

Oral Memoirs  
of  
Larry Cole

An Interview  
Conducted by  
Sarah Tropper  
November 14, 2018

Collection: Detroit Motown Music  
Project: Schroeder Oral History Final Project Interview

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Oral History Memoir

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Sarah Tropper: This is Sarah Tropper here today, November 14, 2018 with Mr. Larry Cole. He is the son of one of the Funk Brothers of Motown, Eddie Bongo Brown. Thank you for being here Mr. Cole!

Larry Cole: Thank you for having me.

Sarah: No problem, um to start out with Larry, where were you born?

Larry: I was born in Detroit Michigan 1953, ah, in Black Bottoms, that's a kind of a historical area of Detroit a lot of poor southern people live, um August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1954, '53.

Sarah: '53?

Larry: Yeah

Sarah: Okay. Uh, tell me about your family.

Larry: Well my mother's ah, Florence Mack, she passed away a few years back, born 1930 here in Detroit she lived in Detroit and um there's, my mom and step dad. I have another family that was, that I was raised with. I grew up with them.

Sarah: Oh, okay.

Larry: And that's, um we had 6 sisters and 2 brothers. And my brother passed away my oldest sister died, my oldest sister was Pat then was me and then Linda, Cheryl, Chris, Alisa, Carla

sister died, my oldest sister was Pat then was me and then Linda, Cheryl, Chris, Ailsa, Gayle, Madiline. There's a lot of us!

(both laugh)

Larry: Pretty impressed I remember it!

Sarah: Um-hm.

Larry: So yeah, we ah we were all raised here in Detroit and then um, ah getting back to my mom and dad, now, you want to ask me questions while I'm doing this, or you just want me to just keep going?

Sarah: Oh, you can keep going.

Larry: Um, my dad he was born September 13, 1932, make sure I get that right. Yeah, 1932 he passed away December 28, 1984 and um but anyway he was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi and in 1932 and he lived there, he lived with my Grandpa Bud ah Edward Brown Sr. and my stepmom [ed. note: Step Grandma], I think her name was Maddie or- I can't remember her name off the top of my head and um he dropped out I think 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grade because he had to help his nieces and stuff. Because my grandpa was pretty strict and soon as he turned 17 or 18 he split and came to Detroit. And when he came here um he didn't know his mom really well, and he moved in with my grandma Susy, um Susie Johnson or Susie Wright.

Sarah: So, he had family here?

Larry: Yeah, my- his mother lived here. She lived on um, 14<sup>th</sup> and Butternut downtown Detroit. But anyway, he ah moved in with her and soon after that the only kinda jobs he had before was like washing dishes, but he always played, you know pans or stuff from the house he was always doing something banging on stuff. He originally, he wanted to be a bass player and I never knew that until today.

Sarah: Wow!

Sarah: Yeah he wanted to be a bass player, and then- but he was pounding on stuff so much he ended up playing bongos and uh he just got really good at it but he um, when he moved up to Detroit my grandmother worked in the restaurant off Washington Boulevard and um, that's where he met my mother, my mother worked and my mother was a waitress there and he was a dishwasher so you can imagine how that was. What that was like, and then um from there was like some whirlwind infatuation and I popped up. Yeah so, yeah that's um that's how that happened but they never got married. They were young and wild, and they had me and then um which I had contact with my dad off and on.

Sarah: Um-hm.

Larry: Because he was gradually beginning to get into the music business and um I'm not exactly sure when him and Marvin met, but he was he was, I'm not exactly sure how, I think it was 1962 he was working with at Motown. But um, he was in Marvin's band and he also was Marvin's chafer like valet you know and-

Sarah: Oh, so that's how they met then?

Larry: Well yeah, he was driving him around, but they were really super close, and he was also his signature, he was the chief percussionist at Motown during the golden ages. And so um, let me see they just clicked big time, huge, you know everything that um Marvin was doing back then you know "Ain't That Peculiar", you know, all the songs he did he has so many, "Hitch Hike", that's my dad on all the congas and stuff and um so they just became really, really close. And you know that's how I remember Marvin a lot from when I would go to the Motown Revues and um I was in his house before. I met his wife during the time he was married to Annie [ed. note: Anna] Gordy Berry's sister she was a lot older than him she was very very nice to me very sweet to me. I remember they had a dog named Peppy I played with him a lot and she would give me Christmas gifts, real nice lady and uh you know. So, I did the Motown- I went to the Motown Revues, you know, whenever they came to Detroit at the Fox. So. you know.

Sarah: So, did you get close with your father later on or-?

Larry: Well not really, we didn't really get super close cause he was an entertainer and that's the side effects from having a dad that's a celebrity because they're not really around that much you know, and um because you know he's just, he's a musician, you know, he's creating he's just all over the place. Um, But I'm sure he wasn't the only one who had- wasn't there that much

Sarah: Um, any- did he teach you how to play any instruments or-?

Larry: No, but I taught him a couple things! (laughs)

Sarah: Did you? (laughs)

Larry: Yeah, I did. He um it was, I remember um, I learned a conga pattern from Santana's first album and then um I remember him coming over the house and playing drums, and he was playing the congas, and he came over the house, and I showed him something and he couldn't quite get a hold of it, and he finally got ahold of it but it's really interesting to me. So, I taught him something!

Sarah: Oh, that's cool!

Larry: That was cool. Never forget that.

Sarah: So, was it true that your father did not know how to read music?

Larry: Oh yeah, he couldn't read anything. No, he didn't read music um he had an acute ear for timing.

