

Motown Oral History Project  
Detroit, MI

Joe “Pep” Harris

Interviewed by  
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Information Sciences  
Kim Schroeder, Instructor  
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Recording Begins

Michael Vollbach: This is uh, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017. We're at the Purdy Kresge uh Library um and on the campus of Wayne State University. My name is Michael Vollbach and I'm meeting with uh Motown great Joe Pep Harris and we're going to discuss uh some of his uh uh musical career and uh some of things uh he's done uh over time. And I wanted to start by asking you Mr. Harris, uh, when did you know, when did you know that you had the gift that you have today and that you wanted to perform?

Joe Harris: Well I didn't know anything about the gift (laugh). Uh um (throat clearing) I knew that in 1954, 1954, 55, some 54, I believe it was, okay I would say 54, I went to a rock and roll show. Well a rhythm and blues show on Hastings Street and it featured Little Willie John. I think I was 9, I know I was 9 then and um it was the first show I'd ever been to. I went with my mom and some of her friends. And um after his performance I knew that's what I wanted to do. The next year I won the first WCHB talent contest.

MV: No kid...

JH: 1955, 56, 56, um the Spinners were second. Willie Tyler and Lester were third and we all end up on Motown.

MV: Wow, wow.

JH: (throat clearing)

MV: Um so, walk me through this because I'm not a musical person.

JH: Okay

MV: So how does a guy that's 9 years old, 10 years old, wins an award um. Is, is

that when you get discovered?

JH: (laughing) Yes

MV: Is that when you get signed? How does that happen?

JH: I got discovered. I um, the um the WCHB show was um was, was uh DJ driven and one of the first guys that had um a major legitimate record company here Robert West, who had Lu Pine Records. Um, uh the winner of the contest won a recording contract a recording contract we were going to record a single. And um I recorded the single with um Sonny Woods of Hank Ballard and the Midnighters and Joe Hunter of the, uh of the Funk Brothers. Um.

(beep beep beep beeps)

JH: That was um my introduction to any music with musicians or anything like that playing behind me. I mean even when we performed live in the WCHB contest it was all a cappella.

MV: Oh really.

JH: Oh yeah, I was doo wop days, everything was a cappella, so you know we would do doo wopping and doing our little steps. And um I um in the 1955, 1956, (whisper) 57, 58. Okay 1956, 55, 56 um um I'm a little older now, I'm trying to remember. And those, those years were that particular year I was getting ready to go to junior, I was in junior high school. I was getting ready to go to high school and my mom shut all that music down. Uh so I had a little year and half run with that celebrity. Doing a lot of things with uh um Mr. LaJune Rodgers and Ernie Rodgers who were doing a lot of things around Detroit at that time. Um I have to give all the, the, the kudos and the credit to a guy that was handling us his name was Eddie Larkins. He was um uh he was a guy that was instrumental in putting The Delphi's together who ending up being the Vandellas.

MV: (whispered) Sure.

JH: And in fact, um uh that, that merging came because we were doing Soupy Sales, I think it was Soup, we did Soupy Sales and Ed McKenzie. And uh during one of the interviews I was telling the folks so like so you know like I'm speaking to you where I was uh singing and I lived in the Brewster projects and uh Eddie Larkins was my manager and I'm a little kid saying he lived on Watson Street. (laughing) So they got his number out of the phone book his uh um Rosalind Ashford's mom who was managing that group at that particular time and um they called him and he made an arrangement and went and listened to them. And the next thing I know I saw them come to his home one day to rehearse and talk about them doing what they were doing. And that's when I met, the first time I met Rosalind and her sister and Annette and the rest of the folks that was in there, I think they had maybe six people in that group then. Uh Rosalind sister was in there, Geraldine, I remember her very well. Um but these were the times when I was Little Joe and Little Joe with the Moroccos. And um when I see the Vandellas now that's what they always call me, little Joe but he's not so little any more. That was my moniker back then in those days. So um that was an era, that was the beginning of the everything in that era for me and uh when I, when I, when my mom shut it down I would uh went to Northeastern High School for four years with Mary Wilson, four years. For four years, Mary Wilson and I were in the first class which was uh, uh, an extracurricular class which was the um the uh part of the choir but not the main choir. This was an ensemble, for four years I was in Northeastern and went to school at 7 o'clock that ensemble class started. Uh and for four years I was there every day, never missed a day. And Mary Wilson and I sat in that same year for four years and I mean, I mean we didn't, we were both

sat in that same year for four years and I mean, I mean we didn't, we were both from the Brewster Projects, not knowing what our future would be so I mean I know it was just we was just classmates. And by the time I got out of high school she was getting a little notoriety then.

MV: So how do you go from you know sort of being this phenom as a child to the next step? Is the next step getting signed by Motown?

JH: Oh no. No, no, no I went, I went, when I, after I did that after that little first record I did with Lu Pine Records with Bumble Bee which was a subsidiary of Lu Pine, um I had to do, I had to do school. My mom said singing and all that stuff was out the window. So I went to high school for four years every day, never missing a day trying to stay out of the Brewster projects. Trying to figure out what I was going to do or be when I got out of school. And the year that I graduated (throat clearing) 1962, um, it must've been .. July / August of 1962 my cousin Lee Rogers who was a little, he had a few records out at that time and he was kind of popular around the city. We stayed across from each other in the Brewster projects but we both had moved out by that time. Well he had moved out, I wasn't but he happened to be down and saw and well man come on go to this club that we're performing at tonight. Oh a club, I said, and I thought about it and how am I going to get in and he said you go and come with me. (laughing) It wasn't a drinking club but I didn't know that at the time.

MV: Sure.

JH: So um we went to this club on Woodward, it was called The Village and it was on Woodward and Alexandrine. Um it the club um the clientele the people in the club were all from the suburbs they were a white audience all from the suburb that come down to this club and every weekend in Detroit they would be in The Village. So I came in there with Lee and as soon as I walk in the door the first, the first folks that I saw were, I didn't know them any of them at the time were um Walter Jackson, uh Betty Levette, David Ruffin, Richard Street and another guy named Roger Way. They were all recording artists uh that had records and things and a couple of guys that sang with Richard Street and the Distance at that particular time. Those were the first folks that I met and um through my two years hanging out in The Village because I was there for about two years before we really became my group really that I had at that particular time coming out of school which was a group called The Peps, uh before we uh began to get um a big following around the city, a reputation really. And uh and in that two years uh one of the guys that sang with me was named William Levine who had at that time we called Billy Lee and he ended up being Mitch Ryder.

MV: Oh shit.

JH: Yeah.

MV: Sure.

JH: He was uh he and I uh from The Village we um we both were moving from home. He was trying to move to Detroit and I was trying to move out of the projects and we got an apartment together.

MV: Wow.

JH: So we stayed together uh I don't know how long we (laughing) that apartment because we had both was getting a little notoriety and we, he sometimes I was home, sometimes he was sometimes he was (indistinguishable) and you know. I was fresh out of school trying to find my way and I saw music again. I was supposed to be over here (thumping on the table) in Wayne, my mom was thinking I was coming here to go to school and I was out in the streets singing. You know

I'm thinking she didn't know but she knew. And um she really didn't want to um uh put, have, push me to pursue that because I mean she, she had no idea like I didn't. I was singing because I liked it. I was in just in the love with being on the stage, and especially with some of the guys that I was on the stage with. It was, uh wow, Tommy Stone, um, was my biggest inspiration after I got out of high school. But before when I was with Little Joe and the Moroccos, Ronnie Abner was with another group that uh Eddie Larkins managed who were called the Vibertones. And uh they were kind of popular group around Detroit which I use to watch them all the time and Ronnie was the quintessential entertainer I mean just a total entertainer. He was born to, to entertain. And after I had hooked up with Tom Stone, Ron came home from the service, he had been in the Airforce, I think it was the Airforce, Army, something one of them. And uh Army. And um immediately he went to the down to The Village with me one night and he went up on the stage and the rest of that was history. We were together from 1963, 60, the end of 62 the beginning of 63, end of 62. Ronnie came at the end of 62 to um 68, 69, where we were, well, by that time (throat clearing) we had recorded quite a few records for um uh Thelma Records. We, we also recorded for D Town Records, which was Mike Hanks. Thelma Records was Thelma Gordy and Ms. Coleman, her mom. They had a record company which, was um, which was where we got all our benefits from because of connection with Motown at that time.

