

Interview conducted by Mike Stephenson at the Alamo Theatre on Farish Street, Jackson, Mississippi in 2019. Many thanks go to Peggy Brown of Hit The Road Entertainment and Carol and Ron Marble of Mississippi Delta Blues, Inc.



We are on the street, Farish Street, where I was raised up and I've named my record label after that, Farish Street Records, and I added Mississippi so that they know I'm from there. I was born in this area, which is a historic district, and I performed on this street at the Alamo Theatre, which is something similar to the Apollo Theatre, and they probably have this type of establishment in every big city. I know Hattiesburg and Vicksburg had them and so this is where I came where they used to have talent shows here every Wednesday night. A dj used to MC the show and I was like eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen on this big stage, which is as big as some of the movie theaters we go to. It was very frightening being on there but it was a great experience for me, because I call it my classroom for what I'm doing today; I learnt my profession from this

stage. On the talent shows back then was nothing but men, no female ever appeared when I was performing. I didn't set that up, it just happened to be that way. The only person who was my age or close to it was Tommy Tate and he was a very good friend and he lived out in the west of Jackson and he might have been the first person to come and get me to perform with a band, because he was already with this band and the band was all white and Tommy was the drummer and singer, the only black person in the band. They wanted a female artist so Tommy knew me and where I lived and he asked me, so that's how I got with that band and we went on to sing in a white club. I could perform in this club but I couldn't sit down in it and have a hamburger or anything like that, because it was as it was in the sixties. I ate in my dressing room but performed on stage and got big tips. It was crazy stuff then but I didn't look at it so much, I just wanted to perform and that was their problem.

What drew me into singing was my great grandmother who raised me and I started singing in the church choir at the age of five, six and seven. I was a lead singer and that's where I learned how to use a microphone. The pianist told me how to use it because I didn't know how to use one and evidently she was a music major to know all of that type of thing; she taught the choir and she taught me how to use that microphone. I sang traditional gospel music in the church, Shirley Caesar type and The Davis Sisters and The Caravans, all that type of gospel music. I knew that music because of the radio. I had a radio but didn't have a record player, so I learnt sings when I heard them from the radio. I might not get all the words when they played it one time, but I waited until it came on again and then would get the second verse and then wait till the next time and get the third verse. So that's the way I learnt stuff and I also put the words under my pillow and I woke up the next day knowing it. It was God, I think.

When I got to the Alamo later on, I was singing nothing but blues, until they later on had a gospel talent show and then I would appear on that. I won a lot of times, both gospel and blues shows. There was a house band backing us at the Malaco talent shows, which was the Sam Myers band and he played up and down Farish Street at different clubs. They had a lot of music here back then. The doors would be

wide open and you could hear it as you passed through with my great grandmother when she went to pay her bills, like electric bills and getting the groceries and own some loans where she had borrowed some money or put her furniture up for collateral. Then the owner of the loan company would come and put tags on drawers and which ones not to use, because we had borrowed it until she paid for it. She never lost any of her furniture, she paid for it. Also one of the house bands was Cadillac George Harris and we all lived in this area and we knew each other, but Sam and George were older than me. I was the only one in school except Tommy Tate when he would appear. I found out later on they called me the pipsqueak when I appeared at the Alamo, because I was winning all the time. It was mainly the money that attracted me to music and of course it took a commitment. We used to get paid if you won on those talent shows, it was less than \$20. My great grandmother escorted me to the Alamo as I was in school and the shows started at 6.00 p.m. and she was my chaperone and she would sit down in the front all of the time and she would tell me where she would be sitting, so when I got through I would go and find her and we would go home after we got our money. Jobie Martin was the MC and he was a disk jockey on W.O.K.J., the only black station in Jackson at that time. His talent show was the greatest thing he could have done for me. I never did forget that, I always made an award for him at The Jackson Music Awards. I paid for his plaque at those awards, so as to respect Jobie for what he had done for music.

I then got discovered by a simple knock at my door by a record producer as he had heard around town that there was a girl singing and he had just opened up a studio and he came to my mother's home late one night when we were both in bed and she went to the door and this tall white man was there. We wondered what that was about, as the Freedom Riders and the civil rights was going on back then in the sixties, so seeing a white man come to your door was a bit unusual and it was like if you saw a black person on TV, we used to turn it on and up. We would call each other about that. It was Bob McRee who called and he wanted me to record for him. Instead of doing straight recordings, I did background work for other stars at his studio. He would record a single every now and then, but I did mostly background work for other artists that came through using his studio. People like Freddy Fender, a country and western guy, and Peggy Scott and Jo Jo Benson doing 'Pickin' Wild Mountain Berries', I was on that. The Pointer Sisters came through and we did the background for them, it was me and two others who were really The Poppies later on. Later on we became The Poppies because the producer it came to him that idea to have us as a group, because The Supremes and things were happening and The Marvelettes and all those people. Bob's studio was in Clinton, Mississippi and he had bought up this big movie theater that went out of business and he put all his recording stuff in there and we were with him for two years because after that we became The Poppies. I was the lead singer of that group for everything and we went on to have an album called *Lullaby Of Love* and that was on the Epic label. Bob took us to Epic to record for a big label. Bob didn't have a label, he just had a studio and he took us to Billy Sherrill in Nashville who recorded Tammy Wynette. The keyboard player was Larry Butler who went on to be Kenny Rogers' manager, he was my keyboard player for The Poppies. We all started somewhere I guess. The other singers in The Poppies were Rosemary Taylor and Patsye McCune and we were all going to college and I was in high school going on to freshman when that happened and I majored in voice and minored in



