

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Jam, Jimmy
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III,
Dates:	December 19, 2013
Bulk Dates:	2013
Physical Description:	10 uncompressed MOV digital video files (5:05:45).
Abstract:	Music producer and songwriter James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III (1959 -) , along with partner, Terry Lewis, has garnered more awards than any other music producers in history. The recipients of five Grammy awards, Harris and Lewis were honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2010. Harris was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 19, 2013, in Westlake Village, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2013_353
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Music producer and songwriter James “Jimmy Jam” Harris, III was born on June 6, 1959 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Harris grew up in Minneapolis where he met Terry Stevens Lewis while attending a college preparatory program on the University of Minnesota campus. Harris and Lewis formed a band called, “Flyte Tyme,” which later changed its name to, “The Time.”

In 1981, Harris began touring with music artist Prince as his opening act. As a member of The Time, Harris contributed to three of the group’s four albums including *The Time*, *What Time is It*, and *Pandemonium*. Then, in 1982, Harris and Lewis met Dina R. Andrews, who would later assist the duo in establishing Flyte Tyme Productions, a business entity. Flyte Tyme Productions joined with A & M Records in 1991 to create Perspective Records, which, from 1993 to 1996, released most of A & M Record’s urban acts. In 1998, Perspective Records closed its doors and Harris and Lewis opened the Flyte Tyme Recording Studio in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They signed a three-year, joint venture with Arista Records in 2000, and then, in 2004, the duo relocated their recording studio to Santa Monica, California and renamed it Flyte Tyme West. On January 30, 2013, Harris and Lewis signed an exclusive worldwide publishing administration agreement with Universal Music Publishing Group.

Harris and Lewis have produced more number one songs and award winning albums than any other songwriting and production team in history. They have been credited with over one-hundred Billboard top ten songs, twenty-six number one R & B hits and sixteen number one Hot 100 hits with artists such as Janet Jackson, Mariah Carey, Boyz II Men, and Johnny Gill. In addition, Harris and Lewis have received five Grammy awards and one-hundred ASCAP awards for songwriting and song publishing. In 2005, they became the first recipients of the Heritage Award who were producers as well as songwriters. Harris and Lewis were honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2010, and the duo was inducted into The Soul Music Hall of Fame at SoulMusic.com in December of 2012.

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 19, 2013.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 19, 2013, in Westlake Village, California, and was recorded on 10 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Music producer and songwriter James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III (1959 -) , along with partner, Terry Lewis, has garnered more awards than any other music producers in history. The recipients of five Grammy awards, Harris and Lewis were honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2010.

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:

Jam, Jimmy

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Jam, Jimmy--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Music Producer

Songwriter

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 James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, December 19, 2013. 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 James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_001, TRT: 1:28:43 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III was born on June 6, 1959 in Minneapolis, Minnesota to Bertha Harris and James "Cornbread" Harris, Jr. His mother was born into the only African American family in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. After marrying, she and Harris' father settled in the South Minneapolis neighborhood. Harris' father worked for American Hoist and Derrick Company while also performing as a jazz and blues pianist. His mother worked part time at Greater Sabanathi Baptist Church and St. Peter's A.M.E. Church, both of which the family attended on Sundays. Although Harris had half-siblings from his parents' previous relationships, he was the only child in his home. In 1964, he entered Eugene Field Elementary School, where he learned to read music and play the clarinet. A natural musician, Harris later played the saxophone, drums and keyboards. In 1971, Harris enrolled at Bryant Junior High School, where he took piano classes with musician Prince.

Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_002, TRT: 2:30:28 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III met Terry Lewis in 1972 at a TRiO Upward Bound summer program. The two came from different musical backgrounds, but performed as a trio with drummer Jellybean Johnson for the program's showcase. In 1973, Harris assembled the racially diverse R and B band Paradise, and began performing around Minneapolis, Minnesota. At Washburn High School, he joined the white rock band Sky, and formed the group Mind and Matter with his high school counselor Michael Dixon and singer Lawrence "Sabu" Brown. Harris served as the songwriter for the band, whose music was heavily influenced by the Philadelphia soul sound. Harris' father, James "Cornbread" Harris Jr., left the family in 1975 to pursue his music career. In 1977, Harris decided to leave high school in order to focus on music full time. In addition to performing with Mind and Matter, he worked in a record store and as a deejay at a local radio station. Decades later, Mind and Matter released an album called '1514 Oliver Avenue (Basement).'

Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_003, TRT: 3:30:59 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III's band Mind and Matter developed a friendly rivalry with Terry Lewis' band Flyte Tyme, as both became better known within the Minneapolis, Minnesota music scene. Harris worked as a deejay in the Fox Trap club, where he received the nickname Jimmy Jam from a bartender. During this time, he also met his future bandmate, keyboardist Monte Moir. In the 1970s, black bands in Minneapolis, such as Flyte Tyme, The Family, Mind and Matter and Grand Central, began organizing their own events at Hotel Dyckman, as they were not hired at the white venues, and there were not enough black clubs to accommodate the various groups. Shortly after Harris joined Lewis' band Flyte Tyme, the group was approached by musician Morris Day to perform with Prince. The group then transitioned to the name The Time, and Day became its lead singer. In 1981, Prince and The Time embarked on their first tour together through Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the Southeast.

Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_004, TRT: 4:28:08 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III toured with Prince throughout the early 1980s as a member of The Time. The band became known for their live shows, which led to conflicts with Prince when reviewers were more impressed by The Time than by Prince's performance. Harris and Terry Lewis spent the summer of 1982 in Los Angeles, California, where they met Sound of Los Angeles Records founder Dick Griffey, producer Leon Sylvers III and Dina Ruth Andrews, who became

their manager. They also began working with music executive Clarence Avant, and wrote songs that were later recorded by Gladys Knight and the Pips and The S.O.S. Band. Harris and Lewis continued to tour with The Time, until November of 1982, when they were asked by Avant to work on The S.O.S Band's album 'On the Rise' in Atlanta, Georgia. A snowstorm caused them to miss their next performance with The Time, and the pair were fired for working outside of the group against Prince's wishes. Harris and Lewis then continued to work with The S.O.S. Band.

Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_005, TRT: 5:32:35 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III enjoyed touring with The Time, although he was often frustrated by Prince's attempts to marginalize the group. They were relegated to smaller venues in New York City and Los Angeles, California, and paid \$250 a week despite their commercial success. At this point of the interview, Harris recounts stories from the tours, specifically involving lead singer Morris Day and roadie Jerome Benton. In 1983, Harris and Terry Lewis produced their first gold records with The S.O.S. Band, 'Just Be Good to Me' and 'Tell Me If You Still Care.' After gaining recognition for their work with Cherrelle, Alexander O'Neal and Cheryl Lynn, music executive Clarence Avant convinced Motown Records founder Quincy Jones to allow them to produce Patti Austin's song 'The Heat of Heat.' The pair began working with Janet Jackson's manager, John McClain of A&M Records, and were given the opportunity to produce Jackson's album 'Control,' which they recorded at their studio in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_006, TRT: 6:34:44 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III and Terry Lewis wrote the hit single "Tender Love," sung by The Force MDs, for the 1985 film 'Krush Groove.' The pair produced Janet Jackson's album 'Control,' which was released in 1986. Much of its content was inspired by Jackson's separations from her then husband James DeBarge and father Joe Jackson. Initially, A&M Records chose different producers for Jackson's 1989 album 'Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation 1814,' but music executive Clarence Avant persuaded them to hire Harris and Lewis again. The album was recorded in six months, and addressed contemporary political themes, such as the 1989 schoolyard shooting in Stockton, California. Harris and Lewis went on to work with artists like Mary J. Blige, Usher and New Edition. At this point in the interview, Harris describes his artistic relationship with Lewis, specifically their agreement to share the ownership of their work evenly. He also talks about their use of technology including drum machines and samplers.

Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_007, TRT: 7:34:22 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III and Terry Lewis worked on The Human League album 'Crash' in 1986. Due to the commercial success of Janet Jackson's album, 'Control,' Harris and Lewis were nominated for three Grammy Awards in 1987, in the categories of Album of the Year, Best R and B Song, and Producer of the Year, Non-Classical. They won the latter award, and accompanied Jackson during her "What Have You Done For Me Lately" performance. Looking to establish their own music label, Harris and Lewis considered a partnership offer from CBS Records. However, when the company refused to support their work on The Time's 1990 album 'Pandemonium,' they secured a collaboration contract with A&M Records instead. There, they produced Mint Condition's album

'Meant to be Mint' and Sounds of Blackness' album 'The Evolution of Gospel,' which won the 1992 Grammy Award for Best Gospel Choir or Chorus Album. In 1994, the pair attempted to buy the Minnesota Timberwolves, but ultimately the team was sold to Glen Taylor.

Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_008, TRT: 8:28:35 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III and Terry Lewis produced TNT's NBA theme music, and remixed Stevie Wonder's song "Higher Ground" for TBS's NBA broadcasts. They also wrote the song "Welcome to the World" for the 1996 Summer Olympics opening ceremony in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1997, the duo produced 'The Velvet Rope' album with Janet Jackson, and the soundtrack to the 1998 romantic comedy 'How Stella Got Her Groove Back.' The movie starred Whoopi Goldberg, Angela Bassett and Taye Diggs, who also appeared in the video for the featured song "Luv Me, Luv Me" by Shaggy and Janet Jackson. In 1999, Harris and Lewis worked with Yolanda Adams to produce the song "Open My Heart." They then left A&M Records to partner with Universal Music Publishing Group, where they produced 'Rainbow' with Mariah Carey in 2000 and 'Nodesha' with Nodesha in 2003. Harris talks about his friendships with baseball player Kirby Puckett and Minnesota Twins owner Carl Pohlad. He also recalls marrying stylist Lisa Padilla Harris in 1994.

Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_009, TRT: 9:34:45 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III and Terry Lewis won an Essence Award in 2002, and a Grammy Award for Best Dance Recording for Janet Jackson's song "All for You." Around this time, Harris moved his family to Westlake Village, California, and their former studio in Minneapolis, Minnesota later became the Minneapolis Media Institute. Harris and Lewis encountered many obstacles with Virgin Records while producing the 2003 Janet Jackson album 'Damita Jo.' Nevertheless, the album went on to become certified platinum. In 2005, they opened a Flyte Tyme Productions, Inc. studio in Santa Monica, California, and allowed producers like Dallas Austin, Rodney Jerkins and Jermaine Dupri to work there as well. They also won Grammy Awards for their work on Yolanda Adams' song "Be Blessed" and Chaka Khan's album 'Funk This.' During the 2008 Grammy Awards, Harris reunited with The Time to perform with Rihanna, and the group began a short term residency in Las Vegas, Nevada that the following summer.

Video Oral History Interview with James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III, Section A2013_353_001_010, TRT: 10:22:26 ?

James "Jimmy Jam" Harris, III and Terry Lewis entered into a foreign publishing agreement with EMI Music Publishing, Ltd., in the late 1980s, forming relationships with president Martin van der Schagt and executive Evan Lamberg. When Lamberg left the company to become president of Universal Music Publishing Group North America in 2011, he offered Harris and Lewis a worldwide publishing administration contract, which was finalized in 2013. Harris talks about the anticipated projects for Janet Jackson, New Edition and the Roney Boys, a new act that his youngest son discovered on YouTube. Harris and his wife, Lisa Padilla Harris, had three children: Tyler Harris, Max Harris and Bella Harris. He concludes the interview by reflecting upon his legacy and how he would like to be remembered.