Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Meli'sa Morgan

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com

Creator: Morgan, Meli’sa

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Meli'sa Morgan,

Dates: September 23, 2016

Bulk Dates: 2016

Physical Description: 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:39:24).

Abstract: R&B singer Meli’sa Morgan (1964 - ) began her vocal career in 1979 with Business Before Pleasure, and went on to sing back-up with the likes of Chaka Khan, Whitney Houston, and Melba Moore. She released six studio albums. Morgan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 23, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2016_027

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

R&B singer Meli’sa Morgan was born on December 6, 1964 in Queens, New York. She began her singing career at the early age of nine years old as a member of the Starlets of Corona gospel choir. She went on to study music and theatre at The Juilliard School Performing Arts Conservatory in New York.

In 1978, a fourteen-year-old Morgan released her debut single “I’m In The Prime Of Love” on Stang Records with the funk group Business Before Pleasure. Morgan next joined Shades of Love; and, in 1982, the group’s track “Body to
Body (Keep in Touch) charted on the Billboard Hot Dance Club Play chart. That year, disco producer Jacques Fred Petrus asked Morgan to join his new studio group, High Fashion. The group’s song “Feelin’ Lucky Lately” charted on U.S. Black Singles. It was their sole hit, and Morgan soon left the group to sing back-up with the likes of Chaka Khan, Whitney Houston, and Melba Moore. In 1986, Morgan released her solo debut album Do Me Baby on Capitol Records. The title track, her cover of the Prince original, topped R&B charts for three weeks. Her 1987 duet with Kashif was released on her album, Good Love, and served as the title track of Kashif’s Love Changes. In 1990, she returned to Capitol with The Lady In Me. Her 1992 release with Pendulum Records, Still in Love with You, included her cover of Al Green’s “I’m Still in Love with You.” In 2005, Morgan wrote and sang background for Mary J. Blige’s song “Good Woman Down,” which was featured in Tyler Perry’s film I Can Do Bad All by Myself. The next year, she released her fifth solo album I Remember on Orpheus Records; Valerie Simpson played piano on Morgan’s rendering of Ashford & Simpson’s Motown hit “Ain’t Nothing Like The Real Thing.” Morgan also teamed up with Freddie Jackson to record the classic song “Back Together Again.” In 2014, Morgan collaborated with fellow 1980s R&B stars Cheryl Pepsii Riley and Full Force on “Thank You for Leaving Me.” She was also nominated for a Soul Train Music Award for “In the Mood to Take It Slow,” her collaboration with jazz artist Najee. Morgan was the subject of a 2015 episode of TVOne’s Unsung; and, in 2016, released her new single, “So Good,” and signed a contract with Cleopatra Records. Morgan has writing credits on most of her songs, which have been remixed and sampled by Junior Vazquez, Mary J. Blige, Cool Million and others. She continues to tour in the United States and abroad, and released the album Love Demands in 2018.

Meli’sa Morgan was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on September 23, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Meli'sa Morgan was conducted by Harriette Cole on September 23, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. R&B singer Meli’sa Morgan (1964 - ) began her vocal career in 1979 with Business Before Pleasure, and went on to sing back-up with the likes of Chaka Khan, Whitney Houston, and Melba Moore. She released six studio albums.

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:

Morgan, Meli’sa

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Morgan, Meli’sa--Interviews
Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

R & B 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 Meli'sa Morgan, September 23, 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).
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 Meli'sa Morgan, Section A2016_027_001_001, TRT: 1:29:36 2016/09/23

Meli’sa Morgan was born on December 6, 1960 in Queens, New York to Margie Johnson Morgan and John Morgan. Her paternal family traced their lineage to Morgan’s great-grandmother, who was enslaved in South Carolina. Morgan’s father was raised in rural South Carolina by his father, Reverend Macaroy Morgan. He studied chemistry at Paine College in Augusta, Georgia, and then moved to New York City, where he worked at a paint company. Morgan’s mother born in Edgefield, South Carolina, and moved with her older sister to New York City, where they were later joined by the rest of the family. Morgan’s parents met in Queens, and raised Morgan and her two siblings in Corona. She lived with her mother after her parents’ divorce, and saw her father frequently. Morgan enjoyed singing from a young age, and often organized performances for her friends in the neighborhood. She attended P.S. 143 and I.S. 61, and belonged to Hornrette Washington’s choir, the Starlets of Corona.

