

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Florence LaRue

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	LaRue, Florence, 1942-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Florence LaRue,
Dates:	April 16, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:09:19).
Abstract:	Singer Florence LaRue (1942 -) was an original member of multi Grammy Award-winning group, The Fifth Dimension whose hits include "Up-Up and Away" and "I'll Be Lovin' You Forever." LaRue was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 16, 2007, in Encino, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_141
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer Florence LaRue was born on February 4, 1942 in Plainfield, New Jersey to Sara Dell LaRue and James Harris LaRue. Her family soon moved to Glenside, Pennsylvania, where she began studying dance and violin. The family moved once more to Los Angeles, California where eventually LaRue earned her A.A. degree from Los Angeles City College, and then received her B.A. degree in education from California State College in Los Angeles.

During the mid-1960s, LaRue met photographer Lamont McLemore after she won Miss Grand Talent after participating in the Miss Bronze California Contest. Lamont offered LaRue a place in a musical group that he was forming called the Versatiles. LaRue joined the group along with McLemore, Marilyn McCoo, Billy Davis and Ron Townson. The Versatiles obtained a record deal with the assistance of Motown record producer Marc Gordon, who introduced them to producer Johnny Rivers, and helped develop their image and changed their name to The Fifth Dimension. In 1966, The Fifth Dimension released their first single, "I'll Be Lovin' You Forever." In 1967, the group recorded a follow-up single, written by John Phillips and entitled "Go Where You Wanna Go," which charted at #16 on the Billboard charts. They then recorded their first top ten hit, entitled "Up-Up and Away," written by songwriter Jimmy Webb. Their album of the same title went gold, and the group was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best New Artist. The song, "Up-Up and Away," went on to win a number of Grammy Awards, including Record of the Year for 1967. The following year, The Fifth Dimension released a cover of Laura Nyro's "Stoned Soul Picnic," which reached #3 on the pop charts and #2 on the R&B charts, the highest-charting single released by them at the time. It ultimately sold over two million copies. In 1969, the group released "California Soul," which reached #25 on the Billboard charts. Their biggest break came with the release of "Age of Aquarius." This song spent six weeks on top of the charts and sold more than three million copies. In 1970, The Fifth Dimension were signed to Bell Records and released a controversial single entitled "The Declaration," which was followed by the album *Portrait*, which became the group's third album on the Billboard Top 50. In 1971, the group released *Love's Lines, Angles & Rhymes*, which went gold. In 1973, the group released *Living Together*,

Growing Together and in 1974, released *Soul & Inspiration*, the last record the group would record for Bell Records. In 1975, the group released their final album with all of the original members, entitled *Earthbound*. McCoo and Davis left the group to pursue their own recording careers, although the group continued to record as The Fifth Dimension without the duo.

In the late 1970s, The Fifth Dimension released “Love Hangover” with LaRue singing lead. In 1981, LaRue joined other members from the group in Fats Waller’s *Ain’t Misbehavin*. In 1995, The Fifth Dimension released an album entitled *In The House* which featured “Say (U Love Me),” a track penned by LaRue. LaRue remains active today as an inspirational speaker and lecturer.

Florence LaRue was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* April 16, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Florence LaRue was conducted by Paul Brock on April 16, 2007, in Encino, California, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Singer Florence LaRue (1942 -) was an original member of multi Grammy Award-winning group, The Fifth Dimension whose hits include "Up-Up and Away" and "I'll Be Lovin' You Forever."

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:

LaRue, Florence, 1942-

Brock, Paul (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
LaRue, Florence, 1942- --Interviews

African American singers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

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 Florence LaRue, April 16, 2007. 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 Florence LaRue, Section A2007_141_001_001, TRT: 0:29:43 ?

Florence LaRue was born on February 4, 1942 in Plainfield, New Jersey. Her mother, Sara Dell LaRue, was born on April 28, 1921 in Saluda, South Carolina and her mother's name was Eliza. After LaRue was born, her family moved to Glenside, Pennsylvania, where her mother worked as a nurse for the Pennypacker family. LaRue's father, James Harris LaRue, was born December 25, circa 1919 and was adopted by the Harris family. He served as a Master Sergeant in the U.S. Army and was stationed at Fort Dix in New Jersey and in Germany during LaRue's childhood. LaRue was an only child until she was ten years old, when her sister Cynthia Yvonne LaRue was born. Her other sisters are Bernadette Marie LaRue and Carlotta Eleanor LaRue. LaRue's parents divorced when she was young, and she recalls living with Mr. and Mrs. Anderson in Ambler, Pennsylvania and living with her maternal grandmother Eliza in Glenside, Pennsylvania.

