



Henderson Thigpen, 2017

Item Type	Moving Image
Publisher	Rhodes College
Download date	2025-01-26 14:17:20
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/33734

Transcript Template

Date: 2017-08-01

Interviewee: Henderson Thigpen

Interviewer: Jeff Kollath and Charles Hughes

Location: Stax Museum of American Soul Music, Memphis, TN

Collection: Stax Museum Oral Histories

Notes: Transcribed by David Nibayubahe and Kameron Lovell MCHS

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Charles Huges: Alright, we are here today with Henderson Thigpen, August 1, 2017 at the Stax music academy. Jeff Kollath, Stax Museum, Charles Huges, Rhodes College. So Mr. Thigpen, thank you for sharing your morning with us. We'll start very simply just tell us about yourself you know, start at the beginning.

Henderson Thigpen: You want to know how I got started in this whole music thing. I didn't tell you this when we met before in black Churches we have a thing called children's day we you have to get up and recite poems in front of the congregation. So, I would of wrote my own poems and it made my mom proud and I got to the point for them to tutor me on to recite so I would read mine. Then, at sixteen

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I thought I was in love with this women that was twenty something and my mom found out about it and it was a very bad thing for a sixteen-year-old to be talking to a twenty-year-old. So, I wrote this song which was really a poem about that situation and was crushed but now I'm over it, and now I'm here. Then, I continued to write poems and someone told me I need to some with them, but I didn't know what to do with them because I didn't play with them like how I sound as a singer. I came to Memphis in 1964, when my uncle lived right down the street and his wife still live there down on Beechwood so I came because everybody in the family knew I use to write poetry and all of that stuff so he carried me to WLOK and they sent me to Stax,

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still didn't know what I was doing, I had no idea, but I'll just stand around and write poems and made a rhyme that I wanted to make but that's really how I got started. I met ****Denin and Ms.Axen**** where the record shop previously was located on the corner and David Porter was over New Talent so, ****Ms.Axen**** would let me stand around the record shop, to wait on ****Denin**** to get out of a meeting, so I can talk to her. So, when he came out of the two swinging doors I will go out and catch him, and he say Thig because that's what he called me and he said, "I'll see you when I get back.", and he never came back, and that happened many times so Denin and Ms.

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Axen, I think a couple of times we stayed up here late after the shops closed and **Denin** and I will write together still I didn't know what I was doing but somebody saw something, and by use being farmers I'll meet her on the weekend and we will lay cotton across, and I met Homer Banks and he was doing this full time and was just coming up here on the weekends and in the Summer time after school in the 10th grade of High School ,but Homer couldn't play but he could record

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and I met Rayman Jackson, the guitar player, and they did it on a regular basis and I was just doing it over the weekend. Then, I met his twin brother, James, so he can deal with me doing it on the weekend so that's how I got in with James and I still didn't know what I was doing they thought I had some in me even when I didn't. Then at the point when I used to think I was writing songs but now when I can sit here now and could not write you a song, and it like I can be in the worst place and an idea would just pop up and I'll have a pen in one pocket and two pads in the other pocket. Wherever I am if I just stop talking to you and start writing that means an idea popped into my head, the melody, the changes, all of that comes

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so I do go back and rewrite it and have to get back in that mode and write down four or five lines and I can go from there and finish the song but that is roughly how I got into music.

Huges: You said you wrote some songs with **Denin Parker. ** So one of the things we're going to talk about today is s sort of the song writing process so what was it like writing songs with Denin in 1964,5,6?

Thigpen: That was a real big time for me to sign a contract at the time with East Memphis but just to have somebody like her position. I can't remember her position at the time. I can't remember but just to have anybody at the company

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just to show me if I had any interest and being a country boy from Mississippi that was a big thing when I saw my name on a Record, and just writing with someone that was on the inside coming and had an inside track it was big.