piano. We were out on the road promoting that album but I didn't get any money, it was a salary that we got instead.

After The Poppies I think came Malaco but they didn't sign me immediately, they waited until I got older. It might have been on my great grandmother's advice, I'm not sure, but they signed me in 1973. They knew about me because the label was in Jackson and everybody knew about me then, and they all knew about Tommy Tate, as I was singing everywhere like all the colleges and everywhere where there was somewhere to perform. Malaco approached me about being signed by them and I did a bunch of background singing for them. They didn't have no money going for them then and I finally recorded with them and it was just three sides, as they didn't have the money to do an album. They didn't want to invest in an album if you didn't have a hit as it cost money probably. So they did singles and they did three on me and one of them was 'Misty Blue', but they didn't release it; they released some other songs instead and waited two years later to release 'Misty Blue'. One of the other songs I did was 'Cry Like A Baby' which was written by Ashford And Simpson who were with Motown and, as a matter of fact, Isaac Hayes recorded that same song eventually and he did it for Stax years later I'm sure. Stax wanted me also, but I was signed to Malaco.



I did a bunch of background vocals for Malaco even after I did 'Misty Blue'. I did work with Jean Knight and King Floyd who went on to make it big and I was singing because it was something I could do, I didn't think about being a great star or anything. It's like a basketball player playing basketball, it's something they can do. I did the background to get some money, a few dollars. I was poor at that time. We didn't have a car at that time, we walked or caught the bus, like walking to church or walking to the Alamo when I was young. That was me and my great grandmother and I was with her when she had my granddaddy too, but he passed. Me and my great grandmother did everything together. My great grandmother raised me, my mother, her daughter, and her daughter's son and daughter, so she raised everyone and we called her 'Mama' and her name was Minnie.

'Misty Blue' became a big hit but I didn't know it straight away and then Malaco told me and asked me to go on the road performing. I had to get a manager and stuff. By this time Malaco couldn't afford to release 'Misty Blue' all over the U.S. as it was selling too fast, as they didn't have the money back then, so they got T.K. Productions to distribute, which was owned by Henry Stone and he had people like Latimore and Betty Wright and K.C. And The Sunshine Band and Gwen McCrae, George McCrae and on and on and then he got me. I was married then and had two children. They released 'Misty Blue' as a single in November 1975, some people say it was released in 1976 but it was 1975. Three months later in February 1976 it was nominated for a Grammy, just three months. So after 'Misty Blue' became a hit I went back into the studio and recorded more songs for Malaco. I was in England picking up an award for 'Misty Blue' and on the stage at the London Palladium and I was the opening act, the big stars were a big rock act.

I didn't know how big and important the London Palladium was. I thought it was like the Alamo, just another stage, and I was interviewed by lots of magazines. They had a whole load of stuff lined up for me when I was there. 'Misty Blue' went gold in the U.S. and Canada. So I recorded a bunch of other songs for the *Misty Blue* album and that came out in 1976. I got tired of making songs happen for other people. I went on to record other albums for Malaco at that time. One was *Once Moore With Feeling* that had a painting of me on the cover which I didn't like at all and which I felt didn't help me at all. I was still doing background vocals for Malaco, as well as for people like Johnnie Taylor, Denise LaSalle and Little Milton. Bobby Bland personally asked me to do background for him but I didn't and I wished I had of done because he was a great singer and I respected him. I was doing this work even though I was out on the road for myself, but when I was at home and wasn't doing anything they would call me and ask me to come in and do something, it was like keeping my chops up. I was having fun being with Jewel Bass, another background singer for Malaco. I stopped doing background in the eighties, some time when Thomisene Anderson came in, because she worked there full time, although I did some things with her, us being background singers. I worked with Johnnie Taylor for three months when *Misty Blue* hit. I was on the road with him. He had *Disco Lady* at number one and my *Misty Blue* was number two in the charts. All these artists became good friends of mine and they helped me to dress up and look nice because they looked super and I learned a lot from them. I was also out on the road with The Manhattans and also the 5th Dimension who had that 'Age Of Aquarius' thing out.

