



Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs,
Dates:	October 4, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:48:44).
Abstract:	Violinist Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs (1963 -) is most well known for her 1993 performance during Yanni's Live at the Acropolis. She has also performed with Soul II Soul, the Wu Tang Clan, En Vogue and Chaka Khan. Briggs was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 4, 2004, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_191
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Violinist Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs was born in New York City on August 12, 1963, and grew up in Portsmouth, Virginia. At an early age, Briggs displayed a natural talent for the violin and began playing many pieces by ear. While in high school, she received her first paying job, performing at a wedding for twenty dollars.

After graduating from high school in 1981, Briggs attended Norfolk State College where she majored in music education and mass media. In 1983, during her sophomore year in college, she began playing with the Virginia Symphony where she performed for four years. She returned to New York City where she won three "Amateur Nights at The Apollo Theater." After getting married in 1988 and moving to Los Angeles, California, Briggs began performing regularly at the jazz club Marla's Memory Lane. In 1989, Briggs embarked on her first professional tour with Soul II Soul, performing throughout America and Japan. In 1991, Briggs successfully auditioned for Yanni, the Greek-American new age keyboard composer. Briggs most notable performance was during "Yanni Live: At the Acropolis" wearing the now infamous red dress. Following this performance, she spent the next thirteen years touring and recording with Yanni, in "Tribute" which was performed both at the Taj Mahal in Agra, India and in the Forbidden City, in China.

Briggs made her Carnegie Hall debut in 1994, performing with pianist Dave Grusin. She has also performed with a number of other artists over the years, including Stanley Clarke, the Wu Tang Clan, En Vogue and Chaka Khan. At the time of the interview, some of her current projects included recording with Hidden Beach Records and performing with the Unrapped Band.

Karen Briggs was interviewed by "The HistoryMakers" on October 4, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs was conducted by Larry Crowe on October 4, 2004, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Violinist Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs (1963 -) is most well known for her 1993 performance during Yanni's Live at the Acropolis. She has also performed with Soul II Soul, the Wu Tang Clan, En Vogue and Chaka Khan.

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:

Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs--Interviews

African American musicians--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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 Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs, October 4, 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 8/22/2011 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, October 4, 2004

Video Oral History Interview with Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs, Section A2004_191_001_001, TRT: 0:30:24 2004/10/04

Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs discusses her family history. Her mother, Ruthie Powell, was born in Accomack County, Virginia in November of 1927. Powell worked in the health care services industry as a candy striper, often helping the elderly and poor. Her father, Frank Briggs, Jr., was born in New York City on April 7th during the 1930s. He played the saxophone and sang in a Doo-Wop group that was featured in the book "They All Sing on the Corner." Briggs remembers her family as being musical with most members of her family having pianos in their homes. Before the Briggs family moved to Virginia they

lived in Harlem, New York and Inglewood, New Jersey. Briggs remembers the atmosphere of living in Virginia as being similar to village life, because her family and her extended family all lived on the same block.

African American families--New Jersey--Inglewood.

African American parents--Virginia

Doo-wop (Music)

African American musicians--Virginia.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs, Section A2004_191_001_002, TRT: 0:30:42 2004/10/04

Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs discusses her early career as a violinist. As a teenager in Virginia, she became the head mistress of her class orchestra although she did not practice regularly. Briggs was introverted as a child causing her to channel all of her energies into playing the violin. Noel Pointer was the first African American jazz violinist Briggs experienced as a teenager. The first time Briggs played her unique musical style was in Virginia at The Ms. Wilson Pageant held at Woodrow Wilson High School. She came in as runner up in the pageant, but subsequently performed at a wedding for twenty dollars. At fifteen, she regularly played with her father, Frank Briggs Jr., and other jazz professionals in jam sessions. When she performed the Dizzie Gillespie piece "A Night in Tunisia" at a session the reception was so great that she committed herself to playing jazz violin.

African American women violinists--Virginia

Introversion in children

Pointer, Noel

Gillespie, Dizzy, 1917-1993.

