Detroit Musicians Oral History Project
Detroit, MI

McKinley Jackson
Interviewed by
Maurice Draughn
November 28, 2017
Detroit, Michigan

As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science
Kim Schroeder, Instructor
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Brief Biography
Mr. McKinley Jackson is a native of Detroit. He was educated in the Detroit Public Schools along with musical training at the Detroit Music Settlement School. Mr. Jackson is an active arranger, composer and producer. From his early work at Motown and other reputable recording studios in the city of Detroit to his current projects between Philadelphia and Detroit, Mr. Jackson continues to lend his orchestrating skills to future generations of artists.
He has been described by his artistic peers and followers alike as “one of the greatest talents to come out of Detroit” and “a musical genius and legend”. This interview is about Mr. Jackson’s contribution to the development of the Detroit Sound.

Interviewer
Maurice Draughn is a WSU doctoral student from the College of Education studying in the area of Educational Evaluation and Research with a focus in qualitative studies.

Abstract
An interviewed was conducted with Mr. McKinley to discuss subject matters pertaining to the development and transmission of the Detroit Sound, the Recording Studio scene in Detroit before and after Motown as well as recording artists and musicians with Detroit connections.

Restrictions
Due to the personal nature of oral history, the Library prohibits use of the material in any way that infringes on individual right to privacy, or results in libelous statements or slander, in accordance with U.S. law.

Original Format
WAV sound file

Transcription
DRAUGHN: It is my honor and privilege to welcome Mr. McKinley Jackson for this interview on November 28, 2017. I am Maurice Draughn and we are in the Kresge Library on the campus of Wayne State University. Mr. Jackson is a producer, composer, orchestrator, arranger and skilled musician. He has been described by his artistic peers and followers alike as “one of the greatest talents to come out of Detroit” and “a musical

and followers alike as "one of the greatest talents to come out of Detroit" and "a musical genius and legend". This interview is about Mr. Jackson's contribution to the development of the Detroit Sound.

Welcome, Mr. Jackson.

JACKSON: Thank you, my pleasure to be here.

DRAUGHN: Thank you.

(00:00:47)

DRAUGHN: What is it about Detroit that developed so many talented musicians?

JACKSON: You know, I have thought about this in reference to the Detroit Sound, Chicago Sound, the Memphis (the Southern) Sound, the Philadelphia Sound. I come up with a theme, I think when guys grow up together; breathe the same air, eat the same food, walking the same soil they build up a certain, whether they know each other or not, a certain aesthetic, a relationship to the location where they grew up in. This is true probably in Philly and I am sure it is true in the South and Chicago. They all have a little different slant, same note, same Bb. They have a different interpretation about it. I've always thought of it that way. Naturally Detroit, we've been supplying the music world with great artists for a long time, even before Motown, whether people believe it or not. (audible laughter)

Going back to Donald Byrd, Barry Harris, Kirk Lightsey, some of the great jazz (musicians). Marcus Belgrave, he settled here but he's a Detroiter in my mind. I always thought, the collectiveness of the music, spirit and the environment gives us a collective viewpoint and that is communicated through the musician. Naturally, music is about having a conversation and this is translated in the conversation.

DRAUGHN: The conversation of the collective makes the sound.

JACKSON: Makes the sound. We speak the same language with the same dialect. (audible laughter). It's not like Babel. We are not all out there babbling about the tower. I think that is valid. It's my personal opinion, but I think it is valid.

(00:03:04)

DRAUGHN: So, for your personal journey, what was life like growing up in Detroit before and after Motown? You mentioned Detroit before Motown, so how did you fit into the music scene?

JACKSON: Actually, I was much younger. I was going to Motown; my first record there was 1963 which was "Ooo, Baby, Baby" (Released on March 5, 1965 on the Tamla Label) with Smokey Robinson and the Miracles and I skipped school to do that one. (audible laughter) I skipped Northern High School to go do the session at Motown. I think Paul Riser was the trombonist with George Bohanon (Jr.) and Don White. Paul started writing more arrangements, so I got in there as a trombonist. That was 1963, those were sessions. I got to do more and more but before even then, I was working around town because back at that point in time, Detroit had a studio on every other, at least every three blocks there was a recording studio. Whether it was Popcorn Wylie's on Twelfth [Rosa Parks Boulevard] Street, Continental (Recording Studio, 9022 Twelfth St.) whether it was Ernie Burt on Grand River (Magic City, 8912 Grand River), whether it was Mike Hanks on the Boulevard (D-Town Records Inc., 3040 East Grand Boulevard). And before the Boulevard, is McGraw (2828 McGraw also known as The Pig Pen) right down the street from Olympic (the Detroit Olympia Arena, 5920 Grand River). Matter of fact, I remember seeing all these people walking, when I used to be at Mike's, I was younger then, and I wondered where they all were going, they were going to see the Beatles. I hadn't even heard of a "beetle". I said, "Going to see a 'beetle'?" (audible laughing) "What is this an anthropology student?" But that's how long ago and he was doing it then. The funny thing about Mike, he had D-Town. He had success. There's Joe Harris, the (Fabulous) Peps that turned into The Undisputed Truth, Melvin Davis, Dee Edwards, Cody Black, Toby Lark, who I just saw advertised. I haven't seen her in years. The funny story about Mike, his thing was to always defeat Berry Gordy; to defeat Motown. "Berry's not the only one that can do music in Detroit. Music was here before him.", that was his whole thing. But, he bought the building two doors down from where Motown is now. And that's what kind of inspired Motown to buy the buildings around them because Mike bought the building right "across the street" and he was determined that he was going to put a glass up there, or whatever was necessary, to get

determined that he was going to put a glass up there, or whatever was necessary, to get that formula, to get those hit records.