MV: Sure.

JH: And then um our later part of our years, even at Thelma's from I think from 65, 66, somewhere around in there, the year that Otis Redding died, Martha Jean came to Detroit, in fact, we were, I was in the car when my manager at that time Pete Hall and Roger Brown with the Lions, went down to get her. And um uh through the Martha Jean years all the way up through the riots, after the riots, Detroit was no longer the musical mecca that uh it was then because it was a part of the, the systematic system that when the system gets to, on the black side, gets to the point they tear it down. So you will never see any of that. And you asking me how, uh, that come off the streets because I grew up in the neighborhood where you see them in the, in the hallways, in the street corners, in school, in churches, always somebody singing. Somebody rehearsing in the apartment we be standing outside the door, looking at groups in peoples singing gospel singers, blues singers, everywhere people were singing. Joe's Record Shoppe was a part of one of my paper routes and I use to hang out up there on Hastings Street. Outside of joes Record Shoppe and seeing all the guys coming and going in there, recording and uh (throat clearing) running, I was very young. Running errands for all those folks up there at that particular time. It was culture, it was the neighborhood, it was the uh the whole vibrant sun up to sun down life. And at that particular time when I was growing up in the Brewster projects, Hastings Street was, was, you think Downtown Detroit is something, it ain't nothing its just a lot of marketing and buildings and stores. It was total entertainment, it was everything at night was about that whole entertainment industry. The streets, every, the lights, the clubs, uh. I mean it, its, its, it was something that you have to be there to see you know. I was caught up in that.

MV: So, the un-, The Undisputed Truth..

JH: That's...

MV: When did that come about?

JH: That, okay...

MV: But how did that come about because um that's that's that's a big movement

MV: But how did that come about because um that s, that s, that s a big movement in a different era?

JH: Listen to me. Okay... okay after The Peps, with Thelma Gordy or Ms. Coleman, when we were at Thelma Records they also had a group they called The Ohio Untouchables. Don Davis was our managing us at that time (throat clearing) And um, uh, we were releasing a record off of Thelma's they had just released a record on The Ohio Untouchables, called I'm Tired of Wondering. And the week of the release we were all coming from the company going to down to spend the weekend where they played in Dayton, Ohio. So we went down there for the weekend and I think that, that was the time in my life when I really knew that this is what I really want to do. I mean I sat there and watched those guys, when we got in the club, now mind you uh I wasn't 21, but I had a little pencil mark on my mouth, over my mouth (laughing) to do the Groucho Marx's you know. And I'm with a bunch of folks and they're all entertainers. So I, I didn't, I never, I never got questioned. (throat clearing) And um I sat there and watched that band play two sets and never moved out of my seat and you couldn't get in the club after the first show. I mean people were in there and they wouldn't leave the club didn't close up 2:30 or 3 o'clock at night. And then they left there and go to another uh place called, and where they called that a dawn dance. In other words, the man going to this great big um it was called Lakeside some kind of coliseum out there that they would rent and people would come in and be cabaret style and from dusk to dawn. It closes at 6, 6:30. So we were, I set up and watched them all night. We did a set with them one night and that was the beginning of something new, my group The Peps and The Ohio Untouchables in Dayton on the stage. When we came to town and worked with them it was like lights out, first come first served, you couldn't get in all night long. And um uh after that group broke up, I uh (throat clearing) well in between of that time, The Peps were, we were a little popular then, we were getting well known. In fact, we were kind of a regular at the 20 Grand Club. And uh when they didn't have big shows, they would bring us in there and we would open and close a show with a few local acts. And then this particular year, 1965, 66, Chuck Jackson came to town and um the guy at the 20 Grand had us to open the show for Chuck Jackson. Us and Yvonne Fair, we were opening the show, Chuck Jackson brought Yvonne. Um ten days at the 20 Grand was really (laughing) it was wild, it was really something. Chuck Jackson was at the top of his game at that particular time. He was the number one R&B rhythm and blues male vocalist period at that time. Him, when we finished those 10 nights at the 20 grand, his manager came and Chuck, both of them were together and were in the dressing room and asked us if we would tour with them. They had a little tour that was going that was going to end up in the Bahamas. The next stop was the Apollo, how was we going to turn that down.

MV: (laughing)

JH: So we left that, that, that night that we closed at the um that we were closing at the 20 grand, we had to leave and go directly to New York. You know because the show started in New York on Mondays [sic]. The last show on Sunday night the next show started Monday. So we were out of there for seven days in New York with uh The Chuck Jackson Revue. After the seven, the first seven days at the Apollo with Chuck Jackson, his manager came to our dressing room on the last night and said, Man, we're going to have to let you guys off, he says because its putting too much heat on Chuck. You know, I mean, we, whoever we were on the show, you would come on you had to work. The Peps we did, we did everything.

Ronnie and Tommy Stone were quintessentials, total entertainers. You know and I have to say we never rehearsed. We were get a list of songs that we were going to learn, who was going to sing it and we'd go learn it, go get with the / a band, when we were performing somewhere, if we, we say for instance, when we went to the 20 grand, when we went to the Apollo we knew we were going so we had charts made so that when we got to Apollo the Apollo band was playing for us not Chuck's band. We had our own band in Detroit, so Chuck's band didn't play for us. But when we got to the Apollo, the Apollo band, the house band played for us and we had charts of McKinnley Jackson wrote those charts for us. And um we did those seven nights there and we put a show together and we didn't have but seven minutes.

MV: Holy Moses.

JH: Couldn't no body follow us. One guy could open in front of us and he just passed this passed year, um his name, he use to write for the Ojays and Kenny Gamble and um um (throat clearing) Bunny Sigler. It was the first time that I ever heard of him. Initially we were supposed to open the show, we opened the first show and that, the stage manager, Honeycomb, said we can't do that. Those guys can't open the show because it throws the whole show off. It, I mean we, that was our intention was to be, to be noticed. I mean we were on the show with no hit record, no record in new..., no, no, no body in New York knew who we were period. Uh The Temptations uh were a couple of friends of ours they use to tell folks, in fact, they were, hadn't, they saw that we were coming to the Apollo and they would telling the folks stuff about us so when we got there folks were, would you know that knew Dave and Eddie and those guys uh kind of had little, uh, information on us. And that first, after that first week, Chuck let us go so we stuck in New York. I mean we weren't stuck, we were prepared to go continue on tour and but just at the same time when I, when I got paid from the Apollo, uh the guy that was running the Apollo, Bobby Schiffman said would you guys want, uh we got um, um, uh Tommy Hunt coming in on this next show would you guys want do, let... another week at the Apollo (laughing) we did another week at the Apollo, great show. Tommy Hunt was, I mean he was, he's quintessential entertainer. (throat clearing) Didn't, never worry about no in following no body, was just a total pro. Um, very good seven days at the end of the seven days, Bobby Schiffman said would you guys want to do another week. No one has ever done that.

MV: Wow.

JH: Three straight weeks and the reason why, third week it was uh, um, a DJ um his name was um, um, I, I, I have a hard time right now remembering those names back there for the era, on the spur but it will come to me.. Rocky G.

MV: You're doing good so far...

JH: ... Rocky G

MV: Okay, alright.

