_178_001_002, TRT: 2:28:48 ?

Marilyn McCoo talks about her childhood in Columbus, Georgia and her family's move to a diverse neighborhood on 10th Avenue in Los Angeles, California. Interstate-10 would later run through the neighborhood, changing the community. In Los Angeles, McCoo attended Arlington Heights Elementary, Mount Vernon Junior High School, Los Angeles High School and then Dorsey High School. She developed an early passion for show business by singing with her family, entering talent shows and participating in theatre. McCoo's parents attended different churches, but her father's involvement with his church choir encouraged her musical interests. Her parents also encouraged her musical abilities by arranging for voice lessons. McCoo credits her vocal coach, Eddie Beal and high school choir teacher, Rudy Salzer with helping her develop her musical skills. She remembers appearing on the 'Art Linkletter Show.' As a youth, McCoo was influenced by Sarah Vaughan and HistoryMakers Della Reese and Eartha Kitt.

Video Oral History Interview with Marilyn McCoo, Section A2014_178_001_003, TRT: 3:29:58 ?

Marilyn McCoo enjoyed singing in school and with her sisters as a youth. After graduating from Dorsey High School in Los Angeles, California in 1960, she wanted to pursue an entertainment career, but family pressure led her to attend the University of California, Los Angeles where she studied theater arts. While in college, McCoo studied music privately with classical vocal teacher Florence Russell. In 1962, she competed in Miss Bronze California and won the Grand Talent Award. During the pageant, she met photographer and HistoryMaker Lamonte McLemore. McLemore brought McCoo into the Hi-Fi's, and later shot her centerfold in Jet magazine. McCoo talks about the Hi-Fi's early performances and musical development. She also describes her friendship with actress Vonetta McGee. When the Hi-Fi's began touring with Ray Charles, McCoo discovered the challenges of being a woman in the entertainment world.

As a result, when McCoo returned to college, she changed her major to business administration.

Video Oral History Interview with Marilyn McCoo, Section A2014_178_001_004, TRT: 4:05:23 ?

Marilyn McCoo decided to leave the Hi-Fi's in 1964 after the group toured with Ray Charles. Although she enjoyed performing with the Hi-Fi's, McCoo wanted to pursue a solo career and complete her studies. Before returning to school, McCoo worked for her mentor and former vocal coach, Eddie Beal as a secretary. She then resumed her studies at the University of California, Los Angeles and graduated in 1965 with a bachelor's degree in business administration. McCoo remained focused on her music career, but did not have a clear path outlined. The Hi-Fi's disbanded after McCoo's departure, but she remained friends with several members of the group.