We were using a lot of the same musicians anyway, they were moonlighting doing sessions for (Ed) Wingate (Golden World Recording, 3246 West Davison), and for Mike Hanks and several other companies around town. So, Motown was not the only record company but it was a lot of experience before then. I used to walk down Twelfth (12th) Street back then, it's Rosa Parks (Boulevard) now. I would always have my trombone with me and the guys use to call, "Can you play the trombone?" I'd say, "I wouldn't be carrying it if I didn't have some proficiency on it." I'm sure I didn't say it that way, I probably said, "I think so." They'd bring me in and I would play. Johnnie Mae Matthews, she's a legend here (known as the "Godmother of Detroit Soul"). She is the one that started the Temptations off and if you watch the movie (The Temptations (1998), De Passe Entertainment), she is in the movie. I just saw that the Temptations have a play out now too. [And the play,] I just saw it in Berkeley, California. It is excellent and it will be coming this way, I think June 11th or so. It is going through the Kennedy Center in D.C. and Broadway, maybe (at) the Schubert Theatre. I'm not sure about the final details. That made me think about Johnnie Mae, and the activities going on here at that time. You could walk down most – Diamond (Recording Company, 8781 Linwood in 1966 and 12328 Dexter in 1967) Jim Riley (proprietor of Diamond), there were just so many,

various – Fred Brown the Mailman, he had a place on Grand River (at 4619 Fourteenth Street). I'm sure you heard about J.J. Barnes and Ortheia Barnes, they came out of there. Some of my first arrangements were there. And then there was the Smash Records/Label. I was online the other day and somebody put on there "I Want to Thank [Him] You (for Love and Devotion)" (Recorded by Danny Woods; Smash: 2159) and I realized that was my first string arrangement; first song I had written and first production I had done. I made that commentary on it. Someone put on there and I listened to it and I said "Wow, it wasn't too bad and that was way before Motown."

(00:08:12)

[After Motown too], I left Motown and went to Holland, Dozier and Holland (Eddie Holland, Jr., Lamont Dozier and Brian Holland). They started Invictus and Hot Wax Records (12813 Grand River). We had Freda Payne "Band of Gold" (1970), the Eighth Day "(You've Got to) Crawl Before You Walk" (1971), which Melvin Davis came out of. (The) Honey Cone – "Want Ads" (1969), Chairmen of the Board - "[Just] Give Me a Little More Time" (1970). I am producing Chairmen of the Board currently along with Melvin and Mervin Steals out of the Philly area, (Aliquippa, PA) that wrote "Could It Be I'm Falling In Love?" (1973) for the Spinners. We are connected now; we have a label that we call "MoPhilly" which is a Motown-Philadelphia Sound so we call it MoPhilly. We have our first release on that now and it seems like it's promising; it's looking good. In the U.K. (United Kingdom) especially, it's taking off in the U.K. because they love the groups over there (referencing the Northern Soul movement). I just came back from London several days ago, I think the 22nd I was over there. We did an event that just happened. The seats were £2,000 pounds per seat at the event. At first, they told us $10,000.00 and I realized they do not deal with dollars, they deal with pounds. And the pound is over the dollar so it's like $17,000.00 a seat. It was a really great event. All the dignitaries, even royal blood was in the house. It was a fantastic time but I was thinking the music we made, it's going over well over there. I even had a couple interviews over there, surprisingly. My record, the Politicians record that I had with Dozier and Holland has some type of validity over there. They play it and still play it after It was put out in the 1970's; 1972 I think. Some of the people still remember the name and the music, playing it every Sunday or every other Sunday they told me. So, that's something; that's really surprising (audible laughter) to me.

(00:10:35)

DRAUGHN: With your arranging and composing, what inspired you to get into that aspect of the business?

JACKSON: Well, playing, first of all. In junior high school, a friend of mine named

