

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Aja Graydon

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Graydon, Aja, 1978-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Aja Graydon,
Dates:	May 22, 2012
Bulk Dates:	2012
Physical Description:	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:14:17).
Abstract:	Singer Aja Graydon (1978 -) was best known, along with her singing partner and husband Fatin Dantzler, as the critically acclaimed R&B and Soul music group, Kindred the Family Soul. Graydon was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 22, 2012, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2012_112
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Singer Aja Graydon was born on September 25, 1978 in Los Angeles, California. At the age of fifteen, Graydon secured a recording contract with Delicious Vinyl. After the dissolution of her deal with the Los Angeles-based independent label, Dantzler migrated to Philadelphia, recording music with the burgeoning hip-hop group "The Roots." In 1997, Graydon met Fatin Dantzler, her future husband and primary musical collaborator and two years later, they married. The couple formed "Kindred the Family Soul," a classic soul and R&B music group. After being discovered by R&B legend Jill Scott at a Philadelphia music showcase, Kindred signed a recording contract with Hidden Beach Recordings (HBR) in 2001. In March 2003, the group released its first studio album titled, *Surrender to Love*, which peaked to seven and twenty nine on the *Billboard* Heatseekers and R&B albums' charts, respectively. Two years later, the duo released their second studio album, *In This Life Together*, which climbed to number fifteen on the *Billboard* R&B chart. In 2006, Kindred's song "My Time" was named the official song of the National Education Association's *Read Across America* campaign. Kindred then released *The Arrival*, its third album on Hidden Beach, in 2008. The album rose to number seven on the *Billboard* R&B albums' chart. The duo released its fourth album *Love Has No Recession* in 2011, which rose to number nineteen and fifteen on the R&B and Independent Albums' charts, respectively. The group also launched a web-based reality television show in 2010.

Graydon and her husband have garnered critical acclaim for their work as "Kindred the Family Soul." In 2003, the duo garnered a Soul Train nomination. Three years later, Kindred was nominated for a BET Award. Graydon and Dantzler have worked with Grammy Award-winning recording artists like Jill Scott, India.Arie, The Roots and Snoop Dogg. Fatin and Dantzler reside in Philadelphia and have six children.

Aja Graydon was interviewed by the *The HistoryMakers* on May 22, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Aja Graydon was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 22, 2012, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Singer Aja Graydon (1978 -) was best known, along with her singing partner and husband Fatin Dantzler, as the critically acclaimed R&B and Soul music group, Kindred the Family Soul.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Graydon, Aja, 1978-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Graydon, Aja, 1978- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Singer

HistoryMakers® Category:

MusicMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Aja Graydon, May 22, 2012. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Aja Graydon, Section A2012_112_001_001, TRT: 1:26:33 ?

Aja Graydon was born September 25, 1978 in Los Angeles, California to Susan Knox Graydon and Richard Graydon. Her maternal grandmother, Susie Brent Gaskins, was born in rural Virginia around 1926. During her teenage years, she married William Knox, who later served in the U.S. Army. Graydon's mother was born in 1949 on a military base in Texas. Graydon's mother later learned that her birth resulted from her mother's affair with teacher and artist Rudolph Morris, and some of her siblings were biracial due to her father's infidelities. The family eventually settled in Washington, D.C., where Graydon's mother attended Joel Elias Springarn High School. She went on to work for former

Secretary of Commerce Ronald Brown. Graydon's paternal ancestors were of Native American and West Indian descent. Her grandmother, Bessie McVay, migrated from North Carolina to New York City, where her father was born in 1943. When he was three years old, his father died and the family moved to Washington, D.C.

Video Oral History Interview with Aja Graydon, Section A2012_112_001_002, TRT: 2:30:14 ?

Aja Graydon's father, Richard Graydon, graduated from high school in Washington D.C. Due to his involvement in a bank robbery, he was sent to prison. While there, he helped other inmates to apply for parole to lessen his sentence. After an early release, he attended Federal City College in Washington, D.C., and became a guidance counselor. In 1977, he married Graydon's mother, Susan Knox Graydon, and they moved to Los Angeles, California. There, Graydon's mother met her biological father, Rudolph Morris. After Graydon's birth, her parents returned to Washington, D.C. In 1982, they separated, and she spent most of her childhood living with her mother and sister, who was seven years her elder. At an early age, Graydon became interested in the music and culture of Washington D.C.'s diverse black community, and her father broadened her political awareness through books and speeches by Malcom X, Kwame Ture and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Aja Graydon, Section A2012_112_001_003, TRT: 3:34:17 ?

