

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Martha Reeves

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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>	Reeves, Martha
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Martha Reeves,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 20, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:21:02).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Motown singer Martha Reeves (1941 - ) was the lead singer of the musical group Martha and the Vandellas, which recorded several hits for Motown Records, including "Dancing in the Streets", "Nowhere to Run", "Quicksand", "My Baby Loves Me", "I'm Ready for Love" and 1967's "Jimmy Mack." Reeves was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 20, 2005, in Detroit, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_022
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Martha Reeves, the earthy alto voice of Martha and the Vandellas, was born July 18, 1941, in Eufaula, Alabama. The eldest of eleven children, Reeves moved with her parents to Detroit, Michigan, before she was a year old. Reeves attended Russell Elementary School where Emily Wagstaff taught her vocals. A cheerleader who loved composition and music, Reeves studied voice with Abraham Silver at Northeastern High School. She was chosen to sing Bach's *Aria* and she competed in talent shows. After graduating in 1959, Reeves worked in

sales while performing with Rosalind Ashford and Annette Sterling as the Del-Phis and solo as Martha LaVille.

In 1961, William “Mickey” Stevenson, head of the Artists and Repertoire department for Motown Records, noticed Reeves at Detroit’s Twenty Grand Club. Reeves, along with Ashford and Sterling, sang back up for Marvin Gaye’s hits, “Stubborn Kind of Fellow” and “Hitch Hike” in 1962. In 1963, Berry Gordy signed the three to a recording contract as Martha and the Vandellas. Named by Reeves for Van Dyke Street and Della Reese, her favorite singer, the group’s first hit was “Come and Get These Memories”. The million selling “(Love Is Like A) Heat Wave” led a string of hits, including 1964’s “Dancing in the Streets”, “Nowhere to Run”, “Quicksand”, “My Baby Loves Me”, “I’m Ready for Love” and 1967’s “Jimmy Mack” and “Honey Chile”. Though they toured the United States and Europe to the acclaim of millions, they were the first group released by Motown when the company moved its operation to California in 1971. In 1974, Reeves sang for the film *Willie Dynamite*. That same year, her solo album for MCA, *Martha Reeves*, set a record for production costs, but did not match her earlier success.

Performing in 1983’s *Motown 25th Anniversary Special* and numerous other television shows and concert tours, Reeves is also featured in the film, *Standing in the Shadows of Motown*. Reeves’ 2004 album is titled *Home to You*.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Martha Reeves was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 20, 2005, in Detroit, Michigan, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Motown singer Martha Reeves (1941 - ) was the lead singer of the musical group Martha and the Vandellas, which recorded several hits for Motown Records, including "Dancing in the Streets", "Nowhere to Run", "Quicksand", "My Baby Loves Me", "I'm Ready for Love" and 1967's "Jimmy Mack."

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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:

Reeves, Martha

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Reeves, Martha --Interviews

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African American women singers--Interviews

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African American families--Michigan--Detroit

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Education--Michigan--Detroit

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Motown Record Corporation

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Stevenson, William

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Gordy, Berry

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Sound--Recording and reproducing

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Popular music--United States

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Soul music--United States

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Rhythm and blues music--United States

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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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Martha and the Vandellas (Musical group)

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## **Occupations:**

Motown 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 Martha Reeves, January 20, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

## **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Martha Reeves, Section  
A2005\_022\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:12 2005/01/20

Singer Martha Reeves begins by describing her family background, focusing on her father's musical talent, which she used as inspiration in her own career. Reeves also shares anecdotes from her family's past, including how her parents met and their lives together in Detroit. Finally, Reeves describes family life during her childhood on the

East Side of Detroit.

African American women singers--Interviews.

African American families--Michigan--Detroit.

Education--Michigan--Detroit.

Motown Record Corporation.

Stevenson, William.

Gordy, Berry.

Sound--Recording and reproducing.

Popular music--United States.

Soul music--United States.

Rhythm and blues music--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Martha Reeves, Section  
A2005\_022\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:27 2005/01/20

Martha Reeves shares memories of her childhood in Detroit, recalling her early passion to become a singer and listing her musical idols. Reeves describes her personality and her elementary school experience. She then details her early singing experiences, focusing on music groups she joined while in high school. Following high school, Reeves explains how she started singing in local clubs, where she was noticed by Motown Records executive William 'Mickey' Stevenson. Reeves then describes her first recording experience at Motown.

Video Oral History Interview with Martha Reeves, Section  
A2005\_022\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:30 2005/01/20

Martha Reeves recalls the formation of her group, Martha and the Vandellas, and talks about the early hit songs they recorded. After discussing some of the radio stations that popularized her music and other Motown Records artists, Reeves discusses her popularity in America and overseas, and credits the songwriters and musicians she worked with. Reeves also discusses her signature sound, explaining why she chose to make danceable music. Reeves then reflects on the decline of Motown Records and the skills of Berry Gordy, and explains how her career changed after leaving Motown.

Video Oral History Interview with Martha Reeves, Section  
A2005\_022\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:55 2005/01/20

Martha Reeves reveals some of the inner workings of Motown Records, noting the training methods used and the influence of Maxine Powell. She comments on today's popular music, and then reflects on her own life and career. Reeves also talks about her love for Detroit and shares her hopes and concerns for the black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Martha Reeves, Section  
A2005\_022\_001\_005, TRT: 0:20:58 2005/01/20

Martha Reeves shares and describes numerous personal photographs.