JACKSON: Well, playing, first of all. In junior high school, a friend of mine named Charles Thomas, whom I've not seen since then. We were friends and you know how you have your friendly competition. He told me that he'd signed up for band on trumpet. I said, "So did I." I ran around on the other side of the school and went to the band room to sign up, because I hadn't. (inaudible chatter) But they didn't haven't anything left but the trombone. The trumpet and saxophone were always attractive instruments to the females (audible laughter). They are the prime instruments. The trombone is more of a melancholy (instrument). You don't think of trombone as a lead instrument but I got it. It was the only thing left and I got it. After a few weeks, I fell in love with it, totally in love with it. I played other instruments too, baritone and some of the saxophone family (alto, tenor, baritone. saxophone from the woodwind family) enough to teach some of the kids younger than myself in junior high school to play scales and show them the fingerings. But the trombone was my love and so after playing the trombone, I was fortunate enough to have a teacher Elmer Jane from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra to take trombone lessons from. The school I was going to, the (Detroit) Music Settlement School (319 East Kirby Avenue), which was for "underprivileged kids". The teacher donated their time. They were getting a stipend but not really for what they were worth. My harmony and theory teacher was Arthur LaBrew who was the first black man to win (the National Guild of Piano Teachers Competition). You know him?
DRAUGHN: Mr. LaBrew, the pianist?
JACKSON: Yes, that was my harmony and theory teacher at the Music Settlement School and several other classical musicians from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and local great musicians who donated their time.
DRAUGHN: What was the name of the school again?
JACKSON: Music Settlement School.
DRAUGHN: Like the Philadelphia Settlement School?
JACKSON: I think they do. I think I even read an article about their school. But this was back in the early 1960's. A lot of things were going on. I used to work for my lessons there for fifty cents an hour. I had a lovely woman who was the dean of the school, Ms. Grace Barber**.** She was a lovely little lady, short in stature. I was supposed to be dusting and she would come out with a magnifying glass and look at the weeds because I was picking the weeds. She would get on a chair and do the "white glove test" to see if all of the dust was off because you had to do it to her expectations. She was a lovely woman. Then there was Mr. Gordon Allen, he was a teacher at the Sherrad Junior High School (8300 Cameron Street). I think it was 1944 and he used to pick me up and take me to the other schools, the suburban schools to give me the experience. I don't know if I was showing that this guy could do this but he was a lovely guy. He was the one that got me the job at the music school. He took me to get my first trombone along with my mother who paid for it.
After I got out there and started playing at Northern High School, I started doing local jobs around town and some of the parties at the school. They hear you and you start getting more work. Then we had a group called the Mount Royal Clefs because we were dealing with the Mount Royal Hotel on Woodward and Hazelwood. Our drummer was Charles Long, Jr. who is a Buffalo Solider now and does a lot of historical archives with them. He was our drummer so we would stay at the hotel and we won the Taystee Bread contest and played with Nina Simone. With her on the same show. (audible laughter) It was a fantastic experience. From there, I started doing sessions around the town getting more and more calls. Then I had a group called the Politicians. We were the house band over at the 20 Grand (5025 14th Street at Warren Avenue) and opened at the (Watt's Club) Mozambique (8406 Fenkell Street)**.** Before then, we all that it was just a ship in a movie. (audible laugher) We didn't know that it was an African country. It was the Mozambique of the great movie…with Humphrey Bogart.
DRAUGHN: Casablanca?
JACKSON: I think it might have been or "African Queen" or something of that nature. But anyway, I started backing up the various acts coming through there because all the major acts came through the 20 Grand. I did that and opened up the Mozambique and then I was playing all of the clubs around town. When all of the concerts and big shows

would come into Ford Auditorium and Joe Louis Arena, which was brand new at that time, and Cobo Hall, I more or less played them with my group and augmented it for a bigger band. I guess it's just an evolution. We kept going and working. I always thought we were very lucky too. There were a lot of great musicians around town. I always think there is a certain element of fortuity, being involved with the people you meet or the people who meet you. For every one, there is a ten or fifteen that you don't know about that are very super talented. I tell people that so they can keep their perspective together. They will prove it to you in the business too because if you drop out, be late or don't do it – it's "Next". (audible laughter)

DRAUGHN: Somebody waiting on the side to come in.

JACKSON: That's right. Somebody that's twice as [talented], you never know. That's basically it.

(00:18:03)

DRAUGHN: Through all those experiences playing in different bands and instruments, you were able to come up with your own concept of how you arranged. Was it that you arranged based on the group or instrumentation you had or did you have an idea?

JACKSON: I think a combination of both. I learned a lot at Motown. I learned a lot at all the studios. You learn from all the different producers and what they want; the style they wanted. And then a lot of times they would call you for what you were doing. Sometimes, it wasn't a great adjustment because they called you to do the arrangement. They might have some input so you learn different approaches from different producers. But, I learned a great deal from Motown. If I were to say it facetiously, "What school did I go to or graduate from?", I would say "Motown University" actually; because that's really true. They had some of the best musicians in the city and some of the best talent like Paul Riser from Cass (Technical High School), George Bohanon and the Funk Brothers. Naturally, everybody knows about the Funk Brothers. But we had a lot of talented musicians at Motown and Detroit period. That helped shape and form me and their (Detroit musicians) expectations of you. It's like when you get on the stage, and they will let you get on there, but you have to hold your own to stay on there; they will shut you down.

I remember guys like Rudy Robinson. This is a little history. I was a part of The Hungry Five before I started the Politicians. You get up there with Rudy, and if you didn't know what you were doing, you might be in Bb and he would tell the guys, "B, go to B". (audible laughter) Everybody would switch to "B" and then he would say, "go to A, go to A!" Not even Bb, Eb or Db, he would go to "guitar keys". I call them guitar keys.

DRAUGHN: The sharp keys.

JACKSON: Yeah, yeah! (audible laughter) So they would check you out and you had to know what you were doing in order to stay up there. (crashing noise from adjoining room) It wasn't all about "who you know" but you had to hold your own once you are up there.

(00:20:20)

DRAUGHN: Earlier, you mentioned various labels in Detroit. What were some of the labels you worked under?