Sarah: Okay, he was one of those ones who can just hear it and play it-

Larry: Yeah! It was just a natural, he was just like a phenom and just, he just fit right in to a groove and um could control the tempo of the groove of sound. But they were trying to produce because they were being spontaneous, but they were creating at the same time they were creating a sound I don't even know if they were aware of what they were doing I think they were just doing they were just doing-

Sarah: Going with it as they went?

Larry: Yeah, it was just doing it, because they, you know, a lot of them were young guys, you know, back in the day all Mickey Stevenson found a lot of the musicians. He was the \_\_\_\_\_ (??) [ed. note: band manager] I think that's the right description of him he found musicians and stuff like that so he um he was-

Sarah: Nice. Um so you were at Marvin Gaye's house while they worked on "What's Going On"?

Larry: Yeah. (laughs)

Sarah: Yeah? So, tell me about that.

Larry: Yeah, I was. I was there, um me, I think it was Lem Barney, Mel Farr, my dad, Marvin, and Ja- I think Jack Ashford was there and he [Marvin Gaye] ah he answered the door and he had a Lions [Detroit Lions] shirt on, because Marvin tried, wanted to try out for the Lions.

Sarah: Oh yeah?

Larry: Yeah that's a whole other story and um so, we- I was in the house and they were- he had a big, he lived on um off Outer drive near 7 mile, near Livernois yeah Livernois or something in that area. He lived off Outer Drive. Real big house on the corner and um big grand piano in the living room and I came in and they were playing around with this- you still good on time?

Sarah: We're good.

Larry: And we smoked a joint, and um he was a big pot head, all those guys were huge on weed and um and I almost, though but that was the last time I saw Marvin alive was before he left Detroit. I can't remember the year, because he had some issues going on with the IRS and divorce so yeah.

Sarah: Okay. So, um what would you say the political climate was like during the time that that song was written?

Larry: It was really *really* ugly it was really nasty. Was a lot of assassinations going on, the Vietnam War um, lot of people got killed in 'Nam it was sad it was the age of Aquarius it- a lot of things changed it was a little bit after that because I think "What's Going On" came out '71.

Sarah: Yes.

Larry: Something like that. But before that you know there was a lot of assassinations, um you know there was a lot of political stuff. The FBI were doing all kinds of crazy stuff. There was a lot of drugs a *lot* of drugs everywhere, every- it was not- everybody wasn't using drugs, but a lot of people were just dropping out, stuff like that it was just a, it was a tragic time, especially in a lot of black neighborhoods and uh it was really rough. Lots of churches because Marvin was very very spiritual and um but yeah, the political climate then was very segregated it was ugly. Real similar to right now.

Sarah: Oh, okay.

Larry: Yes, yeah.

Sarah: Yeah, that's really sad.

Larry: Might be a little worse now, it's out in the open now.

Sarah: So, did this song, you think, help anything or-?

Larry: Yeah, it did. It was a, it was a- something we could all identify with because if you listen to that whole album he's [Marvin Gaye] telling a story

Sarah: Okay.

Larry: You know, he's talking about um the political climate, he's talking about um love, he's talking about, God he's talking about coming down off cocaine on "Flying High in the Friendly Sky" that's, he's coming do- He's kind of almost describing a cocaine psychosis. He's really kinda- his whole life and everything that was going on and marriage and everything and his brother. He wrote that song singing about his brother Frankie and um was going on because he was in Vietnam and um him and Zeola were here. I think he's got another sister in California. The thing is his mom and dad was alive- well, he was alive- so everybody was alive then, you know, so um. But yeah, it was a- that song is very very personal to a lot of us because you know when you hear "What's going on" you go right back to that, you know what clothes you were wearing, who you were dating, all this kind of it was really very, very personal for us is that album.

Sarah: Yeah, a lot of songs do that they take you back to a time, um any other, other notable people besides Marvin that you got to meet?

Larry: Oh yeah, God all The Temptations um when I was a kid I used to, backstage at the Motown Revues, you know, they had um behind the Fox, they have like all these old dressing rooms and elevators and things like that. Looks nothing like the way it looks now and, but I met a lot of the um lot of the musicians. They used to call me Little Bongo.

Sarah: Awe!

Larry: And um I remember, I think it was Florence Ballard brought me a hamburger because I was sitting in the hallway for a long time and I was hungry. And ah, I had a real crush on Mary Wilson, though.

Sarah: Oh yeah? (laughs)

Larry: Yeah, she was really pretty (laughs). And then I met Diana [Diana Ross] and all of the-, I met Pops Gordy he was a really good dude, he was a nice old man. He looked like um, he had- he looked like, um the Colonel, Kentucky Fried Chicken. That guy.

Sarah: Oh okay, yeah!

Larry: Yeah, I remember him having white hair and a white goatee or something like that. And um but, I met a lot of people Stevie [ed. note: Stevie Wonder], I remember once my dad asked me to hold Marvin's robe he'd [Eddie Bongo Brown] give it to him on the side of the stage when he was done, and I decided to show off and go out in the audience and go to the popcorn stand, and I couldn't get back in when I went back, and I got in a lot of trouble!

(both laugh)

Sarah: Oh no!

Larry: Yeah, I couldn't- because I had this robe it was, (laughter) so I got back. So, that was a memorable um experience.

Sarah: Definitely! So, um can you tell me what the Motown Revues were?