Aja Graydon attended Robert Brent Elementary School in Washington, D.C., where she was inspired by the principal Frances Plummer. She developed an interest in theater, and joined the Children's Urban Arts Ensemble, which produced musicals like 'The Wiz' and 'A Chorus Line.' For the seventh grade, she received an academic scholarship to attend Washington, D.C.'s Maret School, where she struggled in the predominately white and classist environment. In 1991, her family moved to Alexandria, Virginia for two years, where she flourished at the racially diverse Francis C. Hammond Junior High School. Graydon then returned to Washington, D.C., and enrolled at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. At this time, she decided to pursue a singing career; and with the help of her mother, secured her first manager, Charlie Jones, who was a sound engineer at BET. She signed with Delicious Vinyl in 1994 at sixteen years old, but did not complete an album.

Video Oral History Interview with Aja Graydon, Section A2012_112_001_004, TRT: 4:28:43 ?

Aja Graydon excelled as a student at Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, D.C. Disappointed by the postponement of her album, Graydon left school; and in 1996, earned her high school diploma through a tutoring program. She followed her manager, Charlie Jones, to Los Angeles, California, but returned to Washington D.C. when her mother, Susan Knox Graydon, became ill. Graydon began working with songwriter Eugene Hanes, and moved with him to New York City to find work. There, she collaborated with the hip hop band, The Roots, and developed her songwriting skills. During this time, she met Fatin Dantzer, and the couple married in 1998. In 1999, they relocated to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where they continued to perform with The Roots. The duo became known as Kindred the Family Soul, and sang in the Black Lily showcase at the Five Spot night club. In 2000, music producer and executive Steve McKeever offered the duo a recording contract with Hidden Beach Recordings.

Video Oral History Interview with Aja Graydon, Section A2012_112_001_005, TRT: 5:28:56 ?

Aja Graydon and her husband, Fatin Dantzer, began recording as Kindred the Family Soul, and released their first album 'Surrender to Love,' in 2003. The album featured music produced by The Roots' pianist, James Poyser. Graydon

and her husband wrote hit songs "Far Away" and "Stars" about their efforts to balance their singing career with being a newlywed couple and first time parents. The album was nominated for the best R&B soul album award at the 2003 Soul Train Awards. In 2005, the duo released their second album, 'In This Life Together,' which they named after Ossie Davis' and Ruby Dee's memoir. It featured the popular songs "Where Would I Be (The Question)" and "Woman First," which talked about Graydon's struggles in accepting her role as a woman, wife and mother. The group's song "My Time" was named the official song of the National Education Association's Read Across America initiative. Graydon remembers touring in the United States and abroad while pregnant.

Video Oral History Interview with Aja Graydon, Section A2012_112_001_006, TRT: 6:29:31 ?

Aja Graydon and her husband, Fatin Dantzler, performed as the musical group, Kindred the Family Soul, and toured with fellow R&B singers John Legend and KEM. In 2004, they opened the Culture Shop in their neighborhood of Cedar Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The business carried clothing from independent designers such as UglyVille and Fly Supply Clothing. In 2008, Kindred the Family Soul released their third album, 'The Arrival,' and the music video for their first single "House of Love" was directed by Matthew A. Cherry. After leaving Hidden Beach Recordings, the duo signed with Shanachie Entertainment, and recorded their fourth album, 'Love Has No Recession,' which received positive reviews upon its release in 2011. In 2012, Graydon and her husband began producing their own music videos under their media company, Media Shack. Graydon talks about her family's web reality television show 'Six Is It,' which followed the home birth of her sixth child, Deen Dantzler.

Video Oral History Interview with Aja Graydon, Section A2012_112_001_007, TRT: 7:16:03 ?

Aja Graydon was married to singer and songwriter Fatin Dantzler; and together, they had six children. She describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community, and reflects upon her life and legacy. She also shares a story about her first wedding ring, and concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.