

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joshie Jo Armstead

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Armstead, Jo, 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Joshie Jo Armstead,
Dates:	July 15, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:04:27).
Abstract:	Singer and songwriter Joshie Jo Armstead (1942 -) was one of the original Ikettes with the Ike & Tina Turner Revue, and later formed the writing trio Armstead, Ashford & Simpson with Valerie Simpson and Nick Ashford. Armstead was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 15, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_002
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer and songwriter Joshie Jo Armstead was born on October 8, 1944 in Yazoo City, Mississippi to Wilton Armstead and Rosie Lee Armstead. As a youth, she sang in the church choir and was introduced to blues music by her grandfather. Armstead's first performance was with Bobby "Blue" Bland in Mississippi, before joining a local band, Little Melvin & The Downbeats. Armstead began her singing career when she joined the Ike & Tina Turner Revue in 1961, as one of the original touring Ikettes along with Eloise Hester and Delores Johnson. She toured with them from 1961 to 1963, and recorded the Ikettes record "I'm Blue (The

Gong Gong Song).” Released in 1962 and featuring Tina Turner singing backing vocals, the song reached number nineteen on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and number three on the R&B chart. After leaving the Ikettes in 1963, Armstead moved to New York City and began recording music under the name Deena Johnson. There, she met Valerie Simpson and Nick Ashford and formed the writing trio of Armstead, Ashford, & Simpson. The trio wrote tracks for artists such as Chuck Jackson, The Shirelles, and Doris Troy, but their greatest success came when they wrote Ray Charles’ 1966 #1 hit “Let’s Go Get Stoned,” and the follow up single “I Don’t Need No Doctor.”

When Ashford & Simpson signed with Motown Records in 1966, Armstead left the trio and moved to Chicago, where she married music producer Melvin Collins and the couple founded their own record label, Giant Productions and wrote songs for Garland Green, Ruby Andrews, Syl Johnson and many others, also collaborating with famous music arranger Andrew “Mike” Terry. She returned to New York in 1970, following the collapse of Giant Productions and her marriage to Collins. She sang back up in Bob Dylan’s 1971 single “George Jackson,” and performed in B.B. King’s Live in London show, Melvin Van Peebles’ Broadway show, the film *Don’t Play Us Cheap* and the Broadway musical “Seesaw.” Armstead also recorded singles with the Stax offshoot label Gospel Truth, and sang backup vocals for Burt Bacharach’s LP “Features,” before returning to Chicago in the early 1980s and starring in Oscar Brown Jr.’s musical “Journey Through Forever.” Armstead’s songs include “Stumblin Blocks, Steppin’ Stones,” “I’ve Been Turned On,” “A Stone Good Lover” and “I Feel An Urge Coming On.”

Josephine “Joshie Jo” Armstead was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 15, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Joshie Jo Armstead was conducted by Harriette Cole on July 15, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Singer and songwriter Joshie Jo Armstead (1942 -) was one of the original Ikettes with the Ike & Tina Turner Revue, and later formed the writing trio Armstead, Ashford & Simpson with Valerie Simpson and Nick Ashford.

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:

Armstead, Jo, 1944-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Armstead, Jo, 1944---Interviews

African American musicians--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Singer

Songwriter

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers|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 Joshie Jo Armstead, July 15, 2016. 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 Joshie Jo Armstead, Section A2016_002_001_001, TRT: 1:29:26 2016/07/15

Joshie Jo Armstead was born on October 8, 1942 in Yazoo City, Mississippi to Rosie Johnson Armstead and Wilton Armstead. Her maternal grandfather, Lucius Johnson, was one of eleven children born to Julia Johnson and August Johnson, who were natives of Georgia. Her mother was born in 1907 in Mississippi, where she lived on Pluto Plantation with her mother, former slave Dora Johnson, and sister, Lee Ethel Whitney. After Armstead's maternal grandmother died, her mother was raised in Yazoo City by her aunt and uncle, Marg Johnson and Cicero Johnson, while her father worked as a bootlegger. Armstead's mother went on to become a seamstress and an African Methodist Episcopal minister. Armstead's father was born in Louisiana, and worked on the highway. Armstead had four sisters, including Velma Davis Turner, who was once married to singer Ike Turner. Armstead grew up in Yazoo City, where she sang in the church choir and glee club. She talks about the possible link between her surname and the Amistad slave ship.