JH: Rocky G. Uh and he was uh sponsoring a battle of the groups. (laughing) It was about... nine groups on the show. We were the only group on the show without a hit record. And on the show was the Fantastic Four, um the Mad Lads, the Falcons, the uh Intruders, um The OJays...

MV: Wow.

JH: ... the um, the Manhattans, that I could remember, but there was someone else from Detroit, um.

MV: Some big names.

JH: Uh I mean back in those days that's where the Apollo went. We were, we were

JH: Oh, I mean back in those days that's where the Apollo went. We were, we were the, we were the unknown on the show so that was always an incentive for us to, for every show we did we had to perform. We never rehearsed. But now how you going to rehearse, what you going to do, you know we, we, we had already accepted the fact that Gladys Knight and the Pips were a routine group and plus we had already been on the stage with The Contours who were very energetic at that time and, and uh, uh The Olympics and the Remington's, of shake a tail feather guys, they would always want to be athletic and doing splits and doing all those kind of things, they never wanted to see The Peps again. I mean that's (laughing) I'm just telling the truth, I mean, in fact uh (clearing throat) three years ago when I, I come back to Detroit, a guy was here that has the rhythm and blues hall of fame, he and I guess he and Ron Banks had come up with the concept to do it. Ron Banks of course have passed. And um when he was...

MV: But you're, you're a member of the R&B Hall of Fame, was that 2015?

JH: 2015, yeah.

MV: Yeah.

JH: And he came to me and he was asking for The Peps. And I was like The Peps, (laughing) okay. He said well, I talked to Eddie Levert and two of the guys in the, in The Dells, and I told them that I was trying, I was intending on bringing the museum to Detroit and I wanted to put folks from Detroit in there and right off the top of their head they said The Peps. (laughing) Well I mean, I was very flattered. I mean, in fact, at one particular point in time in our career, um, Eddie Levert and The OJays, I mean they went from a five man group to a three man group like The Peps. You know, you know a lot of times its very hard to keep a bunch of guys together and when groups turn, become factional or separate you know this faction and that faction, you know, um, uh. I had heard that The OJays were splitting up and when they did the three William, Walter and Eddie went together, which you know were the three's that we uh, hung out with, we, we, we never knew anything about them going to break up but we had seen the kind of, the contention at times when they were, we were on shows together. And um they said that was, they seeing The Peps as the three-man group gave them the strength to say this is all we need. And the thing that The Peps had that was at that particular time was the comradery. I mean we were just three guys that were three tight and then, and, and when Mitch Ryder was with us, I mean he was white boy but he was, I mean we was four tight. I mean we was, we did stuff together, we never rehearsed. We were just performers. All of us trying to be singers, Tommy Stone and The Peps was a very, very good singer. Uh we use to record with Don Davis but we only had so much time to go in the studio and did it and at that particular time we was the lead singer. And I stumbled along and becoming the lead singer just by happenstance I mean we were recording at this one particular time with Don and Tommy didn't have all the lyric, didn't know all the lyrics. And Don said Joe do anybody, do you know the lyrics I said yeah I'll sing it. So I mean I sung the this song, this was the second song. The first song was *I Love you Baby*, which was, which was totally a Tom Stone song. I mean he, we, we was just happy to be singing with him, he had a lot to do with Ron Banks becoming the singer he was. They use to hang out together when Ron was very young, really tight and Tommy and Ronnie was like, like, like Ron could have been in The Peps but he was just younger than we were. And um but Tom Stone was the guy that we followed and wanted to back up and then all of a sudden we just turned into uh, a visual Impressions. So we just saw the three Impressions so like okay lets do some of that. And when we got with Martha

Jean, who became my Manager, we just started singing *Keep On Pushing, It's Alright, Choice of Colors*, all those Mo-, those, uh, uh, conscious songs that Curtis was writing then and, and us going around the city everywhere Martha Jean was. In fact, wherever she was we brought our crowd. Until the guy at the 20 Grand said well I'm going to give Martha Monday nights and so Martha took Monday nights, her and uh Ms. Coleman, who was Thelma Gordy's mom. They operated Monday nights, I think we did that for almost two years as The Peps. Now she continued Monday nights and then they left the 20 Grand and went to other places and other clubs as she got bigger. (clearing throat) And um, um, uh one Monday night we were performing there, I mean you couldn't get in, The Temptations was one side working in the gold, in the gold, in the Driftwood and we were appearing in the Gold Room. So they could open the dressing room doors and they'd be right into the room where we working and we were up on stage. Now they had come over and did they thing, the groups that usually perform at the uh Driftwood would come over on certain nights when the DJs over there and do a performance and go back. You know especially if they on Motown and had records out. They would come out and do a song do they're record they had and go back. And that's, and that helps they're record sales plus it helped the club. And uh so we went through that for a while and before I, my, my stint with The Peps ended, at this particular time I was living in Detroit, Toronto and Dayton. Well I was living in Detroit because Tommy Stone in The Peps was married he had kids and family so as where we use to go and travel around and do things together, he was, had to work and come home. Uh Ronnie was into a relationship where he would work and come home. I was free. So I, you know I took other dates with uh with The Ohio Untouchables until they broke up. And when they broke and became two groups, I was working with uh Robert Ward for about, I don't know maybe six months before Sach in the other part of the group which at that time we became The Ohio Players, an original. And Sach came and said man look we need a front man, me and uh, uh and I was, I mean the guys were great you know. So I, I opt out to play with them, Robert Ward could play by his self, you know and um he was just playing clubs, The Ohio Players wanted to travel around. So that was in my best interest. So what I did was I got them dates and we worked together put the act together and then we got a little recording deal only what happened was when we got the recording deal I didn't sign. Because I didn't like the contract, the contract was predicated on them getting us 100,000 dollars' worth of work instead of getting us 100,000 dollars to sign they want give you us 100,000 dollars' worth of work for the year. And the first date that made it look good to them we did a date that uh, uh, at Wilberforce with Bill Cosby, that was the opening date. It said all those things and I kept looking at it and uh I said you know okay but then the next date was in the club in um I think it was Fort Wayne, Indiana. Now its eight of us in the group, eight of us in the group and we're working in Fort Wayne, Indiana for uh a, a weekend a whole weekend, I think it was a weekend four day weekend, \$1200 and we had to pay travel, hotel, you know and eight of us in the group \$1200 ain't no money. You know I was like, I'm not signing this contract because, but I recorded with them. Did in fact, I produced maybe about 4 or 5 thangs on that first album with The Ohio Players. And um, I, I worked with them for about a little over a year and creatively they uh, they had this drummer that they hired who became a part of the group and he had a little, a little older guy and he had a little more business connections than the guys they wanted somebody to run it so they let him be the band leader. But he wanted me to be James Brown. You know I



let him be the band leader. But he wanted me to be James Brown. You know I mean the James Brown was part of my act but I wasn't go out there and be James Brown all night.

MV: Sure.

JH: And we got um, uh, James Brown and Wilson Pickett and you know the players did a lot of stuff with Wilson Pickett. And um, uh, that caused some creative differences and I felt it coming on and we were doing these dates and staying in places where I was having, I was living in Toronto having my clothes made up in there and we was staying in hotels that somebody could just push the door open and in one night, so what I did was I went and I got me a room at the Motel 6 whether or not I could, the gig was enough to pay for it but I couldn't leave my clothes there. And I got fined 25 dollars every night even though I was paying my part of the rent to stay there, you know. I was staying somewhere else with my clothes. So that really got us into a big uh thing. And before I could quit he fired me. Only time I've ever been fired from anything. (laughing) And I was crushed a lot, I mean, I mean The Ohio Players at that time were, wow, I mean they were really a tough group. But I left there and went to Louisville, Kentucky where I had been working there with a guy named, um, um, um, uh, Richard Barlow and he was partners with uh, Harvey Fuqua. They had a big club down there. When I worked for Richard Barlow he was always the guy there but I didn't know Harvey was a partner of his, you know. I knew they were friends and knew each other but I didn't he was a partner. So when I went there Harvey was there was at this particular time and the band were then called the Nightlighters. So I stayed there and worked a couple weeks with them and then I got, I got them a couple gigs, we went to Toronto and Buffalo and when we were doing that I, and in between Buffalo I was coming back and forth from Buffalo to Detroit. And I happened to go in the 20 grand one night and Bill Caybush the guy who owns the 20 Grand look I got, Bobby Taylor and the Vancouvers were there. And on that show was the first time I ever seen Wild Wild Watson he was in the band, guitar player. And the girls that ended up being in The Undisputed Truth with me they were part of Bobby Taylor Revue.