JACKSON: Invictus, Hot Wax, Music Merchant; that was the Holland, Dozier and Holland (HDH) labels that they formed after they left Motown. Then you had Motown and its variety of labels. Wingate which is Golden World**.** Ed Wingate who built Golden World up to more than less a threat to Motown and then sold it out to Motown. Ed Wingate was connected to the Purple Gang and goes back to Al Capone. He was the only black person who was able to do policies and numbers in Detroit courtesy of the Purple Gang which is a Jewish and Black gang. Ed was the only black guy they would let function in that world. Ed had his record company and his horses. The thing about Ed, he didn't know anything about music and you might come in there and say Ed, "this chord is not right, you have to have an Eb in a C minor chord." And he would say, "Listen", he would take out a roll of money big enough to choke a horse on, "I want that note in the chord." And then you would say, "Yes sir, Mr. Wingate." (audible laughter) and go out there and play it. Not saying it ever worked but you would go out there and play it.

There were other groups and labels too. We used to do a lot of work at Tera Shirma (Sound Studio, 15305 Livernois) which is a recording studio on Livernois and Fenkell. There were other labels, I mentioned D-Town. There were other labels that doctors ran. There were so many different labels that I'm surprised myself. Sometimes I look back or people send things in on Facebook or older records that I did. James Hendrix, Hendrix was the name of this records and he had The Arabians on there. This is under Melvin David. Cornelius Grant and I did a lot of work with it. Cornelius is like the sixth guy for the Temptations. He was their Musical Director and guitarist for many years. There were a lot of labels. I cannot recall them off hand but a lot of labels. Every other block there was a label; it might close down. I didn't get a chance to work with Berry but his family had labels, Anna Records and even before Motown so there is a variety of labels. I can't think of all them right now.

DRAUGHN: What you named is a great deal.

JACKSON: There were quite a few. A lot of guys left Motown like Sonny Sanders and did stuff in Chicago and then there is Mike Terry who did stuff here for The Precisions and other great records that had the Motown influence but a little different influence. Most of them went over to Wingate. Those are great arrangers. Unfortunately, a lot of those guys have passed. We had Maurice King (trumpet), Gil Askey (trumpet) and Wade Marcus (trombone), Teddy Harris (piano), Harold McKinney (piano). His family's legacy is still going on with his daughters. I mentioned Marcus amount ago; we had Bob Reed on saxophone; then we had guys like Herbie Williams; we have Rayse Biggs now. Back then we had people like, Maurice Davis who played trumpet on "Papa was a Rolling Stone" (1972). Some people don't know the history, but they can relate to that record because the record is the current generation or even a little older generation. They had so many talented guys. They all shared too. They would say, "That's wrong, why don't you try this." Gordon Camp, Wyman Stoudemire, a lot of the guys are gone but their music lives on through us and the guys younger than myself.

(00:25:24)

DRAUGHN: Speaking of music living on, I did my research on some of your arrangements and your group the Politicians. How was your band formed?

JACKSON: I was signed by the Holland brothers as an artist but they didn't really want me as an artist. They wanted me to do the arrangements and they knew I had a loyalty to my group, so they signed the whole group. The album was kind of a mix-matched because I didn't sit down and build a concept and do a whole album. There were different tracks that I had cut from other people or tracks that I cut for myself. I had left the company and went to ABC Dunhill Records as a corporate producer. They put the album out to meet the liability for the contractual agreement. A lot of people like the album. There are some things on there that represent me. I did all the music on it in different capacities as an artist or the arranger for someone else. And I got the track back and put an instrumental soloist on top of it. But the band was a good band because all the guys could read (music). There were three horns, myself, Stanley Cleveland on trumpet and Melvin Griffin on saxophone. They could all read and they all contributed to the arrangements so we were able to be flexible enough. Stanley and Melvin were into jazz, a little hipper than I was. Stanley was into the Baroque and the Classics. Melvin was more into Coltrane and the Jazz. I was playing all of it, but I did the arrangements for the R & B and Pop music of that time. I had that input of taking it and commercialize or formulate it so it would be as Berry Gordy would say, "Every song has to have a beginning, ending and a middle" and is relative to each other. Maybe that is what I did for the group because we were all talented.

As a matter of fact, before I signed the group; before Holland, Dozier and Holland signed me as an artist, I insisted that the guys that could not read (music) be sent to school, which they did, to learn how to read. Some guys are just naturally talented but they didn't read. I always thought that it was a benefit to read and to know music. I always encourage people now. If you have a natural talent, that great. Take for instance (Mr. Jackson sings opening line to "Misty"), Earl Garner. He did not read or write music when he wrote that. That is a good example I used to use but then I found out, because

when he wrote that. That is a good example I used to use but then I found out, because I was using the fact that the music is inside, and the notes are just a vehicle to translate or to relate what one feels in the spirit. I look at music as a tool, as a language. You learn it, you master it. It is a discipline. Then I found out later, he did learn music after the fact so that was encouraging because I was using it as a story (audible laughter) but he went back and learned so that was my premise with my group – we all play well but you should go back and learn how to read so you can expand your horizon. Like yourself, being a student here at Wayne, if I ever did speak to them (other WSU students enrolled in course), I made a joke earlier that I would tell them what not to do. That's true. There are some things that you can avoid that will put you right and narrow straight on the course. Naturally, education is the most valuable thing, even if it is just for self-satisfaction, self-esteem. If you don't get one job from it, at least you have that. That is something no one can take from you – education. They can hire you or not hire you, but they cannot take that from you. That's very important to me, very important.