Larry: Yeah, they were- that was all the Motown acts during the day, back in the day, that they had at the Fox. It was usually around Christmas. They had it all over the United States, but they would have it here in Detroit at the Fox Theatre. And they would have, you know, 2 or 3 shows you know, and they would start off with, usually with, a comedian like Willie Tyler and Lester. He was a black puppeteer he had a puppet and the puppet would like, really make a lot of raunchy jokes. People were- it was (unintelligible because of laughter) really funny. He was on Hollywood squares later on in the future but any- I don't know, I don't know whatever happened to Willie Tyler. So anyway, they had bands like that and Junior Walker and the Allstars, some were the kind of like groups, they were kinda okay, the Four Tops and you know then God, Lord, they had all kinds of acts. They had the Four Tops, Temptations and ah Supremes, and Marvin. The big acts was Supremes, Temptations, Marvin, they were always kinda- wanted to be better. Marvin wanted to be, you know, he wanted to be way up there. He even wanted to be a crooner. He put a- I remember him putting an album out, you know (singing) "Quit nights and quit st-" it didn't go over real well.

Sarah: No?

Larry: No (laughs), he- it was kinda, it was like, yeah, I don't know, I think his ego kinda went crazy, but it was- I have it at home it was nice. I mean if you want to you know like-

Sarah: Something different.

Larry: Yeah, you know, like drool all over the table (laughs) it's kinda, I don't know, yeah.

Sarah: Nice. So, um did you ever end up visiting the recording studio that you're- the Funk Brothers-?

Larry: Oh yeah, the snake pit? Yeah sure, sure, yeah, I was down there. Um I don't know which album they were recording because it was really- a lot of people think that would be really exciting. It's really boring.

Sarah: Oh yeah?

Larry: You know I- you've been to the Motown Museum, haven't you?

Sarah: I haven't been there yet, I want to go.

Larry: It's really little. The snake pit is a doorway that's so small, you have to walk down these stairs and you're walking right past the engineering section. I always thought it was bigger than that but it's in a basement of the house they built the basement- he had some kind of like ah he, he created a certain sound. There were different um cities, they had different sounds you had- you had Stax Records, you had the Bar-Kays, these were all like studio musicians that worked in different places. Then you had the um Philly Sound then you had, you know Memphis Sound and you had Motown.

Sarah: Um-hm.

Larry: And we dominated it all up! Although, you had bands from down south like Sam and Dave and those were the country guys. Though, they've got a good history that's another story. They- a lot of the musicians back then were from um Muscle Shoals, I believe.

Sarah: Oh, really?

Larry: They were young white musicians, and everybody thought they were black. They were students that played on all those- Yeah, they were really good dudes man, and everybody thought they were brothers. No, they were young you know southern white guys that were really good. Yeah, just like a lot of different musicians. But anyway, it was um, I remember going up and Berry lived upstairs above Hitsville [ed. note: U. S. A.] and when we toured the museum with your, that's your professor there?

Sarah: Yeah, Kim.

Larry: With Kim.

Sarah: Schroeder.

Larry: We went upstairs, and I remember being in there, and I remember sitting at that table when I was a little boy. I was probably about I don't know maybe about 9, 10 because he, I think my dad started at Motown around '62 somewhere around in there, but I have a lot of fond memories there. I only went there a few times you know. I went there with my dad and he would bring me in in the basement and sometimes, they used to have like a- you would see like David Ruffin [The Temptations] pull up in a pink Cadillac and, you know, and it was just really like, just magical to see these people that we would see on Ed Sullivan Show. And I was around them like touching them and taking pictures of them and stuff and getting autographs, so I had a lot of girlfriends as a kid (laughs), so yeah.

Sarah: Um let's see, so how did Motown's move to Los Angeles affect your family?

Larry: Oh, that affect everybody! That was- I thought that was pretty shitty. Yeah, my dad was the one who told the other Funk Brothers that there was moving vans. That- then they were recording um they would record sometimes at Hitsville on the boulevard, but this Motown was on the, where the new Joe Louis Arena is.

Sarah: Oh, yeah! Little Caesars Arena.

Larry: It was on the corner of Woodward and the freeway. It was a blue building and I remember my dad was the one who called Jack Ashford and other guys that they were moving. And there was a lock on the door, and there was a sign saying that, you know, to go over to Hitsville to record. So, they didn't tell anybody they just jumped up and split.

Sarah: So, it kind of happened like overnight, kind of?

Larry: Well yeah, then they were, Berry Gordy was getting into Hollywood and um "The Wiz" and "Lady Sings the Blues" he was getting into other things other than music, and the Jackson 5. So, the golden age of the Funk Brothers was gradually changing because they found better musicians, and um that could evolve in what they were doing so that they used a lot of machines and stuff like that and different musicians. And the Funk Brothers was gradually changing they were bringing in these. you know. different people coming in and playing and um. so it was

kinda- it sucked the way they moved. I thought that's a nasty one right there. I thought that was pretty ugly but he [Eddie Bongo Brown] ended up driving to California um and then he ended up still working with them, and did some stuff with Marvin, and then he was gradually he was doing some other things with like The Sylvers I think, and then um Stevie [ed. note: Stevie Wonder] um I think there was a couple of bands, I can't remember who they were and he gradually started doing other things with Trini Lopez, um Sammi Davis Jr. and Liza Minnelli he did a lot of stuff with Liza Minnelli so he was, you know, kind of they were kind of on their way out really. That's what it looked like yeah, that's what it seemed like.

Sarah: Um, what did you think of the um, Funk Brothers documentary?

Larry: I didn't care for it.

Sarah: No?

Larry: No, it wasn't enough.

Sarah: Okay.

Larry: You know I mean, it was kind of, you know, um I thought they should have been a little bit more- it was a little- well it was okay, I enjoyed watching it but, yeah.

Sarah: I think they touched on more people than others kind of-?