Video Oral History Interview with Joshie Jo Armstead, Section A2016_002_001_002, TRT: 2:30:22 2016/07/15

Joshie Jo Armstead was raised in Yazoo City, Mississippi, where she lived in a three-room house with her mother,

Rosie Johnson Armstead, and great aunt, Marg Johnson. The city was segregated; and once, Armstead's younger sister, Odell Brent, who was then twelve years old, was jailed for talking back to a white woman at the movie theater. Armstead admired entertainers like dancer Josephine Baker and actress Josephine Premice, and began singing in church at five years old. She later joined the choir at the all-black Yazoo City High School No. 2 under director Jevonne McCoy. Armstead had her daughter, Chandra Armstead, at seventeen years old; and was unable to graduate from high school. She began performing with Little Melvin and The Downbeats, and auditioned for Ike Turner at Yazoo City's Silver Slipper nightclub. With her mother's blessing, Armstead joined The Ikettes in 1961, and toured with the Ike and Tina Turner Revue. She remembers blues singers W.C. Handy, Howlin' Wolf and B.B. King.

Video Oral History Interview with Joshie Jo Armstead, Section A2016_002_001_003, TRT: 3:31:19 2016/07/15

Joshie Jo Armstead joined the Ikettes in 1961, and toured the South with the Ike and Tina Turner Revue. Under segregation, the performers were barred from most hotels, so they often slept on the tour bus. At the time, Armstead earned twenty dollars a night. In 1962, The Ikettes released their first single, 'I'm Blue (The Gong-Gong Song)', which was co-written by Armstead and Ike Turner, although Turner prevented her from receiving writing credit. Armstead decided to leave the group because of the unfair wages, and relocated to Los Angeles, California, where she worked with singer Bobby Lexington and music producer Charles Wright. Then, Armstead moved to New York City, where she worked for the music publishing offices of Tin Pan Alley, and began writing songs with Robert Mosley. She also met Valerie Simpson and Nick Ashford, who were background singers at the time. Together, they signed a publishing contract with Scepter Records, and wrote the song, 'Let's Go Get Stoned' for Ray Charles.

Video Oral History Interview with Joshie Jo Armstead, Section A2016_002_001_004, TRT: 4:31:21 2016/07/15

Joshie Jo Armstead ended her songwriting partnership

with Valerie Simpson and Nick Ashford, and moved to Chicago, Illinois, where she founded Giant Records with her husband, Melvin Collins. They signed singer Garland Green, and produced his hit song, 'Jealous Kind of Fella'. Armstead also wrote 'Casanova (Your Playing Days Are Over)' for Ruby Andrews, and 'Come On, Sock It to Me' for Syl Johnson. After Armstead separated from her husband, she moved to New York City, where she began working as a backup singer for musicians like Bob Dylan, Quincy Jones and Cissy Houston. She also sang backup for James Brown, and worked with his producer, Fred Wesley. After impressing director Melvin Van Peebles' with her knowledge of his movies, Armstead was cast in his play, 'Don't Play Us Cheap,' on Broadway in 1972, starring alongside Esther Rolle and Avon Long. Armstead recalls learning about her husband's copyright fraud during their divorce, after which she was granted full ownership of her work with Giant Records.

Video Oral History Interview with Joshie Jo Armstead, Section
A2016_002_001_005, TRT: 5:28:29 2016/07/15

Joshie Jo Armstead performed in the Broadway play 'Seesaw' in 1973; and then, in 1974, obtained a contract with Gospel Truth Records through her connection with record producer Al Bell. However, the company closed six months later, before Armstead finished recording 'A Stone Good Lover'. The album was eventually released by Collectibles Records, with the song "Stumblin' Blocks, Steppin' Stones (What Took Me So Long)" as her first single. In 1977, Armstead worked with composer Burt Bacharach and songwriter Anthony Newley at the MGM Grand Las Vegas in Las Vegas, Nevada. Then, in the early 1980s, she moved to Chicago, Illinois to pursue commercial advertisement work, and wrote jingles for advertising firms like the Burrell Communications Group. At the same time, she managed boxer Alfonso Ratliff, whom she was dating; thus becoming the first female boxing manager in Illinois. Armstead's daughter, Chandra Armstead, also became a background singer, working with Evelyn "Champagne" King.

Video Oral History Interview with Joshie Jo Armstead, Section
A2016_002_001_006, TRT: 6:33:30 2016/07/15

Joshie Jo Armstead founded Preacher Rose Records in 1983 in order to release her music in the United Kingdom. She later returned to New York City, and enrolled at The New School of Social Research, earning a bachelor's degree in liberal arts with a concentration in writing in 2002. Although Armstead officially retired from songwriting in 1996, she continued to produce music with Fred Wesley; and, in 2014, performed at the Littlefield in Brooklyn, New York, after a thirty-three year hiatus. She reflects upon her life and legacy, and shares her advice to aspiring musicians. Armstead concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.