MV: Ahh, okay.

JH: They had a group. Uh they opened the show and backed up Bobby Taylor and all of that kind of stuff. But I mean it was just a show and it was pretty good. Bobby Taylor was a fantastic entertainer, very good singer. And um so I made a deal signed the papers that night, to come, to do the show following Bobby Taylor, somebody had cancelled out. So we were going, I was going bring my act in there and we were going to do 10 days there, Nightlighters. So we came and opened up for 10 days and the very first night I saw Norman Whitfield and Clay McMurray seating at the bar and Norman say you not with The Peps anymore and I was like well you know this is what I'm doing now. You know doing the solo thing. So they were there every night except the last night Clay McMurray came in on the Sunday night the last night of the gig, very successful gig and um he said man now Norman asked me if you would meet him at the Donovan Building on Monday. He wanted to talk to you about some stuff, I was well okay. Now mind you, I had been, or The Peps we were uh, uh approached a few times to be apart of Motown as The Peps and Norman Whitfield was the guy that told us not to sign. He's going to sit you down, too much, too much heat on Motown acts. In fact, uh, we did a show with Mitch Ryder was on this particular show with us, we was doing a show that was headlining with Marvin Gaye and Tammy Terrell at the local 212. And we

were working the 20 grand so in between the shows we would jump in the car and run over to there and do a show. And after the show was over we would run back to the 20 grand because there was an opening act or maybe two acts in front of us and give us an opportunity to change clothes. And...

MV: (laughing)

JH: ..performed well, we was kind of popular then and we weren't the only ones doing that two at times. But when we got to the local 212 we were in two separate cars, so I rode in the car me and Tommy were in the car with Mitch Ryder so he was driving us over there in one car and Ronnie was driving in another car. He had a hard time finding a new place to park, so we came in just about time enough before the guy was getting ready to announce us so we were in the dressing room, two, two of us. And the promoter came in and said well look I'm paying three Peps you know I'm not, you know if ain't three of yall on that stage you know. So we was, okay. So we knew Ronnie was coming and at that particular time (laughing) Mitch Ryder was standing there this how he really first got into the group. We said come on you going on the stage, he said what, come on. So we went out there, we opened the show with *Knock on Wood*, the three of us, he knew the show. And then, uh, Ronnie hadn't gotten in there yet so we was trying to figure out something to do. So with the end of the show I say you know Mitch Ryder use to sing a Smokey song, the Miracles song, *You Can Depend on Me*...

MV: Sure.

JH: ...and the band that was playing behind us knew it so we did that. A Motown crowd, all those folks were Motown, Marvin and Tammy, that's they show. So the white boy come up there and sing *You Can Depend on Me* and he killed it. (laughing) Before he was off, before he was finished, before we was finished Ronnie was on the stage, so it was four of us on stage at that time. And as soon as he finished his bow, boom we did our last song and we was out of there. And um, uh, the rest of that, that was the beginning of the Mitch Ryder era and The Peps but it was also an era where The Peps were, Tommy Stone moved to Toronto, Ronnie moved Toronto, I moved Toronto following them. I stayed, I got an apartment there and I was staying and they were coming back and forth but I was going to Toronto, Detroit and Dayton. I was working as Joe Pep and with The Ohio Players and The Peps. Um, so uh, and then when The Peps, The Ohio Players went, picked up the Nightlighters, they became The Peps. So when Norman signed me for the 10 day stint with the Nightlighters at the uh, the 20 grand and in order for him to do that he had to get a release from Martha Jean. So we went to Martha Jean and um Norman uh, he pitched and Martha Jean said well you know Motown has this reputation about not liking The Peps, I don't know if I would be doing Joe a favor but by with him being with you, you know, and I think that, that, that, that marriage or that unit, that union would be pretty good and that if that's what Joe wanted to do I sign him off. So she signed me off.

MV: So what was the problem with Motown and The Peps?

JH: Well, The Peps were as popular as any of the groups in Motown but we weren't with Motown. We was with Berry's first wife. So anybody else they would shut them down.

MV: Oh so I get it.

JH: (laughing) So in other words, no body, we had that kind of protection over us because I mean he wasn't going to go in there and, and create no havoc there.

MV: I don't understand...

JH: But it wasn't planned it just happened to be that way.

JH: But it wasn't planned it just happened to be that way.

MV: How does it that The Undisputed Truth get a chance to record *Smiling Faces Sometimes*?

JH: Well Norman...

MV: You guys make this into a huge hit..

JH: Norman Whitfield, Norman Whitfield had been watching The Peps since we first started coming in to the 20 Grand. Just like he watched Dennis Edwards when he started coming here and going to malls. I mean when Dennis came to town, we were the, we were the hot things in town that wasn't in Motown. If The Peps were somewhere everybody was there. And when everybody was coming saying well yeah (undistinguishable) this girl coming say I was just at malls and this guy over there and he killing, you came and we rode passed malls one night and it was just a line of people on a Monday night, all the way around the corner. I said we got go see what this guy is doing. So one night in between shows, Ronnie and Tommy and I rode over to malls and we when in and we went in there and caught Dennis and he was an entertainer. He was sitting at an organ playing he wasn't standing up, he was playing and singing but he had conversation, he had good audience and response back and forth with his audience and he could sang. And uh, so we couldn't knock that, he wasn't no, he wasn't anything that we would worry about 'cause he was a natural talent. He wasn't a guy that put a show together so we, we went and saw somebody that had natural talents, you, we recognized that, you know this guy is good you know. And then the next thing I know he was at Motown and um, this was before I'd left the, ... everybody ended up, in that era, that was doing something ended up at Motown.

MV: You say.

JH: It was another group around Detroit called the Magictones, we were together Mike Hanks studio, they were one of the popular groups with Mike Hanks. They ended up at Motown with me and uh, some of them were singing on the original version of well um The Temptations version of *Poppa Was A Rolling Stone*. Uh and the way Norman recorded it he used them to put demos down and do voices because you know a lot of them Motown acts, uh, back up, my girls sang back up on *Ain't No Mountain High Enough*, *Signed Sealed Delivered*, *Still Waters* with the Four Tops. See Motown was interested in getting hit records they wasn't, when you signed with Motown you might be in The Contours but you sign as an individual. So if Motown wanted you to do something to sing behind some of or put your voice on something that's what you had to do. I mean and I'm a team player. And uh so I'd never had no problems that's why I couldn't never feel, could never understand why the guys in The Tempts were having all the problems when they wanted to do solo things, other folks were doing it.

MV: Yeah, they were having individual problems.

JH: Yeah, oh, well I mean they was having all kind of problems you know, individual, money problems uh.

MV: Was that attributable, attributable that it was a larger group, is that part of the problem you think?

JH: Well when you start realizing that uh you're selling a lot of records...

MV: Yeah.