Violin music (jazz)--Performance.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs, Section A2004_191_001_003, TRT: 0:30:10 2004/10/04

Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs discusses attending Norfolk State University. As a college student, she remembers her professors not supporting her unique musical style. As the first member of her family to attend college Briggs was unfamiliar with the strict curriculum she was expected to follow. During her sophomore year in college, Briggs was a member of the Virginia Symphony. Briggs found the conformity of the classical orchestra oppressive and decided to move to New York City to pursue a jazz career. While in New York City, she won Amateur Night at the Apollo Theater three times. In 1988 she moved to Los Angeles, California, to be with her husband and began playing regularly at Marla's Memory Lane. In 1990, Briggs booked her first professional tour with Soul II Soul as a member of a 100 piece ensemble. She also briefly toured with the keyboardist Milcho Leviev, Tutti Heath and bassist Nedra Wheeler in Bulgaria.

Norfolk State University (Va.)

African American college students--Virginia--Norfolk.

Virginia Symphony

African American jazz musicians--New York (N.Y.).

Jazz clubs--California--Los Angeles.

Soul II Soul (Musical group)

Leviev, Milcho

Wheeler, Nedra, 1961-

Concert tours--Bulgaria.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs, Section A2004_191_001_004,
TRT: 0:31:14 2004/10/04

Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs describes auditioning for Yanni's tour. The audition process was difficult, but she was hired due to her ability to play along with a performance of Yanni's "Within Attraction." During the tour, Linda Evans, Yanni's wife, successfully suggested Briggs as the soloist for the "Yanni Live at the Acropolis" video. Linda Stokes designed the infamous red dress for Briggs' solo performance. In 1993, when "Yanni Live at the Acropolis" aired on PBS, Briggs became famous. Her commodity value also increased, allowing her to perform on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" and "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno." After her success, Briggs continued to work with Yanni for the next thirteen years. Her daughter Kai was born during the height of Briggs' Yanni induced fame. After Yanni, she became a member of the jazz fusion band Vertu with Stanley Clark, Lenny White, Richie Kotzen and Rachel Z.

Yanni

Jazz--Auditions.

Evans, Linda, 1942-

Oprah Winfrey Show.

Tonight show (Television program)

Jazz-rock (Music)

Clark, Stanley, 1957-

White, Lenny

Kotzen, Richie

Z., Rachel

Vertu (Musical group)

Video Oral History Interview with Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs, Section A2004_191_001_005,
TRT: 0:29:17 2004/10/04

Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs discusses touring with Vertu and their subsequent breakup. Around the time of Vertu's breakup, Briggs witnessed her father sober for the first time—he was recuperating from triple bypass surgery. After performing with Yanni Briggs realized that her genre of music could sell records. Regina Carter, Vanessa Mae, and Miri Ben Ari are similar violinist who all saw success during this time. Looking back on her life she would have walked away from Yanni when "Live at the Acropolis" was successful to pursue her solo career. Briggs believes that the violin is a tool of expression and that it is influenced by the musician's environment. She hopes that the African American community will let go of the damage slavery has caused to the community. She believes that African Americans are different from other enslaved Africans because there are no remnants of African culture within their American society.

Vertu (Musical group)

Alcoholic fathers--Family relationships

Violin music (jazz).

Stringed instrument music

Slavery--America--History.

Video Oral History Interview with Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs, Section A2004_191_001_006,
TRT: 0:16:57 2004/10/04

Karen "Lady in Red" Briggs discusses what she would like her legacy to be. She hopes that her legacy will be that she had the courage to pursue a unique style of music. Being unique was a value her father instilled in her as a child by telling her not to copy anyone else. She would also like to be remembered as a person that realized her dreams, in being successful with her own brand of music. She still has hopes that she will be successful without the help of Yanni. Her daughter, a music aficionado, suggested that Briggs play Jaco Pastorius' "Teen Town," a difficult piece to follow for a group of children. In the closing of the interview, Briggs plays a short piece and narrates a collection of photographs.

African American fathers

Pastorius, Jaco

Yanni

Self-realization

Music--Performance.