(00:30:00)

I deal with a lot of the younger kids too because my son was Proof from D12; he and Eminem. My grandson is out there now, Nasaan. I spent some time last night, I was trying to get some sleep so I could get up this morning, but when you get into these things before you know it two or three hours are gone. That's why I don't like to get into them. That's why I didn't watch TV when they had soap operas on because they are designed to suck you and you are only human. But I do meet a lot of young people and I encourage them to go to school, study the arts, spoken word or whatever it is they choose to do, at least have some content. And if you're rapping, have some content and a lot of guys do. They are starting to research the different artists and idioms; maybe go back to study great writers and literature. I think you need all of that nowadays. Even if it is beginners, it is self-educated. I'm self-educated for the most part because I got books and I would study the books but I learned from a lot of guys. I learned from practical experience too. And that's valuable but it's not something I would recommend. That's what I meant. I will tell you some things not to do. It's not something I would recommend but I was fortunate enough; like we use to ride on the Motown bus. We used to sit up there in the back of the bus and had a big band, the Choker Campbell Big Band. And we backed up all the acts, Diana Ross and the Supremes, Marvin Gaye, Temptations, Four Tops, Spinners, Willie Tyler Lester, Marvelettes, Velvelettes**;** all of them were on the bus, Stevie Wonder. We were all on the bus. Clarence Paul was his guide and he taught Stevie a lot and carried Stevie around as a young person. But, I'd sit in the back of the bus and they would show me and teach me about arranging and voicings. They used the finger thing and I understood it intellectually. I understood it but it was years later that I said, "Oh, I see what they mean." There thing was whenever you take out this hand away this should be self-sufficient, the voicings (Mr. Jackson demonstrated the merging and unmerging of voicings using his fingers and hands). A lot of people write and if you take this away then you're missing, (you're missing, you're missing), but if you do it the right way, their way – the big bands, you can do this and you still got the sound. It's complete and it's complete here. It takes a while to learn that, I understood it intellectually from what they were saying but it took years, and I said, "Oh, that's what they were talking about." Many years later.

(00:32:52)

DRAUGHN: In terms of soul music, what impact does Detroit have on soul music or music in general?

JACKSON: A lot. You know not only soul music but music in general. Motown has effected the whole world. You have categories. You can say Rock and Roll, R & B, Pop and then you can say Motown and people know what that is. If you think about it, it's a genre of it's on. A lot of people never thought of it this way but it's true because it's universal music. It changed the radio formats because at one time back then if you made records, they had to put Caucasian pictures on it to put it into the record stores to sell and market it. Pat Boone or somebody had to be on top of it. If it was Elvis Presley, Pat Boone had to cover it for the record to get played but they (Motown) changed of all that.

DRAUGHN: Was it because of the Motown sound?

DRAUGHN: Was it because of the Motown sound?
JACKSON: I think it was because of the hit records and the sounds that was the first thing. And then they turned around, these were black people doing it too, black owners and the whole thing. And then too, they strived and accomplished, doing everything with a sense of pride and excellency that everything had to be. You came through quality control. If it was not the best that it could be and the best out there then it did not get release. Then you had Ms. (Maxine) Powell that did the grooming and had the girls walk around with books on their head so they were very well groomed and very well taught. You don't see most record companies do that with their artists. You get them up and get the live shows; let us make some money and you sell records but they groomed us. So, they went to the Ed Sullivan Show and they went to the Copacabana (A New York City nightclub formerly on 10 East 60th Street). They were ready – artistically and personality. Persona, they had it. So that was very unusual, no other record company that I know of has ever done that.
DRAUGHN: Did record companies start to do that afterwards?
JACKSON: You know, after Motown, I'm not sure how many do it now. But nowadays… back then it was a little different thing. We had a different code. A code of dress, of mannerisms and interaction with people so it was a different time and day. And if you didn't do these things, you would get the work but you wouldn't be in the big houses. You wouldn't be called back to do extended engagements and stuff of that nature. It made a difference. I'm not sure how today's society because it's fashionable now that anything is fashionable – and that's okay. It's a certain freedom there. I went through the sixties (1960's) so I'm not going to (audible laughter). I remember most of the stuff in the sixties (audible laughter). I remember most of what I did in the sixties.
(00:36:20)
DRAUGHN: Well going to the seventies (1970's), I have some questions about the seventies. In the early seventies, how would you describe the direction of soul music? Listening to two particular tracks from the Politicians album, "Love Machine" and "Free Your Mind".

JACKSON: Free Your Mind…
DRAUGHN: I think one had that Motown soul sound and the other one sounded like things I heard because I was born in the late seventies so I grew up on Earth, Wind and Fire and Funkadelics.
JACKSON: Funkadelics…
DRAUGHN: So, it started to have that transition?
JACKSON: Free Your Mind had that (Mr. Jackson sings melody from song) but actually I like the one that was called "Psycha-Soula-Funkadelic**".** That's the one and that's what is was - Psycha-Soula-Funkadelic. We had funk, psychedelic and that's why we called that's we called it Psycha-Soula-Funkadelic. But see we were not recording all that at that time but we were on the scene playing it as it evolved. Like when Hendrix and Sly came out, and I give them a lot of credit in terms of the race relationships, I think they were innovators and leaders in bringing people together. Here in Detroit, we used to have a place called The Village (3929 Woodward) and that's were Nathaniel Mayer and the Peps, Billy Lee. You heard of Mitch Ryder, his real name is Billy Lee. He used to sing there with Joe Harris, Tommy Starnes and Rodney Andrews who became the Peps later and Billy was really one of them at that time. Then we had Nathaniel Mayer called the Village of Love, he has passed now. It was all white people coming from the suburbs so that was a meeting place. When I say meeting, I mean the music brought it together much like Hendrix's music and Sly' s music brought the races together. So, the seventies, I think the Motown and various – Clinton came out of that era being influenced by Sly and Hendrix and that's when he developed his sound that he took it to another place with the funk. Motown with Norman Whitfield started developing with "Cloud Nine" (1968-69) and "Psychedelic Shack" (1970) and "Ball of Confusion" (1971). Those type of things they started to feel what was going on in society. They were making great music but it wasn't necessarily related to where people were at that time with the Flower Power (A slogan adopted in the late 1960's within the opposition

