

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Donnie McClurkin

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McClurkin, Donnie
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin,
Dates:	October 6, 2016 and October 8, 2016
Bulk Dates:	2016
Physical Description:	13 uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:28:49).
Abstract:	Gospel singer and pastor Donnie McClurkin (1959 -) released multiple successful gospel albums, including Donnie McClurkin and Live in London and More. He also founded and served as senior pastor of the Perfecting Faith Church in Freeport, New York. McClurkin was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on October 6, 2016 and October 8, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2016_068
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Gospel singer and pastor Donnie McClurkin was born on November 9, 1959 in Copiague, New York to Donald McClurkin, Sr. and Frances McClurkin. McClurkin joined the choir at Amityville Full Gospel Tabernacle. At the age of fifteen, he became a member of Benny Cummings and the King's Temple Choir. McClurkin attended Walter G. O'Connell Copiague High School.

McClurkin formed the McClurkin Singers with his older sisters and a neighbor; and in 1983, the group performed with the Tri-Boro Mass Choir, led by Albert Jamison, who introduced McClurkin to gospel singer James Cleveland, who became a mentor to McClurkin. McClurkin made annual visits to Los Angeles, California to sing with Cleveland at Cornerstone Institutional Baptist Church. From 1987 to 1989, McClurkin sang in the chorus for the Broadway production of *Don't Get God Started*, which debuted at the Longacre Theatre in New York City. In 1989, McClurkin moved to Detroit, Michigan, where he and Pastor Marvin L. Winans co-founded Perfecting Church. With the choir, McClurkin recorded the songs "Speak to My Heart" and "We Worship You." After signing with Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc., McClurkin released his first self-titled solo album in 1996, which gospel singer and mentor Andrae Crouch helped to produce. In the late 1990s, McClurkin wrote songs for the animated film *The Prince of Egypt*, and signed a publishing contract with The Walt Disney Company. He also appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and performed at the Grammy and Stellar Awards. His second album, *Live in London and More*, was number one on the U.S. Gospel Chart for more than forty weeks after its release in 2000.

McClurkin was ordained as a pastor by Marvin L. Winans in 2001. That same year, he established Perfecting Faith Church in Freeport, New York, which started as a small bible study group. His weekly radio program, *The Donnie McClurkin Show*, debuted in 2006, and went on to broadcast in over seventy-five markets. From 2010 to 2015, McClurkin appeared as a judge on five seasons of BET's *Sunday Best*. His discography includes *Again* (2003), *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (2004), *We Are All One (Live in Detroit)* (2008), *Duets* (2014), and *The*

Journey (Live) (2016).

McClurkin released his autobiography *Eternal Victim, Eternal Victor* in 2001; and was the subject of the subsequent biographical documentary *From Darkness to Light: The Donnie McClurkin Story* in 2004. McClurkin had a cameo role in the film *The Fighting Temptations*, and starred alongside actors Boris Kodjoe and Idris Elba in the movie *The Gospel* in 2005. His weekly television program *Perfecting Your Faith* began airing on The Word Network in 2009. McClurkin collaborated often with gospel singers Kirk Franklin and Yolanda Adams, including on the Hopeville tour, and received numerous awards for his music, including multiple Grammy, Stellar, Dove, and NAACP Image Awards.

Donnie McClurkin was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 6, 2016.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Donnie McClurkin was conducted by Harriette Cole on October 6, 2016 and October 8, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 13 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Gospel singer and pastor Donnie McClurkin (1959 -) released multiple successful gospel albums, including Donnie McClurkin and Live in London and More. He also founded and served as senior pastor of the Perfecting Faith Church in Freeport, New York.