JH: And, you know I remember one time when Dennis was asking me how well did I do over at Motown and I told him well and I knew exactly what he was talking about I said I did pretty good because Norman never allowed all those other producers to record on us and then they recoup the money back, whenever you

make some money they going to take, whether that record was released or not. I had two songs that was released on Undisputed Truth that, I mean that I see why uh I heard a lot, we did uh, uh a voice print on a track that Eddie Kendricks had did called *Day One*. I mean I was walked in the studio, Norm said Joe going in there and do something and see just, just sang on this song for a minute (indistinguishable) I didn't really know the song. And somebody in, in that was packaging and repackaging up that said oh here's something that has never been released put that out, I mean I felt so... (laughing) like oh lord have mercy why wouldn't they come and say do you want to do uh something to fix this up because anybody could hear, I, some of the words I didn't even know, you know. I, and I could see why folks like Martha was so agitated about that, but Norman Whitfield kept that off of us. I mean I think that the only other producers that produce anything on us was Clay McMurray and these white guys that produced uh Dino Zesses and uh his partner Duke and Duke and Dino, um Nick and Dino, Nick Zesses and Dino Ferkaris or something like that. They produced a couple of things on us but we were, they were on the album there wasn't something that was sitting in the can you know. So Norman kept all of that kind of stuff up of off of us. And so (indistinguishable) came it was three of us in the group you know. So I mean we didn't have to split like The Temptations and, you know those other folks, Martha and them. Well its three in Martha but I mean Martha and them was being recorded by every producer that wanted to be a producer you know. And some of the stuff was like you know Motown was paying for it so I mean the contracts was structured that way you know. So Norman kept us out of that, never did that, any of that I mean I didn't even do any of that with, with the Whitfield Records, we recorded something it was used. You know he didn't, he didn't spend time in the studio just fumbling around because I mean his plate was full, he had a lot. He was doing The Temptations, Marvin Gaye, Gladys Knight and then he's bringing in his own group to break in. And he's trying to get support but he's very clever about it, he did it when his contract was ending. See that's what...

MV: (whispered) That's smart.

JH: ...the deal was .... You know he was, this was his second year that he was the number one writer and producer, I, beating out Burt Bacharach, three years in a row he did that. Beat out Burt Racharen [sic], Norman Whitfield had three and four records in the top ten at the same time (thump on table) in Motown. And you know that was, that was something at that particular time. Smokey was doing that kind of stuff when he was doing The Marvelettes, The Miracles, and uh Mary Wells and all those folks, he was dominating. Norman came and was doing the boom, boom, boom, here and there, with different concepts. And uh, (throat clearing) uh those I mean those, those, my Motown days I would, uh, I would, uh, sum up as to say that that was something I really had to have is in my career to uh, for me to feel satisfied because being from Detroit I don't care what's going on anywhere and it's only because I've been out there and everybody wanted to be a part of Motown.

MV: Sure.

JH: Everybody, wanted to be a part of Motown because that was the only (thumping on the table) thing we as black entertainers ever had. Where we would control by from within you know. I mean where we were able to get together and be creative you know and just have that comradery you know and then you know something like money always gets in there and always mess it up you know, when you...

MV: (laughing)

MV: (laughing)

JH: ...when you, when you, when, when at first its not even about money. I mean my, when I worked at The Village I started working there and the guy told us he was going to give us 15 dollars a week, (laughing) a weekend (laughing) we didn't care, I mean come on its three of us, uh, 15 dollars a weekend that's 5 dollars a man (laughing) And then he would hand us, some nights he would give us 3, 4 dollars apiece you know I was like, but I, I never paid any, I was just glad to be up there on that stage, place packed you know. And then when we started getting a little attention around the city you know he came back to offer us more money but I mean at that, after that we weren't even thinking about that kind of stuff anymore, I mean we got away with that for a long time but that was uh the testing grounds for us. A place called The Village, Mitch Ryder put his whole act together there and then he came out to be Billy Lee and the Riviera's and um you know it was, we all had a place to start and, and it never had any thing to do with money it was about the music which you don't hear none of it now, no, I mean, I been back here four years...

MV: Wait, wait a minute there's nothing out any more right now that you like what?

JH: Compared to what? And who is it competing with?

MV: Compared.. yeah, okay.

JH: When, when, when R&B music was being played, Detroit has the worse radio in the country. The worse radio, I woke up the other morning and heard a guy coming, the show coming on with a record called *Doing Da Butt*.

MV: (laughing)

JH: And then they started talking about Patsy Cline, R&B station. I, from that day, now there's another guy friend of mine who's on um, who made, who, you know I was, he had been talking about radio which made me focus on it because I mean this was the only station that I listen to and DL Hughley was on there and there was the other station with Steve Harvey, they're not even DJs.

MV: Right.

JH: I mean til [sic] a couple of years ago I got pissed at them, I'm listening to them and that stations and they coming on from L.A. or the Jord.. or Atlanta, where ever they're coming from and talking about everything but Aretha Franklin on her birthday in Motown. Oh yeah, we in the Motown, and whoo, whoo, whoo, you ain't said nothing about Aretha. You know and that's when I started getting pissed you know. I was like you know what all my life, all my career and everywhere I've been and most of the acts that have endured or reached any kind of plateau from Della Reese to Roz Ryan, all those folks that you started off singing and doing the city of Detroit always promoted the city. So you would come here, you could go you would, you would go on any, on almost any block and find a good act, you can't do none of that today.

MV: Which, which leads me to a question about music when you're recording and music today, I mean you're still recording...

JH: Mm-hmm (affirmative response)

MV: There's sort of a change in the type of music, you don't, there's, you even mentioned it about almost socially conscious...

JH: Mm-hmm (affirmative response)

MV: ...music...

JH: Mm-hmm (affirmative response)

MV: ...and there's, there's a little bit in Motown early on where its almost like..

JH: Berry didn't want it.

MV: Yeah, its like bubble gum..

JH: Yeah.

MV: ... music.

JH: Yeah.

MV: Early on.

JH: Because he was going, he was aiming at pop, he was aiming, he was, he, see they, they, they're, they're, they're um, uh, they, what they were trying do was tear that wall down to, to separate pop. Well music is music. Which is so they start classifying it so if you ain't pop you ain't white. We don't, I mean, all the artist and the friends of mine crossed color lines that, we never talk about that. But they mean, the system is set up so that boom, pop, R&B, now you don't hear no R&B.

MV: Yeah (whispered). Well, you know I see you I see Marvin..

JH: Mm-hmm (affirmative response)

MV: You know, singing um..

JH: Mm-hmm

MV: consciousness...

JH: Yeah, yeah, at that time.

MV: And, and was this, was this on your mind while you were singing...

JH: Because ...

MV: ... this the type of music I have to record?

JH: Because we were, you know, we were, because we were always relegated to second class of things and what, Norman Whitfield let me put it like this, I followed Norman Whitfield. And when we did *Smiling Faces*,

MV: Yeah.

JH: Norman asked me, was it anything in particular that I liked, you know, that, of that day. And you know I just happened to say, you know I like that song on The Temptations album that *Smiling Faces* song. He looked at me like, yeah, okay. He didn't pay it no attention but then when he came back with it, he had this, and I got this song with different concept. Don't listen to Eddie, so don't go thinking you know this song (laughing) and by going to listen to Eddie

MV: (whispered) Right.

JH: I didn't have any clue it was referring to at that time, so you know I went, he had this track and he played wasn't no singing on it and he said this *Smiling Faces*. I was like, he said I got a hit track, its a hit track, and everybody in on Berry's office was listening to the track and they was like wow, ooh, ooh, Billy Jean was just crazy, when you going to start recording, we started that next Monday. I got down in the first night, the very first line *Smiling Faces*. I think I was doing that two and half hours watching everybody on the other side of the glass respond and react to Norman, going crazy. (whispered) God damnit (bumping on the table) beating the desk (bumping on the table) and making all kind of, you know, I'm trying to figure out what am I doing wrong. And he pressed that button and say I thought I asked you not to listen to Eddie Kendricks.