movement to protest the Vietnam War through non-violent demonstrations of peaceful and passive demonstrations) and the Love Scene (Summer of Love) Haight-Asbury (a district in San Francisco) type scene**,** that type of thing. That's the seventies, so it definitely was affected by the undercurrent of the society at that time. They say music mimics society or life and life sometimes mimics music. I think we had a combination there.

(00:39:31)

DRAUGHN: How would you describe, the Detroit Music Sound or the sound that is authentically Detroit Music? Even now, do you think that the Detroit Sound is still connected to Detroit?

JACKSON: I think there still is a Detroit Sound unlike the Motown Detroit Sound which developed over a period of time but it wasn't a happenstance, it became a refined art. Just like Berry used to work at the car manufacturers, he had Motown doing it the same way; around the clock manufacturing records, writing, producing. Arrangers, musicians get off a job, go there work at midnight. The Detroit Sound had a certain identity with the backbeat and the tambourine. You had certain things that was just uniquely Detroit and if they weren't uniquely Detroit, it was uniquely done the way Detroit did it. People and instruments have been there for hundreds of years but Motown had a unique sound. Nowadays, we have a lot of talented people coming around here but it's a different thing; the sound. I don't hear – I can't turn on a radio and tell you where it came from nowadays with the records out there. I might know the artist and know they are located here or there. But back then, you could turn on the radio and you could say, "that record came from Detroit"; "that record came from Philly"; "that record came from Muscles Shoals (the South), or that "record came out of Chicago" with the Chi-Lites and the different groups out of Chicago; Curtis Mayfield, those types of things. Superfly and all of that stuff is not typical Chicago but it had the Chicago flavor. I don't know if there is a Detroit Sound now or not. Maybe some of the rappers or the younger people might say yes. But I don't turn on the radio and hear something that just – I know the artist comes from Detroit and they may be underground. They have underground but I'm saying obvious like in the day, that makes me feel old too – (audible laughter)

DRAUGHN: "Back in the day?"

JACKSON: Yeah, back in the day. I don't really think that way. I don't make an effort to live in the moment or the day but generally, whatever is going on, I listening to it. I'm "vibing" with it too. I'm not listening to it with a jaundice (resentful) eye. I'm listening it to it and I like it. I like some things and other things I don't have room for because it's just fatuitous cursing, racial slurs and demeaning to women and stuff like that. We really have no place for that. And it's not so much me but it's for what it is doing to the younger generation. If they are destroying that and their morals are going – look at it – then you start talking about politics and then you start talking about the president – (audible laughter) I'll leave that alone. (audible laughter and chatter)

(00:43:26)

DRAUGHN: You been in this business for quite a while to have so many experiences and longevity as an artist. As an artist and producer, what are you most proud of?

JACKSON: I guess some of the work I did with the Holland Brothers. That was success financially but there was other music that didn't make it financially. I did stuff with Blue Mitchell, I was proud of that and Pharoah Sanders with Norman Connors**.** I worked with Phyllis Hyman (and) Marvin Gaye. I did the Sexual Healing album with Marvin. I was his musical director until he passed.

DRAUGHN: I saw the Love Overture. (chatter)

JACKSON: Yes, that what I used to play before he came on stage. I had about the first nine to ten minutes on stage. It would take us that long to get to the stage because I had Shelia E. on percussion, her brother Tony Escovedo, Tony Perez out of Oakland. I had seven horns, and then we had Byron Miller who did the solo with George Duke on Stand Up, he had a big record. Wah Wah Watson on guitar; Greg Moore who was part of Earth, Wind and Fire and quite a few other groups; William Bryant who was a part of Frankie Beverly and Maze. Bryant's brother in law, – for a long time, he's very instrumental to Marvin, that's Gordon Banks guitarist. He was married to Marvin's sister

at the time, Zeola Gaye.
I had a big orchestra, I had like twenty-one pieces. That song that is online, it sounds pretty good for it to be thirty to forty years old but I wish I could get back in there and remix and bring the sound to more current type sound because I think it is very good. There are some good musicians on it and for a live show people really loved it. The Isley Brothers came along and asked me to record it so that's how it got on there and Sylvia Moore from the Sugar Hill label.
DRAUGHN: You worked with the Isley Brothers a lot. How was that?
JACKSON: I was producing for them for Bloodstone. "We Go A Long Way Back" (1982), was a record, and there was a demo I had in my closet. A lady name Kitty Sears knew the Isley's and Marvin and she took this record to [the] Bloodstone to Ronnie and they loved it and I did the rest of the album. They put it out and did the rest of the album. That's the connection with the Isley Brothers. That was Bloodstone and then I did the Impressions too for Henry Allen, he was one of the primary black executives at Atlantic at that time. He's passed now, but he brought me in. I understand that from Melvin Steals; we produced the Impressions. I think perhaps Al Bell, the president of Stax (Records), was supposed to come in and produce it and he didn't show; this is the story that Melvin tells. I thought they called me to produce it in the first place but he said, "He didn't show up, so Henry said, 'We'll let McKinley produce it." I always thought they called me to produce it. I got to check that story but it didn't matter we did the album with the Impressions.
DRAUGHN: But you were ready, like you said earlier, "if somebody wasn't where they supposed to be, you get called." (Audible laughter)
JACKSON: Yeah, I was ready. Next, next; I guess I was next! And I was there!