Video Oral History Interview with Meli'sa Morgan, Section A2016_027_001_002, TRT: 2:31:33 2016/09/23

Meli’sa Morgan became the lead singer of Business Before Pleasure while she was a student at John Bowne High School in Queens, New York. She toured in Canada with the band upon graduation. During this time, Morgan learned to assert herself the lead in an all-male band. She was mentored by Sylvia Robinson, who signed the group to her label, Sugar Hill Records. After touring for eighteen

months, Morgan returned to New York City, where she began working at Chase Manhattan Bank and as a backup singer. After being hired as a backing vocalist by producer Patrick Adams, Morgan was asked to step in for the lead singer, who never showed up. The track, ‘Keep in Touch (Body to Body),’ became a hit song in New York City’s dance halls. Morgan went on to perform at the city’s top venues, including Paradise Garage, the Cellar and Mikell’s. In 1982, Morgan was recruited to join High Fashion, a studio group organized by Jacques Fred Petrus that included Alyson Williams and Eric McClinton.

Meli’sa Morgan met Patti LaBelle while touring with the B. B. and Q. Band, which was one of Jacques Fred Petrus’ studio groups. In 1983, Morgan left Petrus’ studio to pursue a solo career. With the encouragement of Vesta Williams, she successfully auditioned to sing backup on tour with Chaka Khan, who became Morgan’s mentor and friend. The role increased Morgan’s reputation in the music industry, and she met Kashif after the tour ended. He asked Morgan to sing on ‘Stone Love’ and ‘Baby Don’t Break Your Baby’s Heart,’ which were recorded with new digital technology. He also introduced her to Whitney Houston, and Morgan sang backup on her song ‘Keep Thinking About You’ in 1985. The following year, Morgan signed a contract with Hush Productions, which was owned by Capital Records. Her producers asked her to record a cover of Prince’s ‘Do Me, Baby,’ and although she was initially hesitant, she was encouraged by her family to accept the offer. The track went on to become one of Morgan’s most popular songs.

Meli’sa Morgan’s cover of Prince’s song ‘Do Me Baby’ held the number one spot on the hip hop and R and B charts for four weeks in 1986. She worked with keyboardist Lesette Wilson on the track, and their partnership continued with the album ‘Good Love’ in 1987. Next, Morgan was invited to record ‘Love Changes’ with Kashif, which also became a hit. Then, Morgan
ended her contract with Hush Productions due to a dispute over her compensation. She signed an agreement to produce three albums with Capitol Records, but when a new president took over the label, he prematurely ended Morgan’s contract in order to focus on the emerging hip hop genre. At the time, hip hop was more cost effective for producers, and many R and B artists struggled to adapt to the changing industry. Although Morgan refused to alter her musical style, she agreed to collaborate with neo soul artists like Mary J. Blige, and worked on a remix of Blige’s ‘The Breakthrough’ with Jay Z.

Video Oral History Interview with Meli'sa Morgan, Section A2016_027_001_005, TRT: 5:33:41 2016/09/23

Meli’sa Morgan released ‘Fool’s Paradise’ in 1986, and the track remained popular for decades. In 1993, Morgan established the Meli’sa Morgan Foundation, which focused on domestic abuse and educational achievement. She recorded ‘Still in Love’ with Ruben Rodriguez on his new label, Pendulum Records, in 2002. Morgan later signed with Orpheus Music, where she reunited with Hush Productions’ Beau Huggins. Together, they recorded ‘Back Together Again,’ which featured Valerie Simpson on the piano. Morgan also routinely performed at the Sugar Bar, a club in New York City owned by Simpson and her husband, Nick Ashford. Over the following years, Morgan suffered several personal losses, including the deaths of her father and her friend, Whitney Houston. At the time of the interview, Morgan was recently engaged. She talks about balancing her personal life and career, and shares her advice for aspiring entertainers. She also reflects upon her legacy.


Meli’sa Morgan narrates her photographs.