MV: (laughing)

JH: I couldn't say nothing, I was like, he said come on out. So I, at that time, I mean, I just thought I blew it. Came in there he said sit down he said I'm going to tell you something said listen to me, trust me. He said 'cause if you trust me I'm a get you, I think I might have one more hit record in me and I promise you I was going to get y'all a hit record okay. He says so, he said but you can't, he said I have, he said let me talk to you I didn't want to do this about recording. I never

have, he said let me talk to you I didn't want to do this about recording, I never rehearsed a song going in the studio with Norman Whitfield. Wasn't never no pre-rehearsal, how you going to rehearse the same act from when we were performing. How do you know, we had opened shows maybe be 20 people in there, so you got 20 people to entertain. We knew we could handle that but when its full you going into a whole different mode.

MV: (whispered) Sure.

JH: And you just bring what you got. So I mean, what are you rehearsing for, why you confuse stuff. So he say you went to listen and sang along with Eddie and sang that song, and now you knew it and now its locked in your brain but I'm going to tell you how we're going to do this, we're going to do the last verse first. But you got to get the first, the first line of the song before we can do anything. And the first line is *Smiling Faces*, took me two and half hours to do that.

MV: But you sing it differently.

JH: Because I had, had to coming out of that (indistinguishable) thing...

MV: Yeah.

JH: ...and boom *smiling faces* that's what he wanted.

MV: It's a different song.

JH: I didn't know that then.

MV: It's a totally different song.

JH: Right, I didn't know that then. You know my whole concept (laugh) of all of recording, I never had, most of the producers that I had were musicians, Don Davis. Only other producer that I had that before Norman Whitfield that I felt very comfortable in the studio with was Richard Street. Because he was, he was, he was the one who put The Peps together.

MV: Sure.

JH: Initially he sang with The Peps, but he was singing with two or three groups then too. So you know we would, we would, Richard would be with us in The Village and then when we picked up some dates with Thelma's, he would, we might go to Flint, or Saginaw or somewhere and Richard would be on the show you know with The Peps you know. But other than that Richard Street was um he was, he was a soloist because I did a date in Flint as Richard Street (laughing).

MV: (laughing)

JH: Richard Street and then this time somebody come in that club, (indistinguishable) it was that last night saw me with The Peps, uh weren't you with The Peps, I was doing this gig for Richard Street okay. They done advertised Richard Street, I had to be here as Richard Street. So I did that, that was the only time in my life that I ever did that, and um did um, that same club with The Peps after that, with uh, Curtis Mayfield's, uh Percy Mayfield.

MV: Sure.

JH: And he told us, he gave us a lot of uh wisdom and about, 'cause I mean he came up through the circuit you know. And it was just at that particular time when everything was opening up, we were being able to go to The Copa and all those places and things were happening. And he said you guys are good, I really enjoyed this show even though I'm a blues player he said but we didn't step on each other's toes. He said one thing I recognized when I come on (indistinguishable), we followed him, he closed the show and but you see he wasn't a threat because we did different things, we just did our show. and he went out there and said wow, people like y'all, he said and that's the key. He said if you're liked his said whatever that it is whatever your mind set is at that time he said you may not be

making a lot of money he said but I been doing this a long time and he said and the reason why he said I use to have to sit up there and explain every note I was playing at some place, all white places, being rhythm and blues they want to know all the nuisances and all the how you slide, why you got that thing on there, how you, he said and I use to sit up there and would do and everybody would just sit all night, he said I end up feeling like I had a uh, uh, uh a class because everybody wanting to know the roots of this of this, this music. And then I take my guitar down and take a seat when I didn't have an electric, he played (indistinguishable), and then can take somebody out of the audience and show him (laughing) how to start to play some chords...

MV: Gosh (laughing)

JH: ... and then go back and all this equipment and (indistinguishable) he say, he say but he said I he was talking about Tommy Stone because he was such a likable person when you see him. You just like, I like that guy and when he smile it was totally infectious, it was nothing fake about it all he was just a genuine guy you know and I always said I want to sing with him because he was a really nice looking guy and I said all the girls are going to like him but he can't get all of (laughing) them.

MV: (laughing)

JH: I said so and Tammy Terrell she was drastically in love with Tommy Stone. She used to say he looked like a jukebox that won't no body put no money in and when they do they play the wrong song (laughing).

MV: (laughing) Great line.

JH: Yeah, Tammy Terrell I was like okay you know. And but you know he was just such a gentleman, you know. And I learned a lot from him, I honor them everything that I do now. I um, I, I, I, I always feel that a part of my life and career is The Peps, you know, I mean I just, one of the girls that was originally with me has just gotten back in the group and um, Brenda Joyce and now its four of us. They call us the Four of Us. But I always had three singers because it was, it was just the way The Peps were. We never tried to be uh in that mode of Motown, when Norman wanted us to be unpredictable. He'd say if I went to see The Peps I didn't know what I was going to get. He said but I know that uh, I could of brought y'all over here but then y'all would a really been a problem with The Temptations and then they was saying that you know people put out they're little stuff oh Norman got this group to do stuff to prepare for The Temptations. You couldn't prepare for The Temptations because everybody was always constantly leaving.

MV: Sure

JH: When I got there, you know all the guys that, Paul was dead, he died right after I got there, um David leaving, Eddie leaving, you know and all the new people was just so much difference because money became a part of the, the whole concept you know so that uh that, that has always have had a lot of things for a lot of black acts period. You know your whole schism change, your whole ideology about being an entertainer you know and then when folks started going up on the stage with they street clothes on I mean I was, I was just out done, you know I knew that it was just being trampled over now.

MV: But...

JH: I mean we done, we worked with folks, with Frank, with uh Sammy Davis. We done things and been in the room, he come up on the stage with us, James Brown you know, because we always carried a little vaudeville and we always presented ourselves as entertainers. we didn't come there being to be just people off the



ourselves as emmentaires, we didn't come there being to be just people on the streets, we respected that.

MV: And you've, you've influenced a lot of people. I know that uh, the Jackson 5...

JH: Of course.

MV: ...was influenced by you.

JH: Of course, Michael, I produced a song with Keith Washington, uh, um, me and a partner of mine, Trey Stone, *Kissing You*. The first hit Keith Washington had but I ended up having to sue Quincy. Now Quincy and Michael are like that.

MV: Right.

JH: And but I never told, we never said anything to anybody that we got some of them sounds from Michael Jackson. You know, those companies were giving him some sounds and he'd take them and use them, and test them and play things that people never heard sound wise. Michael Jackson used to come to my partner's studio, sit there because you know and he huge.

MV: Sure

JH: You know he had to be around some people being creative and we were always creative, wasn't looking for fame and all of that and he was excited about that, loved it you know. And um, when we was with, doing this thing with Quincy um, we got into, got into, turned into a legal thing about ownership and we didn't say nothing you know and um. Uh after a couple of years Quincy called Paul Reiser and said man you know we been fighting this case with those guys too long, I don't know them, you know one of the guys. And when Paul asked me to come to his house that he wanted to talk to me about the Keith Washington project I brought the last, um, outtake that I did in the studio on that and I gave it to Paul and he played it and he sat there two minutes and jumped up and grabbed the phone and, we didn't have cell phone, dialed and called Quincy and said man I be damned I was trying to figure out how in the hell did I get out an uneven bar and that was the end of the that. Because that told him right there who, who, what the track was.

MV: Where it came from.

JH: Before, yeah, before it and then we didn't have to even get out, I told Benny Medina that oh, I oh, I got a master, you know. Keith got a slave, you know, I mean that was a horrible fight because I mean Quincy has always been an icon and somebody that you would always respected for opening doors and being who he was.

MV: Sure.