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:

McClurkin, Donnie

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
McClurkin, Donnie--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Pastor

Gospel Singer

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers|ReligionMakers

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 Donnie McClurkin, October 6, 2016 and October 8, 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 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 Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_001_001, TRT: 1:28:38
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Donnie McClurkin was born on November 9, 1959 in Copiague, New York to Frances McClurkin and Donald McClurkin, Sr. In the 1920s, McClurkin's maternal great-grandmother, Mary Dingue, lived in New York City's Harlem neighborhood, where she was acquainted with tap dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. There, she also raised McClurkin's mother, who was born to his maternal grandmother, Olivia Jenkins, at thirteen years old. Later, his maternal grandmother found work as a housekeeper; and married his maternal step-grandfather, who was a numbers runner and bouncer at a local bar. McClurkin's maternal family, including his mother, moved in 1953 to Amityville, New York. McClurkin's paternal grandfather, John A. McClurkin, served as the pastor of two churches in Union and Rock Hill, South Carolina; and owned a farm in Chester, South Carolina, where McClurkin's father was born. McClurkin's paternal relatives eventually migrated to Amityville, where his father worked in the construction industry.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_001_002, TRT: 2:29:55
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Donnie McClurkin's parents, Frances McClurkin and Donald McClurkin, Sr., met at a party thrown by his paternal aunt and uncle, Odessa Price McClurkin and William McClurkin, in Amityville, New York. There, they married and raised eight children, including McClurkin. His parents were sometimes physically abusive to one another; but, despite his tumultuous home life, McClurkin mostly recalls watching cartoons and eating candies like Squirrel Nuts, Smarties and Mary Janes. On his first day of kindergarten, McClurkin was called a racial slur by a white classmate, which led his mother to confront the principal and the classmate's parents. McClurkin's mother also taught him to play the piano, and he sang his first church solo at four years old. At fifteen years old, he joined Benny Cummings and the King's Temple Choir. In addition, McClurkin recalls enduring racial discrimination at a store in Chester, South Carolina, while attending the funeral of his paternal grandmother, Emma Crosby McClurkin.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_001_003, TRT: 3:27:00
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Donnie McClurkin's younger brother, Thomas McClurkin, was killed in a hit and run accident in 1986, when McClurkin was eight years old. His mother, Frances McClurkin, blamed him for his brother's death, and sent him to live with his maternal grandmother, Olivia Jenkins. At her home, McClurkin was sexually abused by his maternal great uncle. When McClurkin was thirteen years old, he was also molested by his great uncle's son. To cope with the abuse, McClurkin joined the Amityville Full Gospel Tabernacle, which was pastored by William H. Walker. As a child, McClurkin did not have strong relationship with his father, John A. McClurkin; but they became close while living together later in life. In 2005, they appeared on Bishop T.D. Jakes' Father's Day program, where McClurkin's father told him he was proud of him and his career

