

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Johnny Pate

PERSON

Pate, Johnny

Alternative Names: Johnny Pate; John W. Pate, Sr.

Life Dates: December 5, 1923-

Place of Birth: Chicago Heights, Illinois, USA

Residence: Fairview, TX

Occupations: Jazz Bassist; Music Arranger

Biographical Note

Jazz bassist, rhythm and blues arranger John W. Pate, Sr., “Johnny Pate,” was born December 5, 1923 in blue collar Chicago Heights, Illinois. Pate took an interest in the family’s upright piano and learned from the church organist who boarded with them. He attended Lincoln Elementary School, Washington Junior High and graduated from Bloom Township High School in 1942. Drafted into the United States Army, Pate joined the 218th AGF Army Band where he took up the tuba and played the upright bass in the jazz orchestra. In 1946, after his tour of service, Pate moved to New York City where bassist Oscar Pettiford helped him get started.

Pate played with the Red Allen - J.C. Higginbotham Combo and jazz violinists Stuff Smith and Eddie South. Returning to Chicago, he arranged musical numbers at the Regal Theatre with Red Saunders. Pate studied at the Midwest Conservatory of Music from 1950 to 1953 and continued to perform in the 50s with Dorothy Donegan, Sarah Vaughan, Joe Williams, Count Basie and Ahmad Jamal. Forming the Johnny Pate Trio and Combo in 1957, he was also “house bassist” for Chicago’s Blue Note. Johnny Pate’s bass solo on “Satin Doll” is featured on the album Duke Ellington Live At The Blue Note (1959). Pate continued to perform, and appeared on albums featuring James Moody, Phil Woods, Shirley Horn, Wes Montgomery, Stan Getz, Kenny Burrell, Jimmy Smith and Monty Alexander as producer and arranger.

Contacted by Carl Davis of Chicago’s Okeh Records, Pate arranged a Curtis Mayfield song, “Monkey Time,” which was a big hit for Major Lance in 1963. Pate’s collaboration with Curtis Mayfield produced most of the well-known Impressions tracks including “Amen,” “We’re A Winner” and “Keep On Pushin.” He produced B.B. King: Live at the Regal and also arranged for Betty Everett, Gene Chandler and Jerry Butler. In the 1970s Pate orchestrated and arranged Shaft In Africa, Brother on the Run,

Bucktown, Bustin Loose and others. He continued to arrange in the 1980s for Peabo Bryson and Natalie Cole. Retiring to Las Vegas in the 1990s, Pate was honored in 2003 as the “Unsung Hero of Popular Music”. Pate’s son is well known bassist, Don Pate and his cousin is saxophonist, Johnny Griffin.

Related Entries

Bloom High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Washington Junior High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Lincoln Elementary School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Verve Records [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Producer

King Records [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Producer

Verve Records [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

In House Producer

ABC-Paramount Records [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from ? to ?]

Producer

Club DeLisa [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1949 to 1952]

Musical Director