JH: I mean, I mean, I knew more about Quincy in the movies than I did of his R&B stuff and television you know, coming up in during that era. I see Quincy Jones that's a black guy, name all across these, you know okay you know and all of a sudden, I'm in court. And my attorneys say you know we can't sue Keith, he don't have nothing and I say well you we suing, he say Quincy. I said man I don't want to be suing Quincy (laughing).

MV: (laughing)

JH: He say well you ain't going to get nothing if you don't sue Quincy, Keith is hiding up under Quincy. So you have to sue all of them, Quincy and Warner Brothers, I was like I'm in L.A. and I'm suing, suing Warner Brothers. But we had a good fight. I just got my masters, my uh, copyrights back. They waited 'til they bled us out of all the money in sales that they did and find out, come to find out that the attorneys were working for Warner Brothers. You can't get no attorneys in L.A. that's going to go to court against Warner Brothers. They paying for all the

judges to be sitting on the benches you know. So a lesson learned, you know. And a hard lesson but I mean you know there's a power above that operates everything and when, as my grandmothers used say there's only two ways of life, right and wrong. Ain't no in between you know, and right always win. She say 'cause it's right you know. And uh, I'm still here, I'm the guy from the Brewsters projects that wasn't supposed to be making it to 16 years old, I'm almost 75.

MV: Can I say one thing?

JH: Sure.

MV: When did you know that you had made it? I mean it wasn't as late as getting inducting into the..

JH: No.

MV: ..into the R&B Hall of Fame..

JH: No.

MV: You did stuff, so much stuff. When was the moment that you said I'm in the right place.

JH: (indistinguishable) The very first uh, uh, in Chicago the very first date with the Jackson 5 Tour.

MV: Oh yeah.

JH: In '72, we toured with them 90 days. Norman and I had went and saw two shows with two different acts, The Commodores, and uh, um, *Don't Lead Me This Way*, they were opening, she was opening, when The Commodores were opening, when they came on stage the kids were saying, we want the Jackson 5, we want, which is a horrible thang. And Norman say, that's what you're going to have to face. And I was watching the show and I say I'm ready, I know what to do (laughing). So what I did, you know, at that time the Jackson 5 were they great, they were, they were the number one in the world and I was not trying to challenge them against that.

MV: Yeah, all the women were in love with them...

JH: They all they, every time they come they brought all the, I mean they brought, oh lord have mercy, lord have mercy, in fact just, just uh, uh, uh, the story about that 90 days would be a story. But um, my looking at it objectively and how I could fit in and make, and make what I, The Commodores were The Commodores. Uh then the young lady come on she bring her little band and open, they didn't play for her, she had a band, they play maybe 3 or 4 pieces.

MV: Sure.

JH: I brought 6 pieces, 7 pieces, I had wah wah, I had 3 guitar players, I had a white boy out of Detroit named Paul Warren who was, who played rock and R&B and he was, whoooooo, he was on fire. Uh, I had um, um, Leroy Taylor, who was a base player with me with Nightlighters in New Berth, he went back to New Berth after he left me. Robert Ward who was the band leader for The Ohio Untouchables. Um, um Billy Cooper who played, who, all these were seasoned people.

MV: You're stacked.

JH: Stacked! Soon as that band hit off, boom, the Jackson 5 was on the stage looking (laughing).

MV: (laughing)

JH: And we was, we out there and the people be screaming and we be thinking that ain't hollering, they looking didn't get a chance to say, we want, 'cause they could see the Jackson 5 back there looking out there at the show, ahhhhhh (emulating crowd screams). We was thinking we was killing, look back there and see Michael and them looking, so they backed up they gave us a little play and backed up and

and them looking, so they backed up they gave us a little play and backed up and uh.

MV: Yeah.

JH: You know and uh, we never got hissed and uh we were able to do the whole, we thought we were going to do the first half because that's they way they presented it to us the first half and then Joe came back there and said we want them on, they going to do the whole tour and we going end it up in Hawaii. And when I did that first show in Chicago at the Cow Palace I think it was.

MV: Ah yeah the Cow Palace, yeah.

JH: Yeah. I mean all those people out there and all those people trying to get in and I was like this killed the, this killed the Apollo. When I got to the Apollo I mean I was gratified...

MV: Sure.

JH: ...with being a singer. I was like...

MV: It's the mecca.

JH: It's the mecca. And you'd see it on TV at night..

MV: Absolutely.

JH: ... in black and white. And you'd sit there and watch *Showtime at the Apollo*.

MV: The crowd can be tough.

JH: Whooo, we never had a problem.

MV: Yeah.

JH: We never had, we became Apollo favorites.

MV: That's fantastic.

JH: Yep. And uh, and, and I think those were the things that were really driving me in this because they were more ups, I mean there were ups and downs but the ups were so up, when there were up they were up. So wasn't no faking in there we didn't have to go and try to do somebody's routines, you know so in other words everything you do in stage somebody done programmed it for you like it worked where ever you go, you not The Peps. We did 7 days at Leo's Casino, we did 14 days. The first 7 days was with The OJays.

MV: Sure.

JH: The second 40, uh 7 days were back to back with the Pips, Gladys Knight and the Pips.

MV: Oh.

JH: I mean that's pressure on us because when you look at those guys they were so together with every little nuisance they had, but then that really made us realize that you know, you think about what have I rehearsed being me, and we if picked the right songs, be me with the right songs and we had a great time.

MV: What I...

JH: (sniffed)

MV: ...like about your music is...

JH: (sniffed)

MV: ...whether...

JH: (sniffed)

MV: ...it's The Undisputed Truth...

JH: Mm-hmm

MV: ...or any of other groups...

JH: Mm-hmm (sniffed)

MV: ...that you were in The Peps.

JH: Mm-hmm

MV: It sounds like it, there's not a controlled...

JH: Right, right, right.

MV: ...of a situation of this great, its, what it, its, its ...

JH: Its raw.

MV: ...its everybody is a soloist.

JH: Yes, it is.

MV: Everybody is a soloist.

JH: Yes.

MV: Everybody is making their sound heard, nobody's singing over each other...

JH: That's...

MV: ...and that's what I like about your music.

JH: That's my concept that's, um, that was the concept of The Undisputed Truth in the beginning. I used that concept when we had Chaka's sister in the group, uh.

MV: Chaka... Chaka Khan's sister,

JH: Taka Boom, yeah.

MV: Yeah

JH: I had, we had because we were all lead singers.

MV: Right.

JH: So we tried not to be, be the, The Dramatics or the, the, uh or the, those guys that do all those routines that program your steps.

MV: (whispered) Yeah.

JH: You know so...

MV: Or, or diminish ...

JH: Right.

MV: ...the talents of another person.

JH: Take your personality and put it in the capsule. Yeah, I didn't want to do that. And that's, that's the, that's the um, uh, uh the format that we're using now. I mean we just did a thing in uh, in one of the girls, DJ's choregraphed the group you know back, back in the 70s but you know that was okay for then but I mean our concept is, you know as I look at it, with the ladies now you know all of y'all can sing, lets lets be the Pointer Sisters, lets be En Vogue, lets be, uh, um, uh, uh, uh, there was another group that they, uh the Ikettes. You want to be that sharp but you don't want to lose your personality, you want to be freedom but you don't be able to be, you don't want to be just a, a back up, I don't like back up singers.

MV: Right.

JH: So we always, I did George Clinton for 10 years, and everything was front ground, no background.

MV: George...

JH: Everybody's got somebody they tell you...

MV: Yeah, they got something going there.

JH: Yeah, yeah.

MV: Yeah, absolutely.

JH: We did uh, we did that big that big album on the Red Hot Chili Peppers, uh, we did so much. I mean one particular time doing we after Tommy done, I got an Emmy working with George doing the Tracey Ullman Show.

MV: Really.

JH: We did the music working with the Tracey Ullman Show. Me and my partner who did Keith Washington, we use to do the little snippets for, you remember when Tracey Ullman first she had the Simpsons coming on...