Larry: Well they should have- well to me, I felt that, you know, there's so many different like, groups of musicians, you know, and all these new Funk Brothers I'm seeing, I don't know anything about them! I knew Bob Babbitt played on a lot of stuff with kind of, The Temptations when they changed writers they wanted, you know, they would switch from Bob Babbitt to James Jamerson. And um, you know Jack Ashford he played tambourine and different things, some percussion but my dad did all, most of the majority, of percussion on that um, you know.

Sarah: Did you know what song was your father's favorite and why?

Larry: Oh God, no

Sarah: No? (laughs)

Larry: I know some songs he- some um, music he played on he- they gave him, they gave him a section where he could show his skills.

Sarah: Oh, okay.

Larry: And that was Dennis Coffey Scorpio he had a conga solo in that. And um, I'm not sure I got to look this up but I kinda remember him on Deodato? Um I forget his name, it was 2001 Space Odyssey or something like that and I think it was my dad on the congas. I'm not sure now, so make sure you put that I'm not sure on that one, but he played on that one, he had a lot of- Marvin gave him room to really show his skills on, God, "Hitch Hike", "Ain't That Peculiar", "Stubborn Kind of Fellow". My stepmom told me that he, Marvin, um had a song that he always thought about my dad and I can't remember which song that was. It was either "Ain't That Peculiar" or "Stubborn Kind of Fellow" one of those. I can't remember which one it was, but he had some stuff he played on where he had you could really feel his presence it was, yeah it was, he was making a statement. I really liked that when he did that so.

Sarah: Very cool. Um so what was your father's personality like?

Larry: Silly! Goofy like me! Goofy, clumsy, um (laughs) very generous, um maybe to a fault um really funny sense of humor. He used to make um, he used to act like a monkey (laughs) and that was, I thought that was funny. You know, where he'd stick his tongue under his upper lip and he would act like a gorilla and uh yeah he was he was a real hoot, he always kept something going on, he didn't like no dead ass party he would come in say, "Is there damn a funeral in this damn place?" He was very, very um very funny and lively and honest.

Sarah: Nice. Sounds like a good guy! Um any- I know you brought some awards to show me um would you like to mention which ones those are?

Larry: Yeah, well um he was inducted in the Hall of Fame and it says here presented to Eddie Bongo Brown in recognition of the years of creative genius and contributions to the recording and entertainment industry the Music Hall of Fame is honored to induct you as a member and that's Eddie Bongo Brown. This is something I'm very very proud of right here.

Sarah: And what was the date that that happened? Oh, looks like November 26, 2007.

Larry: Yup, Nashville Tennessee. So, he's there and this is a picture, this is my favorite picture. This is my dad when he had a small afro they use to wear processes their hair slicked, and he used to wear a hair style that was called three to the side beehive it was really weird. Him and Eddie Kendricks used to wear the same hair. I think a lot of them had the same barber that was

on- it was a pretty famous barber- that did a lot of their hair. I think he was on 12<sup>th</sup> street 12<sup>th</sup>- my dad's staying on 12<sup>th</sup> and Pingree. That was before the riots and that was a really interesting area.

Sarah: Yeah?

Larry: Yeah, it was like going to uh like Mardi Gras or something. You know, real, real lively records stores was open at like 11:00 at night, people were getting their hair did, and they were kids selling chronicles and Jet Magazines, and the restaurants was open, you know. There was a couple of girls turning tricks out there and they were high, they weren't- they were women of the night doing their thing. And a lot of hipsters, lot of you know, sure, there was everything that comes with that, drugs, rock and roll. You know what I mean? So, um that was interesting. But this picture here was when him and Marvin had a little afro and this was at the Apollo and my grandma, Susie, she gave me this here, this is my favorite here.

Sarah: Beautiful!

Larry: Yeah, it's nice, you can put this in there as well.

Sarah: Yeah, we'll take a picture of that.

Larry: And then um this is one of his, I got this from my step mom (rustling, unintelligible) this is um, I never heard this before and I just said well okay it's called "Makin' It" by David Naughton is that it?

Sarah: Naughton. Mm-hm.

Larry: Yeah, and the tune is called "Makin' It" and it really sucked too! But anyway, I mean, you know, it's okay, I love you dad, but you sucked. I never- yeah this is the um Funk Brothers got a square, you know, Hollywood Walk of Fame in front of Grauman's Chinese theater you know the area there so that was on March 21, 2013 Hollywood Walk of Fame so I was really proud of this. It was a pretty big ceremony too, when they did that. I have a- pictures of Stevie [ed. note: Stevie Wonder] and my brother and Jack Ashford, and everybody was there and yeah so these are some of the awards. There are quite a few other ones. I have some other photographs of all the "Songs in the Key of Life", "What's Going On?" a bunch of other stuff he got awards and recognition. I think he got he got some awards here at the um, you know, they had the State Theatre [ed. note: The Fillmore Theatre] the Detroit award, kind of award some- he got something, you know, lifetime achievement award there, and I was there my stepmom, she was there as well. We went to that and um she's got, he's got a lot of awards I don't even know about. There's so many of them but these are the ones I have, I'm familiar with.

Sarah: So, um with all those awards and everything, did he and do you feel like he was recognized adequately for his musical contributions to Motown?

Larry: No, not at all, no. It depends on what you mean when you say recognition as well. You know, a lot of those guys were studio musicians, and they only got paid so much money, and they would get paid per sessions and different things like that, you know. And I'm sure you saw standing in the shadows of Motown, where some of the musicians used to hide in the funeral home because they were hiding from Berry because they were outsourcing, and you know they were just trying to make some money and they- I remember them wanting my dad to snitch to- on the other ones. He'd never do that!