Huges: Thinking before you even got into Stax but certainly then when you were here as a song writer, were there any particular influences you had like songwriters, music you like, or even poets that you like? What were your influences as you were coming up and developing your style? You know that's weird. I use to love the way Motown writers wrote and how Holland does and Tom Bella and Linda Creed. All of my sons and a chorus formed cause your chorus formed the whole

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idea that it is about and you are supposed to sum that up in your chorus. I got that style from them, but I studied Motown writers better in Philadelphia International better than anybody else. Now I grew to love Homer Banks writing

style and it was very deep and it was Earthly. So, lot of people wrote about fluffy and I'm going to take you here and there, but Homer didn't do that he wrote stuff you can relate to. I still write that way and I write things that are realistic stuff people deal with every day but I still promise that I can take them here but I can't take them around the corner, but those were my early influences and the poetry I don't know where it came from but it just came. Then, it took me later on to realize that what I had was a gift and I wasn't doing it enough but from a writer's standpoint it had to be Hollandos and Holland

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Huges: Even beyond songwriting what type of music did you like listening to, it sounds like Motown and Philadelphia, but what was your favorite even before you got here and when you did get here?

I always liked R&B music and I liked contemporary gospel although back then I was excited over ****Rans Allen**** because he was doing the kind of Gospel that I liked to do and I like to do Gospel too, but I'm a RnB songwriter and I can write Blues and do Gospel. We use to have a little station in Nashville, but I always liked RnB music, I always have Gospel music was not my motivation, it is now; I love Gospel music now more so than I did then. I used to love going to Church but my mom

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particularly couldn't understand why I listened to the devil's music and love going to church. I still have that problem now because in my church I'm a Trustee, Deacon, and I teach outdoor Sunday School and I write the devils music, and that's weird cause I don't even try to defend myself and I'll run into somebody that's crazy and I say I worked at a gun manufactory plant and the line comes down and I put the trigger mechanism in. When someone goes out and buy a gun and go kill someone, so I'm not guilty of murder. So, I can still love God and do what I do because we try to put him in a box and I know that's not what you asked me.

Huges: So the first time you saw your name

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on a record, what was the first record with your name on it and what was your family's reaction to that?

Thigpen: My mom was always proud of me and the first record with me on it was "It's Catching" and Mable John, David and I did this one thing that Your Good Thing (Is About to Come To End) and at first this wasn't a big thing so I thought I was wasting my time. So, my mom will still support me, and after that I made a very little amount of money.

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You have to have a love for this music. If you are strictly doing it for the money? You will not last long you have to have a passion. At 69 I felt like I was 19 because I had a passion for music even when I was young, because I do it more for the art more than I do it for the money. I do this because the more I do the art the quicker the money comes, and I like to think I'm pretty good at doing what I

do because I been doing it long enough to be good at what I do. Its Catching was the most professional thing I've done with **Denin** ,I call her **Denin** not Ms. Parker. And that's pretty much everything and like I say I was big stuff and for a kid to be in tenth grade in high school and having nobody in my town my county that have done that was a pretty big thing. Do you know what's strange?

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I never seen myself and I still don't and that's why this whole thing we are doing today is strange to me because anything that God has allowed me to be done, is of any reason think worthy enough. I say that is just what I do and a lot of folks at my church don't even know that I do this and they ask me why don't I talk about it. So, I say what if you worked at McDonalds and you flipped burgers all day would you go home bragging about what you had did, and I say that's just what I do. So I didn't think I was important but I wanted to make myself feel good inside to know what I have done which was being heard by people even though it wasn't a hit, but I did hear it.

Huges: Did you have any when you was with Mable John or was it just write a song for Eddie Parrel and Deny and her then husband Randle.

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So, talk about writing with the artist. Did you work with the artists closely or was it just literally write a song?

Thigpen: That's what's really fun, I really never sung but somebody ask me recently and a guy I'm working with asked me how Christina and I was said I don't know her cause I never met her, but she did a sample from the Barcays spell mound and whatever u want but I never met Christina and the only artist I ever met was Shirley Brown. I was working a job and it was a full-time job and I missed work in the Gym. I stayed in there to coach, how to talk the **wrap** because they couldn't talk with the wrong attitude and someone will might off hung up on you which is another story.

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I wasn't around when they recorded the songs because I went back to Mississippi. I hadn't really moved a bit that time so I was never around. Shirely Brown is the only artist, and I was even here, I was in Memphis then when the Barcalys recorded Holy. I just never was around.

Huges: You mentioned that you had a full-time job, what was your full-time gig that you would do when you weren't here writing songs.