(00:48:02)
DRAUGHN: We've talked about performances and studio work, we want to transition to touring because you still tour.
JACKSON: I still tour.
DRAUGHN: Quite a bit.
JACKSON: Yeah.
DRAUGHN: What is it like traveling on the road when you compare it to the 1970's to now?
JACKSON: Actually, comparing the road in 1970 to the road in 2017? You know, just traveling here in America, it's a lot different because back then it could be stressful when you travel down South. You couldn't get rooms; you couldn't stay in places and go in places to eat. You might get food out the back door. They would have the grit off the grill and your sandwich, you didn't know what they had done and stuff like that. And then I remember a time, which I think they covered this in the Temptations new play, we were riding down in the South and a couple of trucks came up with hay on it. These guys had rifles or shotguns and they pulled them out on us, but all of the windows on the bus went because the Four Tops, Temptations, they all had guns. (audible laughter). So about twenty guns come out and they took off!
DRAUGHN: They were ready.

JACKSON: They were ready and they took off. They were messing with the wrong people from Detroit. (audible laughter). Nowadays, it a lot more coordinated. The road can still be rough; the airport, traveling, dehydration and the whole thing. I have been doing it for the last five or six years with the Temptations and we'll see going into another year now. I think I mentioned to you now that I might be spending more time at home and doing some other projects. I might be doing my own projects. I didn't mention that but that's one of the things that I'm debating and preparing for. The traveling is good. Guys wonder, "How can you still be out there traveling?" Well, I can do it, so I do it. The moment I can't do it, I won't do it or when I come to the realization that I've done this now – see we are not traveling to places like Africa and Germany. Now we are going to England, Australia, Philippines, Hawaii, all of that is good but I am

Now we are going to England, Australia, Philippines, Hawaii, all of that is good but I am ready to go to Abu Dhabi and places in Africa, the homeland. They've done all of that years ago, they did it and that's when I was in the studio. That's another reason why I'm doing this, I was in the studio for many years doing records and recording, most of my career. Until I got out with Marvin in 1983, and then after Marvin passed I came back to Detroit. I was living in L.A. (Los Angeles) and then I moved back to Detroit. I have been here until the Temptations came in about 2012 and asked me to go on the road so I'm out there again on the road. But most of my life, I had a chance a to go and see all of the country (United States) and several places overseas. That was something that I think I owe it to myself because I was in the studio sending everybody overseas. So, I said, "Let me just get a little bit of this while I still can."

(00:52:02)

DRAUGHN: You mentioned being on the West Coast, what were some of the differences between working in the industry here in Detroit, when Motown was here, and on the West Coast and any other places you might have worked out of?

JACKSON: West Coast is – Well, I know Paul Riser, this is home, he doesn't want to live anywhere else but I enjoyed living on the West Coast. Once you get used to the West Coast; after getting used to jumping in the pool on Christmas and things like that. Having Thanksgiving with palm trees, that type of thing. One thing about it, there's always hope out there. If you are not doing something, something could kick off the next day. If you are on the beach out there, with nothing going on, there's always hope out there. I guess there is always hope anywhere, you should have hope. The chances are somebody could walk into the store and there you go. You are in a restroom and they might hear your voice and there you go.

It's really organize out there too. (background noise outside room) A lot of times, people say it was plastic but they had it really organize as far as cartridges, instruments and the copying and everything was very much organized. Back here in Detroit, we were used to doing everything ourselves. Getting on the floor, writing the music, creating the song, writing the music, getting on the floor, getting the musicians, recording it. In fact, out there I called it "black book production" because they would check off (mimics action) "arranger", "musicians", "copyist", "drum kit". Then I realized you can't knock success. They were doing it and they were successful in doing it. It was just a different way of doing it but I was used to guys getting on the floor and really putting their stamp, their personal stamp on it. So, it was a lot different out there.

DRAUGHN: So, they assigned different people all of those things as opposed somebody here just going in?

JACKSON: Yes, you might have an arranger but you were on the floor with them and they were tearing up music and putting out new music. You represented whatever you felt or envisioned of what you conceived. You might have that maybe just by getting the right people that it is the same thing but a different, esoteric way of doing it. A lot of good music came out because a lot of good musicians went to California.

DRAUGHN: The Detroit Sound migrated out West, so you all were still able to have those conversations because it was the same people you were used to working with?

JACKSON: Exactly, exactly and maybe with a couple of other people that changed the conversation a bit. You had great people like Joe Sample – (Sticks Cooper was the drummer but I was talking about the saxophone player) Wilton Felder, he was the saxophone player with the Crusaders but he's the bass player out there. He did work with Barry White; we used him. You had great guys out there, Gene Page, orchestrator and arranger, fantastic guy. It was a variety of things out there, so many different types of things. I did José Feliciano for Motown and then I was doing a lot of stuff that wasn't hits. I was doing Latin things before it really became a big market. I did some Greek music, a lot of various but I especially enjoyed a lot of the jazz things I was able to get on as an orchestrator and arranger.