Sarah: Um-hm.

Larry: You know, and um you know what was going on because you could hear some of his- I know his style that's why I have such a good ear with music because I used to stay up at night because I missed my dad. I used to listen to him on the transistor radio and I was able to identify his style and I was also, that just that kind of ear kept a love of music, and I know a musician's signature when I hear them play to this day I can tell who that is and what's going on, you know, if it's a good match, and that's from listening to my dad obsessively all day long all the time, yeah, so-

Sarah: Awe. So, he was kinda like your hero or someone you looked up to very much?

Larry: Yeah, I did I looked up to him a lot. Missed him a lot. It was- I didn't- you know, I have a lot of questions. I didn't see him a lot. That kind of bothered me as a younger man and as a young adult as well. But, you know, that's something that you learn and grow you grow up on and you know you get to a little older and understand that's a hell of a sacrifice to have like, a calling, almost like a minister, where you so involved in what you're doing that you kind of, don't mean to, but you kind of not present? With your- do you know what I mean? You're not in the present your someplace else your always-

Sarah: You're always thinking about that thing that you-

Larry: Yeah, your never really there. And that's one of the things that happens to people that are either work a lot or, you know, are just not there. That all effects a family no two ways about it! But, you know, our family's pretty healthy, you know, we get over our stuff, you know.

Sarah: That's good!

Larry: Yeah.

Sarah: Um, what do you think your father would want his legacy to be relating to music or otherwise?

Larry: Oh goodness gracious, he would want to be appreciated and um recognized for his contributions to American music. You know, I mean this is just as significant as Beethoven and stuff like that because he changed- he played a role in changing the face of music and how we approach music and the different swag in the music. He um, he was one of the um, he would want to be respected as um one of the pillars at Motown. That's what- well, that's what I want but I believe he would want that too. I just want him um to be recognized, acknowledged because a lot of them wasn't. A lot of them died of drugs poverty every now and then you'll see a few of them at Eastern Market.

Sarah: Oh yeah?

Larry: Yeah, playing and a lot of them might be dead now but I remember running into a few that had some, you know, but that's just, you know, whatever that is. You know people, you know everything- some people adjust to that really well when the music is over, and they have to kind of get a life. That was hard for my dad because he was just so young, as a super famous musician.

Sarah: Um-hm.

Larry: You know like all over the world and then it- the light went out. That right there would be devastating.

Sarah: Sure.

Larry: You know, and I think it took a toll on him. It took a toll. He died, he was 52 when he passed away.

Sarah: Oh, that's young.

Larry: And um but you know, like I said that's a big sacrifice when you get into music, it's a sacrifice, is profound but the vibe of the- it's spiritual, the music stuff that's the only way I can describe it, it's more spiritual because you're on a higher level of communicating. You communicating not only thought, emotion and the times and sound you know where people from another country could understand what they were trying to get across or convey without knowing the language. Do you know what I'm saying?

Sarah: Yeah.

Larry: So that's spiritual to do that and then the other side is that you can't really market- corner that market because you can- you know it comes and goes and some people use drugs to influence the musical creativity and da da da da da you know, but and then there's a downside, because you can't- you know what I mean? So, there's constant battle about-

Sarah: Everyone's always looking for something new and it's always turning over.

Larry: Yeah, and then and then competitive and then you know and then in current that's you know you got to be a little crazy to do that (laughter) yeah so

Sarah: So, were the Funk Brothers, they were pretty close right?

Larry: Oh yeah, they were all buddies they were real close, the Funk Brothers. I remember at the Motown Revues the drummer was Benny Benjamin or it was um, Uriel Jones I remember them. I remember Benny, Uriel Jones, James Jamerson was on bass, Earl Van Dyke was on organ he was a musical director my dad was on congas it was either Jack Ashford playing tambourine and there was a couple more players in there, but the Funk Brothers was Benny Benjamin, my dad James Jamerson, Earl Van Dyke, Eric can't think of the guitar player that did it, Eric not Gale, Eric what's his name? (frustrated grunt) I can't remember his name, but anyway, he's the one that did the "My Girl" Robert Washington [ed. note: Robert White] was that it? I can't remember his name so-

Sarah: Very nice, um any special memories of your father you'd like to share?

Larry: Well um he, well there's a whole lot of memories that I got but one that comes up, I remember when I was a kid. I think this was just when he was beginning to work at Motown, my grandmother made me a lemon cake, and he came over to her house. I was, I was probably about 8 or 9 and he brought his congas out and played them on the porch and all the kids in the



8 or 9 and he brought his congas out and played them on the porch and all the kids in the neighborhood came out to see what was going on. Yeah so, I remember that's my father's memory. That and playing congas with him when I was about 17 or 18, I was going through my own hippie thing you know I was heavily involved in the hippie thing and the Vietnam war. So, I was a product of the sixties. I was um, heavy involved in the Grande Ballroom, Easttown, you know side and then Wayne Kramer a lot of them, MC5. So, I was around that crowd. I mean he had the R and B then which was okay, but I was more into you know Led Zeppelin, and The Doors, and Jimi Hendrix stuff like that. But um he- um lost my train of thought, um you know. So, um what was the question? I think I lost it.

Sarah: That's okay. So, you had your special memory with your dad you were talking about?

Larry: Oh yeah! Yeah and there was a lot at Motown I remember when he- I'm not going to mention this. I don't know if you- I don't know- so anyway, I remember he um (laughs), I don't know about this.

