

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joe Billingslea, Jr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Billingslea, Joe
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joe Billingslea, Jr.,
Dates:	June 22, 2014
Bulk Dates:	2014
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:08:32).
Abstract:	Singer and performer Joe Billingslea, Jr. (1937 -) was a member of the musical group The Contours, famed for their 1962 Motown hit "Do You Love Me." The Contours have been inducted into both the Rock 'n' Roll Walk of Fame and the Doo-Wop Hall of Fame. Billingslea was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 22, 2014, in Detroit, Michigan. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2014_206
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer and performer Joe Billingslea, Jr. was born on November 14, 1937 in Hamtramck, Michigan. Before his first birthday, his parents moved to Detroit, Michigan where he was raised. He sang with the boys' choir while attending Chadsey High School. After graduation, he enlisted in the United States Air Force. While stationed in the State of Maine, Billingslea formed a vocal group with four other airmen called the Revere Tone Five. After receiving an honorable discharge following his four-year stint, he returned to Detroit.

Upon his return, Billingslea was invited by an old high school friend, Billy Gordon, to join his singing group, The Majestics. In 1958, the group disbanded, so Billingslea and Gordon decided to form a new vocal group. Billingslea placed a want-ad in the local newspaper looking for singers. Billy Hoggs responded to the ad and became the group's third member. At Hoggs' recommendation, his friend Billy Rollins, became the fourth member of a group they named The Blenders. Within weeks, Rollins was replaced with another friend of Hoggs, Leroy Fair. In 1959, Hubert Johnson was added, making the group a quintet. At Billingslea's suggestion, the group renamed itself "The Contours."

Within days of the name change, The Contours signed a recording contract with Motown Records. The group's first two records in 1960 and 1961 on the Motown label didn't receive much airplay outside the Midwest. However, in 1962 the group made music history with the million-seller, "Do You Love Me", recorded on Motown's newest label, Gordy. Billingslea continued to sing with The Contours for two more years, racking up a number of chart hits on the way. In 1964, every member of The Contours, except Billy Gordon, left the group over creative differences with Motown.

Billingslea took a job for Chrysler Corporation at the Dodge Truck Plant in Warren, Michigan. A year later, he was elected UAW Chief Steward; a position he held until he resigned in 1968 to join the Wayne County Sheriff's Department. In 1977, he joined the Detroit Correctional Department (DeHoCo), and eventually reached the rank of

Sergeant.

In the early 1970s, Billingslea reconstituted The Contours and the group began playing weekends in the greater Detroit area, with occasional dates outside Michigan, including a few international dates. While leading The Contours, he continued to work his day job and in November 1985 he was assigned to the Detroit Police Department, 9th Floor Lockup.

In 1987, the release of the movie, "Dirty Dancing" created a renewed interest in The Contours' music. The 1988 re-release of "Do You Love Me" from the movie's soundtrack soared on the charts, eventually going multi-platinum at level 4.0. The movie's success prompted the ten-month "Dirty Dancing Tour," in which The Contours participated.

In 1989, Billingslea decided to resign from the Detroit Police Department to devote all of his time to The Contours and his singing career. He is married and has eight children - five boys and three girls.

Joe Billingslea was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 22, 2014.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Joe Billingslea, Jr. was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 22, 2014, in Detroit, Michigan, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Singer and performer Joe Billingslea, Jr. (1937 -) was a member of the musical group The Contours, famed for their 1962 Motown hit "Do You Love Me." The Contours have been inducted into both the Rock 'n' Roll Walk of Fame and the Doo-Wop Hall of Fame.

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:

Billingslea, Joe

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Billingslea, Joe--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Joe Billingslea & the Contours

Occupations:

Performer

Motown Singer

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 Joe Billingslea, Jr., June 22, 2014. 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 Joe Billingslea, Jr., Section A2014_206_001_001, TRT: 1:28:01 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Joe Billingslea, Jr., Section A2014_206_001_002, TRT: 2:28:36 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Joe Billingslea, Jr., Section A2014_206_001_003, TRT: 3:32:22 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Joe Billingslea, Jr., Section A2014_206_001_004, TRT: 4:29:36 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Joe Billingslea, Jr., Section A2014_206_001_005, TRT: 5:33:06 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Joe Billingslea, Jr., Section A2014_206_001_006, TRT: 6:29:42 ?
- Video Oral History Interview with Joe Billingslea, Jr., Section A2014_206_001_007, TRT: 7:07:09 ?