for the first time. McClurkin also describes his parents' tumultuous relationship and disciplinary methods.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_001_004, TRT: 4:29:55
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Donnie McClurkin wrote songs from an early age, and performed them at home with his siblings. Through his aunt, soprano Bea Carr, he met gospel singer Andrae Crouch at the age of nine years old, during a concert at the Bethel Gospel Tabernacle in the Jamaica neighborhood of Queens, New York. Crouch became McClurkin's mentor and friend, and encouraged his interest in biblical scripture. In Copiague, New York, McClurkin attended Deauville Gardens Elementary School, Copiague Junior High School and then Walter G. O'Connell Copiague High School. There, he was bullied, and left school before graduating. In 1979, McClurkin organized a singing group with the members of his church, and they performed at the Greater Second Baptist Church in Freeport, New York. Then, he formed the McClurkin Singers with his older sisters and a neighbor; and, in 1983, they sang with Albert Jamison's Tri-Boro Mass Choir. Through Jamison, McClurkin was introduced to gospel singer James Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_001_005, TRT: 5:21:09
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Donnie McClurkin and his family made annual visits to gospel singer James Cleveland's home in Los Angeles, California, where they sang at the Cornerstone Institutional Baptist Church. In 1988, McClurkin moved to Detroit, Michigan, where he founded the Perfecting Church with gospel singer and pastor Marvin Winans. With the choir, McClurkin recorded the songs 'Speak to My Heart' and 'We Worship You,' which became popular on the radio in 1990. He was offered a recording contract with Savoy Records, but declined. Then, McClurkin sang 'I See A World' and 'No Problem Too Big' at the 1992 Democratic National Convention at the request of presidential candidate William Jefferson "Bill" Clinton; and, soon after, was invited by President George H.W. Bush to sing at the White House for First Lady Barbara Bush's literacy initiative. At the time, McClurkin worked at an HIV/AIDS clinic in Highland Park, Michigan. He talks about coping with his experiences of childhood sexual abuse, and how he found solace in religion.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_001_006, TRT: 6:29:03
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Donnie McClurkin sang "Speak to My Heart" with his choir at the Grammy Awards, where he met Neal Joseph, an executive at Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc. With his help, McClurkin obtained a recording contract, and released his first solo album, 'Donnie McClurkin,' in 1996. After gospel singer BeBe Winans sang McClurkin's song, "Stand," for poet Maya Angelou and Oprah Winfrey, Winfrey invited McClurkin to sing on her talk show, and his album sales grew from thirty thousand to three hundred thousand copies sold. While performing at the Stellar Awards, McClurkin was approached by music producer David Foster to sing "The Prayer" with gospel singer Yolanda Adams. He went on to write songs for the animated film 'The Prince of Egypt' in 1998, and signed a publishing contract with The Walt Disney Company after impressing its president, Michael Eisner, with his rendition of "I Can Go The Distance" from the 'Hercules' soundtrack. McClurkin also talks about being diagnosed with leukemia in 1991.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_001_007, TRT: 7:27:09
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Donnie McClurkin lived in Detroit, Michigan until 1999, when pastor Marvin

Winans persuaded him to found his own church. McClurkin formally established the Perfecting Faith Church, which began as a small bible study group, in Freeport, New York in 2001. In addition, McClurkin released the album 'Live in London and More' on Verity Records in 2000. The album featured the singles "We Fall Down" and "Caribbean Medley," and held the number one position on the U.S. gospel Billboard chart for over forty weeks. In 2001, McClurkin published his autobiography, 'Eternal Victim, Eternal Victor,' which was criticized by his mother, Frances McClurkin, and maternal grandmother, Olivia Jenkins. During his career, McClurkin was the recipient of multiple Stellar Awards, Dove Awards, NAACP Image Awards and Grammy Awards. He describes his son, Matthew McClurkin; and adopted daughter, Michelle, whom he met in Devon, England in 1995. He also talks about the importance of counseling in the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_002_008, TRT: 9:30:21 ?

Donnie McClurkin was influenced by his family's musical tastes while growing up during the 1960s. During this time, he listened to artists like Gladys Knight and The Pips, The Mamas and the Papas, The Lovin' Spoonful and The Byrds. His siblings enjoyed the music of Aretha Franklin; his father, Donald McClurkin, Sr., preferred rhythm and blues artists like Otis Redding; and his mother, Frances McClurkin, listened to gospel groups such as Dr. Mattie Moss Clark and the Church of God In Christ International Mass Choir, as well as gospel singer James Cleveland, who later became McClurkin's mentor. To discover new music, McClurkin watched television programs like 'The Ed Sullivan Show,' 'The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson,' and 'Tonight Starring Jack Paar.' During the 1970s, McClurkin's favorite musicians were The 5th Dimension and James Taylor. In addition, McClurkin describes the inspiration behind his popular song, 'Stand'; and recalls hearing the voice of God on numerous occasions.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_002_009, TRT: 10:33:10 ?