Sarah: Not sure about that one?

Larry: Yeah, I'm thinking. But anyway, we were inside of Motown of um, oh God, I can't say this I remember him telling me he was going to marry my step mom.

Sarah: Oh, okay.

Larry: And my response wasn't that good (laughs). I was little, now I was young, so he laughed. She looked at me funny. Because, you know, my mom was really- my ma was like my mother was psssst my mother was like, really fine, you know, like drop dead fine and she- You know, Jerry was a pretty lady, but I just thought, you know, my mother looked prettier (laughs). You know how kids they say ugly things, but yeah, I remember that memory. And then I remember us playing together. That was fun. I went over his house when he lived on Stoepel on the west side. And I remember us playing, smoked a little weed and we played- he bought Abraxas, Santana album and he was trying to- that's where I showed him that style of that. It sounded like, reminded me of horses walking (emulates the sound of the music with his mouth), and I showed him, and he couldn't get it, so I got on up on him. I got a lot of memories of him he was he was a pretty funny guy he was crazy about my ma.

Sarah: Yeah?

Larry: Yeah, and my mom was crazy about him too, but it just didn't work they were young and you know toxic (laughs).

Sarah: Sure. Did you live with your mom then?

Larry: Yeah, I lived with my mom and we lived on the east side. And um I would see my dad every now and then. I didn't see him a whole lot, last time I saw him he was- he was struggling. He wasn't doing that good. It was the last time I saw him, and I think he died a few years later. I remember though when he died, I was washing dishes in the kitchen, and there's a window over the sink, and I felt like him walk right through me and out the back window, and um my step dad came and told me my dad died. I felt him when he died I did, yeah.

Sarah: So, anything else that you would like to add?

Larry: My sister Damita um, she really helped me a lot with a lot of this information.

Sarah: Okay, nice.

Larry: You know um, she helped really a lot she's the one who sent me a lot of the photographs. They got the congas and all the records out in L.A. She helped me a lot, Damita. And um I've been looking forward to this for a long time, you know, and a lot more mature now, I understand the significance of this here. It used to be more emotional but it's more mature now. I just want him- I don't want anything, I just want my dad to be recognized, you know, and I think it would do his soul good- mine too- but I think it would- I think he's getting some rest out of this you know. Because I've been excited about this all over the place! You know, and a few people know about it, a couple of my clients, my sisters they know about it, a few friends they know. I was really- because a lot of people, you know, they know the side effects of growing up with a famous father by watching me, and um what's really cool is that, you know, some of my experience dealing with celebrities, its enabled me to, I train celebrities, so they don't impress me with their "celebritiness" that's why a lot of them hire me. That and my skills, you know so, I get a lot of musicians' stage ready. Kim Owens, Kim is a singer here from Detroit, I'm his trainer. I trained, oh God, Jackson Smith, that's Patti Smith's son. I trained him. I was one of the first people he told he was going to marry Meg White. He married Meg White, that was a trip, but you don't have to get too deep into that one. But yeah, I've trained a lot of people in music

business and I used to train Fred, his Fred Sonic back from the MC5. I used to train his manager who's- that- Fred was his name, he was ended up being Luis Resto's manager, they all from 54 sound that's Eminem's where they- Joel Martin used to manage him and Luis he got Luis, Jeff Bass and Matt Marshal Mathers, they got the academy award for "8 Mile". I've got pictures of me with them with "8 Mile" on it. I trained, I'm very close friends with Luis. But, you know, so, I've just learned a lot, a lot of people in the music business I've actually kinda- like they- I'll talk to them about being famous you know and talk to them about fool's paradise.

Sarah: Oh, yeah?

Larry: Yeah, talk to them about some of the things that being a creative person sacrifices, you know, and it's only going to last for a period of time, you know. I've talked a lot- to young group about relationships and being a good person, you know, and stuff like that. I've told a lot of them to be careful of what they do with some of these fans, you know, before they get- catch a video online somewhere. So, I talk to them about that, but no seriously, you get law suits yes, you know so because they're in, you know, a lot of those guys, a lot of people in the music business are really kinda- they're kinda boring, they're not- a lot of people think you partying all day, they got- they got kids they have, you know, they sometimes, they get sick of all the attention but they love it at the same time (laughs). Yeah, so yeah, but you know, and-

Sarah: And how is it different from being a celebrity back then to today? I know it's-

Larry: Its steroids now! It's on steroids now, because back then you would see, you know, one of the Four Tops riding down Woodward, it wasn't- people didn't worship celebrity worshipping like they do now, it's kind of weird it's kind of like, you know, they're just people. You know, they're not like "Oh my God, Oh my God! I'm going to die if I don't touch you!" you know it's too, yeah, I remember my sister Pat she wouldn't wash her hands because she had a crush on Eddie Kendricks, you know. But um, I think back then was totally different now because when I was into the whole rock and roll scene, and the during the big ball room days from '67 to about, probably about '71 or so, somewhere around there, in the Eastown and the Grande we partied with the Rolling Stones and all them all the time. Joe Cocker, Ron Wood you know Jack Bruce from Cream um that was like a normal thing. But it wasn't no really big deal because we saw them all the time, you know. So, but it's different now being a celebrity now, plus they got social media, you know, if you if you fart they got a picture describing what you ate, but excuse me for being so gross, but it's like ridiculous, the way things are now. Because you know like um I don't know Marshal, I never really met him I never really wanted to meet him, a lot of people were crowding him, but I knew a lot of his musicians, and looking at that kind of fame, you know, he lives in a fortress and you sacrifice a lot. Your privacy, you have a lot of people after you for money and friendships, you don't know who your real friend is, you don't know who's videotaping you, you know, so you got kind of- you become like a Howard Hughes kind of a little bit. He's not like that, he's grown up a lot, but you know there's side effects that comes with being famous you know. So, looking back by me living with my mom, I used to miss my dad a lot, I always wanted to be there with him and, you know, because I had these visions of grandeur and we were going to be doing all this stuff in here, I wouldn't want to live with him.

