

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Pookie Hudson

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Hudson, Pookie
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Pookie Hudson,
Dates:	March 2, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:00:43).
Abstract:	R & B singer and doo wop singer Pookie Hudson (1934 - 2007) Pookie Hudson was the the lead singer of the musical group, The Spaniels. Hudson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 2, 2004, in Capitol Heights, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_010
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Thornton James “Pookie” Hudson was born on June 11, 1934 in Des Moines, Iowa. Hudson received his nickname from an aunt who babysat him. He was the only child of Ardath Robinson. His father, who he never knew, was rumored to be a gypsy. James Hudson married his mother while she was pregnant and shortly after his birth the family moved from Iowa to Gary, Indiana. Hudson attended Roosevelt School from first grade until he graduated in 1953. He developed a love for music and singing at a young age and shares the bloodline with famous performers Josephine Baker and Fats Waller. In 1948, while only in junior high school, he formed his first Doo Wop singing group, The Four Bees with fellow members Billy Shelton, Gerald Gregory and Calvin Fossett. The group eventually broke up when one of the members graduated.

The Spaniels were created in 1953 at Roosevelt High School. The teenage celebrities included Hudson as the lead singer, first tenor Ernest Warren, second tenor Willie C. Jackson, baritone Opal Courtney, Jr and bass Gerald Gregory. Upon graduation in 1953, the group became the first artists to sign with Vee Jay Records, the first large, independent African American-owned record company. The group’s initial release *Baby It’s You* reached number ten on Billboard’s Rhythm and Blues chart. In the spring of 1954 that The Spaniels reached the height of their Doo Wop success when *Goodnight Sweetheart Goodnight* hit number twenty-four on Billboard’s Top 40 and rose to number five on the R & B chart. The multi-million dollar single was just one of hundreds of songs written by Hudson. To date, the song continues to be a popular favorite among Doo Wop, classic rock and R & B music fans.

In the 1950s, The Spaniels were the top selling vocal group for Vee Jay records. When the label went bankrupt in 1966, Hudson embarked on a solo career and began recording for several other labels. In 1969, the group reunited and returned to the music of their youth. Their song *Fairy Tales* became a national hit in 1970. Hudson continued to perform with various Spaniels groups until he reassembled the original group.

In 1992, Hudson was inducted into the Rhythm and Blues Hall of Fame. He continued to perform with two Spaniels groups, one in Washington, D.C. and the original group still based in Gary. Hudson raised money to open

a Doo Wop museum in Washington, D.C. where he resided with his wife, Delores.

Hudson passed away on Tuesday, January 16, 2007.

Hudson was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 2, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Pookie Hudson was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on March 2, 2004, in Capitol Heights, Maryland, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. R & B singer and doo wop singer Pookie Hudson (1934 - 2007) Pookie Hudson was the the lead singer of the musical group, The Spaniels.

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:

Hudson, Pookie

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Hudson, Pookie--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Spaniels (Musical group)

Occupations:

Doo Wop Singer

R & B 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 Pookie Hudson, March 2, 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 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 Pookie Hudson, Section A2004_010_001_001, TRT: 0:30:35 ?

Pookie Hudson was born on June 11, 1934 in Des Moines, Iowa. His mother, Ardath Roberta Collins, was born in 1917 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His stepfather played a role in his naming and rearing, but was no longer in his life by the time he reached high school. Hudson's maternal grandparents lived in Iowa where his grandfather, Robert Collins, owned two taverns and worked in the auto industry. When Hudson was a child, his great-aunt Audrey Collins hosted music acts at her house, including the Ink Spots and Nat King Cole. One of Hudson's uncle was a Tuskegee Airman. Hudson is also related to Josephine Baker and Fats Waller. Hudson developed his love for music while listening to 'Randy at Night,' a black music hour at a time when radio featured mostly white musicians. Growing up in the projects in Gary, Indiana, a steel town, Hudson enjoyed playing basketball and reading. He also formed a band, The Three Bees (later The Spaniels), while attending Theodore Roosevelt High School, the only black school in Gary.

Video Oral History Interview with Pookie Hudson, Section A2004_010_001_002, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Pookie Hudson grew up near his maternal grandmother and great-aunt in Davenport, Iowa. Early musical influences included Billy Williams of the Charioteers and Bill Kenny of the Ink Spots. Hudson formed his first singing group, The Three Bees, while a student at Theodore Roosevelt High School in Gary, Indiana. He was then recruited by Billy Shelton to form Pookie Hudson and the Hudsonnaires (later, the Spaniels) with Calvin Fossett. The group performed in talent shows and also auditioned at the Chicago Theater in Chicago, Illinois. In 1952, Hudson wrote 'Goodnight Sweetheart' which was one of the group's biggest hits. In 1953, they were approached by a group who would later become the Vee-Jay record label. He describes how the group's music changed hands between labels a number of times, making it difficult for them to acquire ownership of and compensation for their records until decades later. Hudson also recounts experiences as a professional entertainer, including his travels to the segregated South.

Video Oral History Interview with Pookie Hudson, Section A2004_010_001_003, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Pookie Hudson quit singing after his marriage in 1954 to raise a family. After the marriage ended due to age and inexperience, Hudson returned to singing with the Spaniels and recording with Vee-Jay Records. He describes tenuous relations with Alan Freed who wanted to be named as a writer on 'Goodnight Sweetheart'; by refusing, the group was not invited to play in any of Freed's shows. Without compensation for two decades, Hudson secured royalties for 'Goodnight, Sweetheart' with the help of an attorney in 1978. He explains how the doo-wop genre differed from of the singing style of older groups. After Vee-Jay Records went bankrupt, the Spaniels broke up and Hudson joined Neptune Records with a new singing group. Hudson reflects upon the Civil Rights Movement on music and the effect of evolving music genres on his work and life as a self-represented entertainer in a predominantly white industry. Hudson describes his most valuable life lesson and his hopes for doo-wop musicians and similar artists.

Video Oral History Interview with Pookie Hudson, Section A2004_010_001_004, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

Pookie Hudson reflects on the doo-wop genre and whether he believes there will be a doo-wop revival. He emphasizes working together as an important aspect to ensure doo-wop's longevity, and believes younger artists might facilitate its sustainability. He encourages those interested in doo-wop to have sufficient

legal support and sincerity in their practice. Reflecting on his accomplishments, he names 'Goodnight Sweetheart' and his induction into the Rhythm and Blues Hall of Fame in 1992 as significant moments in his music career. He would also like to be remembered for writing the song 'Peace of Mind.' Hudson describes his hopes for the African American community and reflects upon his life. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.