

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dee Dee Bridgewater

---

## 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>	Bridgewater, Dee Dee
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dee Dee Bridgewater,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 10, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:27:37).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Singer and actress Dee Dee Bridgewater (1950 - ) was a three-time Grammy Award-winning singer, as well as a Tony Award-winning stage actress, and hosted NPR's JazzSet with Dee Dee Bridgewater. Bridgewater was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 10, 2014, in Los Angeles, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_254
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer and actress Dee Dee Bridgewater was born on May 27, 1950 in Memphis, Tennessee. Raised in Flint, Michigan, Bridgewater was exposed early to jazz music; her father, Matthew Garrett, was a jazz trumpeter and teacher at Manassas High School. After high school, Bridgewater attended Michigan State University before transferring to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In 1969, she toured the Soviet Union with the University of Illinois Big Band.

In 1970, Bridgewater met and married trumpeter Cecil Bridgewater and moved to

New York City. She sang lead vocals for the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra in the early 1970s, and appeared in the Broadway musical *The Wiz* from 1974 to 1976. Bridgewater also released her first album in 1974, entitled *Afro Blue*. Then, after touring France in 1984 with the musical *Sophisticated Ladies*, she moved to Paris in 1986 and acted in the show *Lady Day*. Bridgewater also formed her own backup group around this time and performed at the Sanremo Song Festival in Italy and the Montreux Jazz Festival in 1990. Four years later, she collaborated with Horace Silver and released the album *Love and Peace: A Tribute to Horace Silver*. She then released a tribute album, entitled *Dear Ella*, in 1997, and the record *Live at Yoshi's* in 1998. Subsequent albums included *This is New* (2002); *J'ai Deux Amours* (2005); *Red Earth* (2007); and *Eleanora Fagan (1915-1959): To Billie with Love from Dee Dee Bridgewater* (2010). She has also performed with the Terence Blanchard Quintet at the prestigious John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., and opened the Shanghai JZ Jazz Festival in 2009. Bridgewater also appeared regularly at other music festivals and on numerous television shows, radio programs, and in feature films. She owns a production company and record label, and has hosted NPR's syndicated radio show *JazzSet with Dee Dee Bridgewater* since 2001. In addition, Bridgewater served as a United Nations Ambassador for the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Bridgewater has received seven Grammy Award nominations and won three. She also won the 1975 Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical for her performance in *The Wiz*. Bridgewater was the first American to be inducted to the Haut Conseil de la Francophonie and has received the Award of Arts and Letters in France, as well as the country's 1998 top honor, Victoire de la Musique.

Dee Dee Bridgewater was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 10, 2014.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dee Dee Bridgewater was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 10, 2014, in Los Angeles, California, and was recorded on 5 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Singer and actress Dee Dee Bridgewater (1950 - ) was a three-time Grammy Award-winning singer, as well as a Tony Award-winning stage actress, and hosted NPR's *JazzSet with Dee Dee Bridgewater*.

---

# 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:

Bridgewater, Dee Dee

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

## **Occupations:**

Singer

---

Actress

---

## **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 Dee Dee Bridgewater, November 10, 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 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).

---

## 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 Dee Dee Bridgewater, Section A2014\_254\_001\_001, TRT: 1:31:13 2014/11/10

Dee Dee Bridgewater was born on May 27, 1950 in Memphis, Tennessee to Marion Holliday Hudspeth and Matthew Garrett. Her maternal grandparents, cleaner Rosa Davenport Holliday and Ernest Holliday, raised their family in Flint, Michigan. Her paternal grandmother, organist Eileen Gee McGraw, was the sister of singer and dancer Lottie Gee, who influenced Josephine Baker. She was married to Bridgewater's paternal grandfather, a railroad porter, and raised Bridgewater's father in Louisville, Kentucky. He became a trumpet player, and met Bridgewater's mother at West Virginia State College. After marrying, they moved to Memphis, where her father served as the music director at Manassas High School and Porter Junior High School. In 1953, Bridgewater's family returned to Flint, where her mother became a junior executive at the General Motors Corporation, and her father taught in the Flint City School District. Bridgewater also describes her relationship with her younger sister, Rhonda Garrett Whitters.