Thigpen: I worked at a truck line, loading and unloading trucks to be sent up and down the road, and for 4 years I got maybe 4 hours of sleep a day and go to work in the evening at 6 and get off at 2 o'clock in the morning. Then come home and get a few hours of sleep. Then get up and James and Eddy will pick me up and we'll go to 4 Way Grill, do the Mississippi walk, and do the coffee thing. Then I'll get dropped back off at home get a couple hours of sleep then go back to work. I did that for 4 years but just about everybody in this area

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At the time had a job and did this on the side. There were some who didn't. Homer didn't, of course David Ivy didn't but most of us needed to do something to make a living because you wasn't getting some on a big artist where you could make some money. That was all I did out of my 69 years I only punched the clock 17 years, so music has been pretty good to me. Then my real blessing was when people started sampling and I'm praying that someone sample something now, because when Snoop sampled he did a compilation with ****Jewaya**** but they never did an album. They did Woman to Woman on a murder case and it went triple platinum. That was a blessing and it was nice money. So, I've been able to live off of my old stuff for all these years.

Kollath: This is kind of a specific question but it's so interesting

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you know particularly for someone like you who's getting you know doing songwriting here not clearly on a he's important level yet but how did you learn the business of songwriting, did people say this is how it wrongs and you're going to get it. How did you learn about the economics of songwriting?

I learned a lot of this in my latter years because at the time we got a check every two week but I didn't consume myself. So, I became more knowledgeable in my latter years or when we realized we wanted to do our own things. Some people read books on these things now but we didn't have books to read so

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You learned the hard way but people don't even read books now to know I'm dealing with a Blue's artist, trying to explain to her about the publishing thing, and you still have artist today who don't understand the business side of the business. Then, you will end up with artist who will be broke because they don't take the time to learn the business side of the business, and everybody with that right always don't have their own publishing company though they are going to end up having to split with somebody although you should retain partnership, because you shouldn't give it all up to anybody but to answer your question, I learned mine just by talking to people because in the latter years

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when everyone started doing their own thing we started a production company. We got our artist and put them on a major label. So, then you were forced to learn. Then you mentioned Rosenberg and we all knew about him because he had more music. Typically, a lawyer doesn't know anything about the music business, so you had to have somebody that has some music knowledge. So, I got my knowledge from people who knew things about music and had done it, and that's how I learned what I know and now I do know.

Huges: Talk about the environment here at Stax when you were here in both eras in the 60's

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but also the 70's too. Can you talk a little bit about just coming into, being in the office and what was it like here.

Thigpen: It was really fun, it was kind of like a family even though we competed. No one in my perspective was jealous or mad at anyone. When we got ready to submit songs to Shirley Brown album after the single had done what it had did and he didn't even submit anything because he said what you all gave birth to and this is Homer talk. He said we aren't going to submit anything and they were hot writers at the time and they definitely had some songs but because of us having single which was a hit, Homer and his team didn't even submit anything because they want to see us get called up. We didn't get anything on the air because well we have politics and everything and it's kind of politically persistent

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Here but it wasn't any people hating anybody and all that kind of stuff. Steve Crawford, the guitar player for the MG's set me down where I came in now that's the old entrance center. It used to be a couch on both sides but he sent me down once and gave me some pointers because he just saw me around. We never did anything together but he saw me around and it was people who would try to tell you stuff and enlighten you to what was what but they still wanted to get a hit record. It was really a nice family atmosphere, we had fun, we really did for the little time I was here.

Huges: Do you remember the pointers that Steve Crawford gave you?

Thigpen: Yes. I can't call names. Let me put it this way. He told me what to do to stop a lot of people wasting my time when I was

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coming around trying to get hooked up with certain people. He saw something in me that I didn't see in myself apparently from talking to people like that but he just told me some things to do to avoid wasting my time dealing with certain people because certain people weren't going to do what they said they was gone do. So he enlighten me with that. That's basically it. I can't tell you the people that he taught.

Huges: So at some point in time you've been working with James Banes. When did Eddie marry and how did he come into the picture and how did you get hooked up with him?

Thigpen: I think James' contract had expired. Eddie was an engineer in the demo studio. At that time studio A, B, and C were the demo studio where we went to put our stuff together before we presented it to a producer. Well I wasn't under contract at all so in order for us to get in, Eddie

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being an employee, he could sign us in cause we had the guard house out there. I expected to see that the day I came but I was gone tell them I have an appointment with you but Eddie could go out there. If we walked to the guard house and our names on the boat, we could get in. So, Eddie would let James and myself come into the studio and we could bring musicians in and put our demos down. That's how we got hooked up with Eddie. James and I were together before Eddie came into the picture but that's how we got started and that's it.