Sarah: Um-hm.

Larry: You know as an adult now, when I was a kid I wanted to, you know, why can't he- why can't I be with him, I'm his oldest son, you know, and but, oh but now, I'm an adult looking back. Oh no, I wouldn't want to be there, no way, that's way too- price too high for that and the other stuff that comes with, you know, I wouldn't want that. I mean looking back now retrospectively, I would never want that, no. I'd rather stay with my step dad and my mom but that, you know, that took a long time to get to that point.

Sarah: Sure, sure. Because it's a lot different when you're a kid.

Larry: Oh, huge difference! You know, your emotions is on the front of your chest, you know, so-

Sarah: So, what is it about Detroit that makes it a hotbed of musical talent do you think?

Larry: You mean now or then?

Sarah: You can go with both if you want.

Larry: That doesn't exist now.

Sarah: No?

Larry: No not at all back then it was- music was everywhere! I mean everybody played instruments. There was music stores all over the place. Grinnell's it was on Woodward. Drum

instruments. There was music stores all over the place, Children's it was on Woodward, Drum Shop was on Broadway, you had, you know, you could get instruments anywhere, all over the place! You had bands all over the place, um Doo-wop groups during the early sixties. It was just totally different! You could go hear really good live music, not these machines hip hop and- which I like hip hop I'm okay with that, alright? But, you know, you heard live performances with real organic people, real people onstage playing an instrument, you know, and then the sound and the, you know, then the singing and spontaneity. It was all live. Now it's not, they're not rehearsing this is like, right in front of you, now so whatever mistakes they made you're going to hear it, you know, and there were very little of that, because they were just dead on the money, and so now it kind of, you know, kind of- you can make machines in your computer at home by yourself in the living- in the bedroom and, you know, it's not- you don't have the other musicians. I'm sure they do still but you know the music business sucks right now, it's just, you know, and that it still sucks now because it's just ripping people off like crazy. They and plus now the difference now, with the music, is that back then we have- we had disc jockeys that played whatever they want, but I remember when the record companies' payola would started paying the radio station money to play certain songs. So, now you don't have radio stations and they play whatever they want, that died here in Detroit. That pretty much kinda died when we lost WJZZ and then we lost WDET, even WRIF they were kinda really good disc jockeys that played the, you know, kept up. There was a fight going on and when you listened to the radio, especially people like Rosetta Hines, that was one of my dad's favorite, she I don't know if you are familiar with her? She was uh, she was like Ms. Detroit. She was on JZZ and I think it was WJLB or it was WJLD I forget which FM station it was. It was a jazz station it went from WJLB or WJLD to WJZZ and they had people like Ed Love, Rosetta Hines but they were personal because, you know, she would be playing a song, a jazz tune by, you know, Horace Silvers or whatever somebody like anybody, and part of the song she would tell you what the weather was!

Sarah: Oh, yeah?

Larry: Yeah! Eighty degrees in Detroit! And then she would come back, it was like really personal, and we knew when she was pregnant, she had her daughter, so it was totally different. So now, sucks, you hear the same shit all the time on the radio that I- the musicians don't get no kind of air, you don't know what's playing anywhere. I just found out Massive Attack is playing at the Masonic Temple and I found it out by happenstance, because I'm real big into the electronica and stuff like that, so, you know, I want to go see them. So, the music scene now, I really think it sucks and I don't like it at all. There is some really good young musicians coming out. They're a little more savvy with music and they're producing they're own music and they're keeping all the money, okay? So, I like that some of those young musicians- But um, no the music scene now, I don't like it all, no, it's, you know, a lot of people like me for instance, by me growing up in front of live music like, from a little kid and then the whole hippie thing around live music, you know, all the time, like phenomenal stuff, like, you know, stuff that I can't even describe to you that experience! So, now when I go to a live concert, you know, I'm really disappoint like, really fast, you know, I try not to be but, you know-

Sarah: You've seen all the amazing stuff!

Larry: What are they fucking doing? Yeah, excuse my language but this is bullshit! This is like, wait a minute! I'm not- I'm paying \$270 to see this, are you serious man? So, it's just not as good, you know, there's still good musicians now. Some good groups like Snarky Puppy, Snarky Puppy's a good group they are kind of, I don't know if your familiar with them?

Sarah: I'm not, no.

Larry: Yeah, they're a really good group from, I think they are from Seattle or something like that, Snarky Puppy, really super good group as far as a musicians group. They all- I think they all went to Berkeley in California there's a few good groups, I think it's Thievery Connection that was- that's a pretty good group, um I don't know if you are familiar with them? Um you know, these are-

Sarah: Mostly country music for me.

Larry: Well, yeah, yeah, and then Massive Attack is a really good group. They do their music sounds like soundtracks to a- but it's kinda weird, it's kinda you know electronica, but yeah, the music scene now, the radio scene now, sucks. They don't have, you know, you got these big corporations that just gobbling up all the airwaves, and they're just puking in our ears, you know, so that's why a lot of people are looking on YouTube and kind of going back to what they used to

like. But it's hard to really get into, you know, what these people are doing now because it just really- it really sucks. So, no I don't like the music scene now not at all.