MV: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you're right

MV: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you're right.

JH: ...going across the stage (singing harmony notes), we did all those, little, little uh 15 seconds, 30 seconds, little jazz kind of vibes they were would come across the stage to, (singing harmony notes). And they always could do some little skits a little kid coming around dragging the turn and little stuff to the music, it was just a little passing thing. That took care of me for about 6 years. Tracey Ullman Show was really...

MV: Not bad.

JH: Oh yeah, really, big show, we were, we got an Emmy for it. George never said anything about it, but it's okay. I took all my kudos now. When I was with Norman, we never thought about stuff, people tells Norman, ah you going to be nominated for this, Norman, I ain't going. You know so he tell folks so they didn't you know, they didn't you know, you know, *Car Wash* you know, uh, uh, *Animal House*, he did all of that.

MV: Hmm.

JH: Ah, three Richard Pryor movies you know and Berry and Ms. Gordy told me you know, Norman Whitfield in Motown is a Motown story but the things you guys did when y'all left Motown that's the uh that worth talking about, you need to write a book.

MV: It is book worthy.

JH: Yeah. He said because Norman is not here and if you don't write somebody going to write you in it. I was like okay, I got my, I know the difference between Whitfield Records and Warner Brothers because I had to, when uh, Norman opt out of his contract I was the only one left over there, I was like what am I, that's how Rose Royce became a, a group. That was my band and we were doing the film and um, and I had just got Gwen Dickey and brought her back from Florida we were doing Joe Namath's club in Florida and uh, one of the promotion man from Motown, I let it be known that I was looking a female singer. And uh he said well John Williams, John, John, what's his name, sang with The Spinners at one time (thumping on table), John something, anyway he was performing at this other club there, uh, at a golf course, the Teeter Green and um he said there's a lady in that group that you need to see, I said okay, so I kept my whole group there three days after this, we finished at Joe Namath's and we went and saw this girl, the first night I saw her, I went and called Norman and I said man I think I found the girl he said well you know you got to get her to L.A. if she come, if she want to come you know I hadn't asked her, then I told, but then after I had I talked so much I knew, well you know what I'm going ask her to leave and come to L.A. and be a star and I say I feel stupid I said it sound like I was lying (laughing).

MV: (laughing)

JH: And I went back and called Norman, he said, he getting graphic and said mutha fucka [sic], want you worried about tell her we'll give her a 1000 dollars she can come, buy her own ticket and when she get here she ain't got nothing to worry about where to stay and she going to have her own money and so ain't worried about no body, give her the money, you give her the money. I gave her the money. (laughing) And two weeks later she was in L.A., the rest of her story is history. And the thing about it now when she got there we was already doing the uh, the, the music for *Car Wash*, they was shooting then, they was getting ready to shoot. (sniffing)

MV: That's a classic sound track.

JH: Yeah, and uh but she had been listening, she went and listened to all of The

Undisputed Truth's stuff and the kind of stuff we was doing and the stuff the girls was doing. And I was in and out of town, I was still you know had some dates to do so she was in there working with Norman and getting acclimated and learning L.A. and stuff and like that and um, and one day, uh, one of my partners well he was managing me, road manager, Benny Bell, come and said man Gwen wants to speak with you, I was like oh how she doing, he said she want to talk to you, I was like okay, 'cause she thinks, I think she's upset (laughing). So I go and hook up with her and she sitting there and we talking and she was like you know I came here with all these great big dreams and thinking that I'm going to be in The Undisputed Truth and she say I haven't seen you since I've got here and I'm in the god damn studio singing about a damn car wash (laughing).

MV: (laughing)

JH: I couldn't say nothing I was like ah, oh, ah, ah, ooh, ooh, ooh, three months later she had a whole different tone.

MV: I bet she did.

JH: (laughing)

MV: Once, once that film went out, yeah

JH: And when I saw her again and she looked at me, she put her head down and said okay I'm sorry, I was like okay I understand, because you never know.

MV: You got to trust sometimes.

JH: You got to, you never know. And I knew this was a project that Norman had been working on, he wrote Richard Pryor in there, wrote the Pointer Sisters in there you know I mean. They changed the whole movie, Norman did, with the music, it was whole completely, they had ask me, Norman asked me you want be in it, it was so dull I said I don't want be in no crap like that.

MV: (laughing)

JH: But when he finished it I was like ahh shoot. (laughing)

MV: (laughing)

JH: But I mean my learning experience was first was in the musical production of it so I mean I wasn't going to try to fake it and try to be an actor I mean I probably could of but I mean, and then my daughter came back and with the acting my daughter is like one of the major casting directors today, her first film she did was *What's Love Got To Do With It*, she cast that, she brought Bernie Mac in the film, oh, uh, uh, Vivica Fox, my daughter brought all these folks into film. And at one particular time back there in the 80's, uh in the 90's when these gospel plays were going around, my daughter was writing a lot of those things, and doing all those productions and stuff. Now she's major, major, all these folks on you seeing black on TV, my daughter got a lot to do with a lot of them, a lot.

MV: That's great.

JH: Yeah so, you know, God just does what he does and you have just you know, when you be true right and wrong and true to what you do the reward would come to whatever it is when you stick with that because no one knows you. I've never had a job in my life. And people look at me when I say that and I was like because this is has never been like a job, it has, it has been hard work because most of the situations I have been I've been the band leader you know and I'm the singer, so I was doing a lot of things putting the shows together putting the people together doing a lot of things but that was just my nature.

MV: And you're obviously laying tracks right now, right?

JH: Laying tracks now. (laughing)

MV: You just got out of the studio, is that right?

MV: You just got out of the studio, is that right?

JH: That's right.

MV: I hear you talking as we moved our way into this interview

JH: Managing and them made a mix for me and you know I got a piano part on there that you know is moot, you know there's a line that the piano plays and I don't need nothing but that. You know but he put it all in there.

MV: So when are you going on the road, when are you performing again?

JH: After the first of the year.

MV: After the first of the year?

JH: Yeah.

MV: Are you going to be in Detroit doing this?

JH: We're going to do some stuff in Detroit, we're going, but we're going to be all over, people, I got get pictures together now for the uh Indian Casino, they've all been trying to get me, you know all of last year, so we're going to uh, we're putting (thumping on the table) an act together, new act where we're not just doing Undisputed Truth songs anymore, we're just going to do Motown act we can do all of the Norman Whitfield and any other things that's happening today that we feel is pertinent and we're doing a new album. In fact, we have uh, we have uh, uh, uh, uh CD out now which is two CD's of the very first 3 albums we did at Motown, and we're getting a lot play and a lot of feedback from *Smiling Faces* again, because you know all those generations that's not familiar with it and when they put it out again the first thing anybody that has any familiarity with is *Smiling Faces* and they jumping on it.

MV: Ah, absolutely.

JH: So you know. (sniffing)

MV: Although I like help, *Help Myself*.

JH: Yeah, *Help Yourself*.

MV: *Help Yourself*, is right up there for me

JH: I see Norman always has something to say.

MV: Yeah.

JH: *To my love and affection*. (laughing)

MV: (laughing)

JH: *All you got to do is point it in my direction*.

MV: (laughing) This has been wonderful sitting down talking to you.

JH: (sniffing) I appreciate it.

MV: Talking about not doing any work today, uh this, this was pretty easy talking uh...

JH: yeah (laughing)

MV: ...uh to uh Joe Harris about uh, his career.

JH: Okay.

MV: And I appreciate uh, you coming on in here and allowing Wayne State University to leave this out here for other...

JH: Mm-hmm

MV: ...people interested...

JH: Right

MV: ...to study you.

JH: Mm-hmm, my pleasure.

MV: So thank you very much.

JH: My pleasure

MV: Okay

JH: Thank you, and right on time for my, for my uh...

Recording Ends

*Transcribed by E.Jones*