When *Misty Blue* was nominated for a Grammy, at the ceremony Gladys Knight and Michael Jackson were the MCs and what they chose to do was sing each song that was nominated and I wondered who was going to sing mine and Michael Jackson did, but it didn't sound like no 'Misty Blue'. I was there with my ex husband, sitting right behind Natalie Cole with her sister, and Ringo Starr was sitting right next to me and he shook my hand.

After Malaco, I did the Streetking album, *Just Another Broken Heart* under Bob Montgomery. I was passing through Nashville and that's when I did that disco song 'Just Another Broken Heart' which was a twelve inch. Streetking was a disco label and I recorded that song and album just before they went out. I was a free agent then. I've done a gospel album for Word Records. That label have recorded Shirley Caesar and Al Green and all those people and they had a label called Rejoice and that's what that record came out on. Kenny Rogers' keyboard player produced it. I then went to the Volt label and I signed for them after they called me and I was a free agent after doing that gospel album. I did an album for Volt, *Time Out For Me*, and also *Winner*, they were in the mid eighties. In 1989 I called Malaco and asked them if they were signing any artists and Wolf Stephenson answered and said "If their name is Dorothy Moore, we are". So that's how I got back with Malaco, this was in 1989, and then we did *Feel The Love* that had 'He Thinks I Still Care' on it which came out in 1990. I was still working all over then as well

and Malaco have always produced great albums. I signed with them for five years and did some other albums, *Talk To Me*, *Stay Close To Home*, and then asked for a release.

After that I stayed off for a while and then I started producing myself for my label Farish Street Records. In 2002 I produced my first Christmas album, *Please Come Home For Christmas*, I had never done one before. I did *I'm Doing Alright* and then *Gittin' Down Live* and then after that I did *Blues Heart* in 2012 and I went to Nashville to cut that one.

More recently, and bringing things up to date, I've just recorded a new album (2019). That album started by someone asking to do a duet with me, which I didn't do, but I thought that I should do my own album. I'm very happy that I have gone ahead and done the album. I have Mississippi horn players on there, Mississippi violins and Mississippi background singers and Mississippi arrangers and a Mississippi studio and I'm from Mississippi. It started by me calling a friend who is from Mississippi, Jamie Mitchell, who has a studio and he knew these other guys who had a studio and that's where we went, to Vicksburg, Hummingbird Studios. The spirit of the studio felt so good and I couldn't wait to get in there to start recording. Then I went to call up my friends who are writers as I don't specialize in writing.

I called Jim Weatherly and Gregory Abbot and E.G. Kight and Eddie Floyd, who is a good friend, we toured together in the past and still do from time to time, and everybody sent me a song. Some I got one, some I got two and Jim sent me ten. I listened to them all and I love listening to them, but I picked one of Jim's, two of Eddie's, and two of E.G.'s and one of Gregory Abbot's and I have done a Willie Nelson song, 'Crazy', as I've always loved that song. I'm thinking of a title for the album at present and it may be *Happy With The One I Got Now*. It's one of E.G.'s songs and I thought that would be a positive thing in any way you want to make that, such as happy with the man I've got now, or happy with the job I've got now, or whatever. How I picked the musicians is, several of the musicians have played for me already and the arranger had already played for me, his name is Kimble Funchess, he is a trumpet and flugel player. I called him and asked him to do the arranging as my last arranger, Harrison Calloway, passed. He was my past band leader and arranged a number of my past albums.

My brother was also helping on some of my recordings in the past. His name is Housecat, his real name is Melvin Hendrix, he and I have the same father. All the musicians on my new album are all from Mississippi and I chose who I wanted and the arranger chose who he wanted and I love who we got, as they have all played with me before here and there and every now and then. We also have Jessie Primer on sax on the album. There is a nice variety of songs and music on the album. I try to cross the musical board because that's what I am and do, and from that Malaco didn't know where to put me. I record stuff that I like. I'm a gospel singer and rhythm and blues singer, pop, jazz, country, I can yodel. I usually have a country number on most of my albums. There is a musical creativeness on my new album, what with all those wonderful musicians and we lived off each other's creativeness in the studio. Everybody made suggestions on how it should sound or how a song could be arranged. When we recorded the



album we were all in the studio, so we could see one another and that helped make it all happen. We are looking for worldwide distribution for the new album.

There was a time when I used to have horns in the band on my live shows, sometimes three and other times four, along with my rhythm section and I used to have background singers as well. I still do a gospel number on my live shows.

Interviewer Mike Stephenson is a UK based blues journalist and photographer who has been a blues fan all his life. He has written articles on and interviewed blues artists and reviewed blues events in Europe and the US primarily for Blues & Rhythm but also for other blues publications.