Sarah: Oh, you think it will come back around?

Larry: I think everything comes back around at times, but I just think some original stuff need to happen. Because okay, during the time of the '60s that was like the age of Aquarius. We were challenging the government, they were lying to us like left and fucking right, they were killing black folks everywhere, so, it was really *really* nasty. They were killing civil rights leaders, they were doing all kinds of different things. But people talked, and they communicated. They had much better interpersonal skills. Nobody's texting to say, "I love you" and all this shit. They were, you know, if you want to call somebody there was no caller ID, you picked the phone up and you answered the phone or, you know, it was totally different back then. And now it seems like it's just too much information, um it's like, way too much information up in the head for people to really just settle down and say hi, you know. And so, that's- you know, so, wow, it's just totally different now. Which is fine, but I think people- musicians- need to get to a point, they need to express themselves and that's what I like about some of the hip hop like, and some of the bands like Tribe Called Quest and um, what's his name J Dilla from Detroit. I don't know if your familiar with any of them? Now, that's somebody you want to interview! I don't know how to get ahold of them but they were from Detroit Slum Village, they did a lot of music for, oh my goodness gracious, Busta Rhymes, Q-Tip I mean, you know, they were- he did sampling that you hear to this day he was from Detroit, he died from diabetes, he was pretty sick but he, you know, he- musicians, hip hop musicians from all over the place, was coming over to him and they were a couple a broth- the Yancy brothers so that's something you need to document that and if you want to document something that's current.

Sarah: Yeah, and what was his name again?

Larry: He was J Dilla.

Sarah: J Dilla.

Larry: Yeah, ah, he- they were in some slum. But his mother's still in Detroit and that would be someone that would be really good to have interview. I don't know how to get a hold of them. I could try. I'm sure somebody knows Ms. Yancy. But yeah, the music scene is just totally different now. I just wish younger people would be more- A lot of them are going back to older stuff which is okay, looking at current things, but you know like I said during the time back then it was innocent, we wanted change, and you reflected in the music. There was a lot of creative stuff going on then. Things started getting weird around '92 because the whole hippie thing and the flower power thing was gone, and we were like, a lot of us had kids and we kinda laid off the drugs and kind of got kind of normal and got real super stiff and then the younger punks came in. The punk rocker thing, yeah. And then the disco thing came that was awful!

Sarah: (Laughs) Oh yeah, not a fan?

Larry: No, I was pretty- Yeah, that was pretty bad. But all these different music scene, there was a Motown scene during the early, mid- early '60s and then you had the Philly Sound then um you know the Wall of Sound from Spencer Davis, well not Spencer Davis but it was Spencer Davis grew up- well that was somebody else, but you know I can't think of that guy's name who killed his wife? Shot her in the face? What was his name? Phil Spector, yeah, real creepy dude but he had a really good sound and he did- Tina Turner when she left Ike they made a song. Ah "Mountain High" [ed. note: "River Deep, Mountain High"] I can't think of the name of it.

Sarah: Was the "Ain't No Mountain High-

Larry: No, no that was Motown it was (singing) 'When I was a young girl do you and dat da-', can't remember the name of the song. Anyway, they're different sounds so, you know, I would like to see some of the people now create stuff that reflects what's going on now. And it's probably going to be kind of strange, because this is a really weird time right now. We're learning some things now that you're going to hear some angry music you're going to hear some, um, you know, some political type stuff, you know. You got all kinds of people going on so, I guess you're going to have some of the music hopefully reflect the truth, instead of some watered down- But that's the thing now about radio station. They're feeding us watered down, like it's like, shit coming out of the speakers! It's horrible music! It's like, this is not music man! "I'll die for you and I'll just die for you" and I'm going huh? What the hell you talkin' about? So, I don't know, and the kids will listen. So anyway, I'm going on a tangent, you hit a nerve there.

Sarah: So, you want something more that has feeling and is more of a reflection of the time?

Sarah: So, you want something more than the feeling and is more of a reflection of the time.

Larry: Well something that's intelligent! Well yeah! I mean it's just not some lazy ass stuff you just came up with in your basement. I'm talking about something- there has to be some intelligence behind it. Which, you know, I'm sure a lot of it does but it's not- it doesn't have no- it doesn't make you feel, you know, how some people you meet and something they said you remember the feeling more than what they said? That's not- that's not there anymore. See, that's the stuff I notice from being around music before. Where now I feel like a hole in a donut because- or like I'm suffering because I've been around, exposed to so much music that now I'm a malcontent for the time because I'm going like this is horrible man! You're not a musician! What is this shit you're playing? You know what's going on here man, this isn't- this is something I don't know anything about (laughs). So, yeah.

Sarah: Alright any parting words you would like to add?

Larry: Oh, I've been waiting for this for a long time a long, long time.

Sarah: I'm glad we got to do it.

Larry: Lot of- lot of thing over the years when you have a father like this, he's with you in your head all the time, all the time, and not only that, if you're looking at a commercial and its playing, a movie, it's always his music in the movies, and I always hear his stuff everywhere I go. So, it's almost like, you know, he's always with me and um but I wanted to um make sure- I wanted to do something. I'm a spiritual person and I'm a Godly man and I wanted to um make sure my dad was at rest and the world knows what he contributed to American music. That's what I wanted and I'm very *very* pleased, I'm so glad that I came here to talk with you.

Sarah: Perfect! It was so glad to talk to you! So that was Sarah Tropper interviewing Mr. Larry Cole about his father, Eddie Bongo Brown. Thank you so much Mr. Cole!

Larry: Thank you very much!

*End of interview.*