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, African American.

African American families--New Jersey.

African American fathers--New Jersey.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence LaRue, Section A2007_141_001_002, TRT: 0:27:37 ?

Florence LaRue grew up in the Glenside, Pennsylvania neighborhood on the border with North Hills, Pennsylvania. Her family attended Salem Baptist Church. LaRue also attended the predominately white North Hills Elementary School, Glenside-Weldon Junior High School, and Abington High School. She played hockey, basketball, track, and the violin. After high school, LaRue moved with her family to Los Angeles, California, where she received her A.A. degree in music from Los Angeles City College and her B.A. in elementary education from California State College in Los Angeles. While in college, LaRue also worked at Hughes Aircraft, North American Aviation, and as a telephone operator. While student teaching at Grant Elementary School, LaRue won the Miss Bronze California contest with Eartha Kitt as one of the judges. She was approached by HistoryMaker Lamonte McLemore to join the singing group, The Versatiles, who later became The Fifth Dimension. She also recalls her relationship with their manager, Marc Gordon.

School integration--United States.

African American school children.

African Americans--Social conditions.

R&B (Music).

Video Oral History Interview with Florence LaRue, Section A2007_141_001_003, TRT: 0:28:04 ?

Florence LaRue joined The Versatiles after winning Miss Bronze California. She was approached by photographer and HistoryMaker Lamonte McLemore, who had previously been a member of the Hi-Fi's with Lawrence Summer and Fritz Baskett as well as HistoryMakers Marilyn McCoo and Harry Elston. After the Hi-Fi's broke up, McLemore formed The Versatiles with LaRue, McCoo, Ron Townson, and HistoryMaker Billy Davis, Jr. The group joined with conductor Rene DeKnight and producer Marc Gordon. Gordon introduced the group to songwriter Jimmy Webb, and they recorded his song "Up, Up and

Away” for Johnny Rivers’ Soul City record label. At this time, the group was rechristened “The Fifth Dimension” and the song became a major hit. LaRue married Gordon in a hot air balloon around 1968. LaRue reflects on each of the band members and talks about the group’s other hits, including “Aquarius,” “One Less Bell,” and “Stoned Soul Picnic.” LaRue also reflects on McCoo and Davis’ departure in 1975 and later lineups of the group.

Versatiles (Musical group).

McCoo, Marilyn.

5th Dimension (Musical group).

Video Oral History Interview with Florence LaRue, Section A2007_141_001_004, TRT: 0:27:58 ?

Florence LaRue reflects on The Fifth Dimension’s lineups after HistoryMakers Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis, Jr. left the group in 1975 and the difficulty of finding new singers. She talks about her position as the musical and business leader of the group and continued success the group with new lineups. Marc Gordon stopped managing the group and was replaced by Erick Sterling and Jason Winters, who were responsible for the group appearing in a production of “Ain’t Misbehavin’.” LaRue also reflects on her trips to sing at the White House and in Eastern Europe, and a mission trip she took with her church to Gambia. She shares her hopes and also reflects upon her family, including her mother, her children, and her grandchildren. Her two stepchildren are named Robin Gordon (ph.) and Chris Gordon, and her son is Geoffrey Gordon. Her grandchildren are Sarah Elizabeth Gordon, Isabella Gabrielle Gordon, and Zoë Isiah Gordon.

5th Dimension (Musical group).

Davis, Billy, Jr.

McCoo, Marilyn.

African American mothers.

Video Oral History Interview with Florence LaRue, Section A2007_141_001_005, TRT: 0:15:57 ?

Florence LaRue describes how she would like to be remembered. She also reflects upon what she would have done differently in her life, her sisters, and her ex-husbands Marc Gordon, Errol Aubry and, Bennett Curland. She ends the interview by narrating her photographs.

African American families.

Divorce--Psychological aspects.

Brothers and sisters.