(00:56:22)

DRAUGHN: What are some of the projects you are working on or planning to work on in the near future?

JACKSON: First of all, I plan to work on mine. But then, I got other things too. We are doing with MoPhilly. We are doing Ken Knox and a couple other groups lined up to put on that label. I just some stuff with Tony Clarke's son, Geno Clark, I have to hear it. Drew Schultz, you know Drew. I think Drew, Tony and Geno Clarke finished it up. I started it but I had to go on the road. They have been sending me cuts to keep me abreast of what is happening. Joe "Pep" Harris of The Undisputed Truth, he's doing some things, he's got the group back together and I'm involved in that too. So, it's various things. Things that are tentative and then they manifest themselves; other things you think are firm and they don't happen now, they might happen a year from now. Even when you are not busy, things are always work, there's always something going on tentatively. There might be a play or a couple of things like that. I've been approached about, they have to see how the financing works out. Things outside my control.

DRAUGHN: Have you orchestrated for plays or musicals?

JACKSON: I did the music, I couldn't go on the road but H.B. Barnum took over on the road, for the First Wives Club (1996) which was a movie with Diane Keaton, Bette Midler; it was quite a few, about four great actresses in there. They did a musical on it and it did go to Broadway. It went to Chicago and Toronto. I did the music on that but I could not go on the road with them so H.B. did that. I had the experience of doing that and I had experience doing other stuff that didn't necessarily take off. Sometimes it's all about financing.

DRAUGHN: It's part of the business?

JACKSON: It's part of the business.

DRAUGHN: Have you done any film scoring?

JACKSON: No, I haven't had a chance to do any direct film scoring. Although, I have a record out now. This new film, Girls Trip (2017), with Queen Latifah, Tiffany Haddish, Regina Hall and Jada Pinkett (Smith). The first song in that movie is a record that the Steals Brothers and I did. It's not a film score but the first credits at the end of it is my name first (puts up number one with finger) because the first name. That was enjoyable. So no, I haven't really had the chance to do film scores.

(00:59:42)

DRAUGHN: Another question came to mind with sampling, have you found that people sample some of your arrangements?

JACKSON: Well that's what happened on this song in this movie (Girls Trip). Chubb Rock sampled a song that we did; Melvin, myself and his brother Mervin on the First Choice (album) on SalSoul Records several years ago. They sampled that and changed the title. "Love Thang" was the name of our record and they changed it. We had a hook in there called (sung) "You treat her right, I'll do you no good" and that what's Chubb took and developed; and that's a hit record. As a matter of fact, my feelings about that was differently – except I made more money off that than I made off any records I made off my whole career. Just off that one. I'm not going to retire on that. Musically, I use to have maybe a different viewpoint but they used to sample a lot of my records too, that I found out later. The hip hop guys came and told me that this is from the Politicians, or this and then I started looking online where they had taken it from.

DRAUGHN: Do feel the Detroit Sound, in some indirect way, could live through sampling? I know that's not an authentic way of representing it, but at least…

JACKSON: For the person that's a connoisseur and researches it. You had a guy here that passed and his mother has a label going. (searching phone for information) He and my son were good friends. He did all of the sampling and guys from all over the hip hop world utilize his stuff even though he's passed. I even did a concert at the Majestic Theatre that I dedicated to my son and for him, for his mother's label. (Mr. Jackson supplied the name of the artist after the interview. The artist he referenced was J-Dilla.)

(01:02:21)

DRAUGHN: Is there anything else you would like to share? It's been an honor just to sit

here and listen to your stories and the telling of all of the things that have been going on in the industry.
JACKSON: The industry is just a whole new day and new system of doing things and record company doing business. See we, a lot of guys even before me, “paved” the way for what they are doing nowadays and there are getting “paid” for what they are doing nowadays. (audible laughter) Because they are and that’s good as long as they put it back into – I think each generation has to precede and do better than the former generation. In a lot of ways, that hasn’t been the case. A lot of it is by plan, by the drugs that came in and were introduced into the inner city, that’s like two generations, the ones who are doing and their kids. A part of it is, it’s a lot of stuff happening. They make a lot big money and I just hope that they will be better eventually because their kids will go to college. But I’m talking about a concentrated effort, they can put some of that money back into the community. Not just the music community but in general. Music is representative of the community, our society. I’m not sure if that’s a direct line to our conversation but their making so much money and we paved the way for them so I would like to see them do something with that money culturally.
DRAUGHN: Absolutely. That’s a good concluding thought because we are here today because your story is going to impact future generations through this project, we hope…
JACKSON: A lot of stuff we did back then has been culturally--when you think about Marvin Gaye or just Motown in general. Some of the records and how we mentioned before overseas, they love it. They want to know what James Jamerson wore? What kind of corn cob pipe did he smoke? What kind of shoes did he wear? That kind of loyalty over there. America, we are more star-oriented - who is front. They don’t want to know who played the drum, who clapped, the tambourine or who recorded it, who put the echo on it. They are more appreciative there overseas. But hey, it’s been my pleasure. (audible laughter)
DRAUGHN: Well, thanks again Mr. Jackson and this is going to conclude our interview for today.

JACKSON: Okay, sounds good Maurice. Thank you and best of luck with you.
DRAUGHN: Thank you.
end of interview