Donnie McClurkin appeared in 'Don't Get God Started' from 1987 to 1989. The play debuted at the Longacre Theatre in New York City, and starred Kim Fields, Giancarlo Esposito and Ernie Banks. The play's music composer, Marvin Winans, encouraged McClurkin to audition; and he and his sister, Andrea McClurkin-Mellini, were cast in the chorus. Soon after, McClurkin became the understudy to the lead singer. The play ran on Broadway for four months, before going on tour. When the production ended in 1989, Winans and McClurkin partnered to found the Perfecting Church in Detroit, Michigan. During that time, Detroit's musical community included emerging gospel artists like The Clark Sisters, James Moore and Vanessa Bell Armstrong; and, in California, gospel artists like Andrae Crouch, Walter Hawkins and The Love Center Choir, and Edwin Hawkins, were gaining popularity as well. McClurkin also talks about the success of gospel singers BeBe Winans and CeCe Winans, and their transition to the mainstream music industry.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_002_010, TRT: 11:30:00 ?

Donnie McClurkin and Marvin Winans founded the Perfecting Church in 1989 in Detroit, Michigan. There, they also established the Academy to Perfection, an advanced Sunday school program; operated a food and clothing bank; and built warming stations to protect people who were homeless during the winter. In 1999, McClurkin moved to Freeport, New York, where he began hosting church

services at the Best Western Hotel & Convention Center. In 2001, he established the Perfecting Faith Church with the guidance of his mentors, including Gilbert Earl Patterson, Norman L. Wagner, O.T. Jones, Jr. and Charles E. Blake, Sr., who helped fundraise. McClurkin hired a staff, and developed the church's organizational structure, which included twenty-three departments. He also made improvements to the Perfecting Faith Church facility through donations submitted on the church's website. During this time, Winans founded the Marvin L. Winans Academy of Performing Arts, a charter school in Detroit.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_002_011, TRT: 12:34:03 ?

Donnie McClurkin worked with film producer Stephanie A. Frederic to produce the documentary 'The Donnie McClurkin Story: From Darkness to Light.' The project began as a short video about his career, and grew to include interviews with Coretta Scott King and McClurkin's family members. McClurkin also appeared on television programs like 'Girlfriends' and 'The Parkers,' and had a cameo role in 'The Fighting Temptations' with Beyonce Knowles and Cuba Gooding, Jr. In 2003, he participated in the Hopeville gospel tour with Kirk Franklin and Yolanda Adams; and he starred in 'The Gospel' alongside actors Boris Kodjoe and Idris Elba in 2005. McClurkin talks about his friendships with gospel singers Yolanda Adams, Kirk Franklin and CeCe Winans; as well as his social media presence and live streaming church services at the Perfecting Faith Church. He also recalls his congregation's response to his autobiography, 'Eternal Victim, Eternal Victor,' which was published in 2001.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_002_012, TRT: 13:30:27 ?

Donnie McClurkin began broadcasting 'The Donnie McClurkin Show' on the radio in 2006. The show became the number one radio program in the New York market, and was among the top one hundred radio shows in the United States. McClurkin also created Donnie TV, a multimedia website featuring historic black films like 'Cabin in the Sky' and 'Stormy Weather'; recordings of black musicians like Billie Holiday, Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington; and television programs like 'Amos 'n' Andy.' The website also promoted emerging gospel singers. McClurkin served as a judge on 'Sunday Best,' a singing competition show hosted by Kirk Franklin on the BET network. During the contaminated water crisis in Flint, Michigan, McClurkin partnered with pastor Marvin Winans and the Perfecting Fellowship organization to donate 6,000 cases of water to needy families. He also talks about his fiancée, Nicole C. Mullen; and his son, Matthew McClurkin, who lives with his mother and stepfather in California.

Video Oral History Interview with Donnie McClurkin, Section A2016_068_002_013, TRT: 14:37:59 ?

Donnie McClurkin recorded seven albums during his career as a gospel singer, including 'The Journey (Live),' which was released in 2016. He reflects upon his legacy, and the future of gospel music in the digital age. He also describes the history of racial discrimination in the United States, and his message to young African American men regarding police brutality. McClurkin reflects upon the importance of interfaith cooperation, and concludes the interview by talking about the election of President Donald John Trump.