Video Oral History Interview with Dee Dee Bridgewater, Section A2014\_254\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:34 2014/11/10

Dee Dee Bridgewater grew up in Flint, Michigan, where she listened to jazz musicians like Miles Davis and Nancy

Wilson from an early age. She also sang a capella for her mother's bridge club. Bridgewater began her education at Clark Elementary School in Flint, where she excelled academically. She also wore elaborate costumes to school on a daily basis. In the second grade, Bridgewater transferred into the majority-white St. Matthew Catholic School, where she was one of six black students. She was physically abused by the nuns, and was ostracized by the white parishioners during Mass. In the ninth grade, Bridgewater was kicked out of school for arguing against the superiority of the Catholic faith during a school debate. She enrolled in the integrated public Southwestern High School in Flint, where she formed an all-female vocal group, The Iridescent, in 1964. She also worked as a candy striper at Hurley Medical Center in Flint. At this point, Bridgewater remembers being sexually abused by a Catholic priest.

Video Oral History Interview with Dee Dee Bridgewater, Section A2014\_254\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:19 2014/11/10

Dee Dee Bridgewater formed her own all-female vocal group, The Iridescent, when she was fourteen years old. Around this time, Bridgewater also sang with jazz musicians Sherman Mitchell and George Benson at nightclubs in Flint, Michigan. She graduated from high school in 1968, and then attended Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. Inspired by political activists like Angela Davis, Bridgewater volunteered at a breakfast program run by the Black Panther Party in East Lansing's black community. During this time, she also sang with The Andy Goodrich Quintet. She traveled to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for a collegiate jazz festival, where she met her first husband, jazz trumpeter Cecil Bridgewater. She was also recruited to join the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Jazz Big Band by the university's musical director, John Garvey. Bridgewater recalls undergoing an abortion during her freshman year of college, and describes her experiences of childhood sexual abuse.

Video Oral History Interview with Dee Dee Bridgewater, Section A2014\_254\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:19 2014/11/10

Dee Dee Bridgewater transferred to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 1969. While there, she sang with the majority-white Jazz Big Band, and toured the Soviet Union. In 1970, Bridgewater left college and married her first husband, jazz trumpeter Cecil Bridgewater. She later accompanied him on tour with jazz composer Horace Silver. Bridgewater sang with The Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, and recorded her first album with producer Jerry Wexler in 1973, although it was never released by Atlantic Records. In 1974, she left The Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra to work with a series of jazz musicians, including Sonny Rollins. That year, she released the album 'Afro Blue,' which was recognized by DownBeat magazine. Bridgewater was active in New York City's jazz fusion scene, and befriended musicians like T.S. Monk, III and Onaje Allan Gumbs. She released her self-titled album in 1976, and collaborated with Horace Silver to record 'Love and Peace: A Tribute to Horace Silver' in 1995.

Video Oral History Interview with Dee Dee Bridgewater, Section A2014\_254\_001\_005, TRT: 5:29:12 2014/11/10

Dee Dee Bridgewater was cast in the role of Glinda, the Good Witch of the South, in 'The Wiz' in 1974. The musical's director, Gilbert Moses, later became her second husband. Six months before the show's Broadway premiere, one of the producers began pursuing a romantic relationship with Bridgewater. She rejected his advances, which led the production team to replace Moses with Geoffrey Holder. They also reassigned Bridgewater's number, 'Believe in Yourself,' to actor Andre De Shields. Despite these setbacks, Bridgewater's performance won the Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical in 1975. The next year, she won the Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album for 'The Wiz: Original Soundtrack.' Later in 1976, she released the album 'Dee Dee Bridgewater.' In 1977, Bridgewater recorded the jazz fusion album 'Just Family' while pregnant with her second daughter, singer China Moses. During this time, she appeared in several television series, including 'Hill Street Blues.'