Huges: Talk a little bit about the relationship you had with James and Eddie and sort of who did what on the song writing team and what everybody contributed.
Thigpen: James was a person who'd stand off on ideas. He was a person who had more knowledge and writing than I did so if I brought an idea to the table and I brought a lie,

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if it was some he thought had some meat to it than we would work on it and he would be the one to say when it would be finished cause we had that kind of respect for him. We all contributed pretty much. James and I, we were together more than Eddie was so we did more but we all contributed.

Huges: In thinking a bit about some of the kind of major tracks that you became associated with and that you help create in the 70's, just thought we might talk about a few of them, and we'll get to the big three but thinking about some of the others, one song that I know, well actually Jeff do you want to talk because you were listening to it this morning.

Jeff Kolath: Yeah, one of the songs that they have cut it on is it a'nt easy by the Barcades. Sorry, I was gonna say Just a'nt easy but that's a

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different artist that did that song. It a'nt easy by the Barcades.

Thigpen: I was telling Josh a minute ago, I don't know if I was talking to you but it a'nt easy was another one. Originally it was written for the staple singers but at the time muscle shows had this real tight rhythm section so a lot of Stax artists would go to muscle shows Alabama to record so we were going down. We weren't apart of the package to go that was supposed to be there but we got a chance to talk to Al and we ad it a'nt easy and I'm trying to think of the other song. I can't think of it but like I said it was originally for them, you're still my brother, that's weird, anyway politics again and we didn't get through that so Alan Jones who was the manager/ producer for the Barcades, we referred to him

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and he liked the songs so he recorded them on the Barcades, that's how they came by but they were really ready for the staple singers cause we never got anything on the staple singers through that whole little thing but we did try.

Huges: So you were down at muscle shows so what was it like being at muscle sows verses being at Stax, did you notice any differences?

Thigpen: Well, I don't know because we didn't get to the studio. We got to the hotel room in Homer and Hampton. They had a hotel room so we didn't sleep over, we just hung out with them and did the little meeting. Since we didn't have any *songs* we reconsidered, we weren't going to the street, I know where the studio is but I don't know what it was like. I just know they had a tight rhythm section you know that's all I know about there, we didn't make that.

Huges: Thinking about the songs that you wrote for the staple singers, when you were writing for them

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Or when you were writing songs that you wanted to cut on a particular artist, how did that work, would you try to kind of get the sound, was there lyrical things you'd go for, like if you were trying to write, whether or not they ended up cutting it, when you were writing for a specific artist did that change how you approached it or was it, how did that work?

Thigpen: It did sometime, like it a'nt easy and you're still my brother. They would, from a lyrical standpoint, the structure and all they was kind of put together the way the staple singers were doing it at that time. Some artists we wrote for, we didn't style it to fit them. A good song, good idea came up and we just wrote the idea because we had that *theory* and I still believed a good idea will find the right artist. If it's a good idea eventually it will. I have some ideas that I'm recording now that are ten years old. I had to go back and change some light word

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maybe you know but if it's a good idea it'll find its home but like the staple, we structured that. Holy Ghost for the Barcades, we didn't structure that for the Barcades. *Women to Women* they the ones that structured Shirley Brown cause we didn't know who was gone do the song, it was just a good idea and we just wrote it, that's all and I don't do that now; I don't structure stuff but if I see an artist perform and I try to do that when I'm working with an artist, it doesn't help me with an idea it's just certain words I may use, I'm not using a phrase because I see how they phrase stuff on the stage and I try to picture that in my mind when I write. I try to see an artist performing the song you know I did that then, I still do that now because back then we didn't have videos with naked girls and all that stuff to sell a song; you're idea had to sell the songs because all you had was the people's ears, you didn't have their eyes and their ears but we didn't do a lot of kind of structured stuff to fit people, we just write from a good idea

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and we thought it was a good idea, we wrote the idea; that's what we did.

Huges: So let's talk about the three songs that you're probably most well-known for. We've talked about it so let's start with woman to woman and what was the genesis of that idea, talk about the process and kind of carry it all the way through up to the recording.

Thigpen: Woman to woman came about, I overheard my ex-wife talking about two women arguing over this man and if two men want to get serious they always say hey look man to man blah blah blah so I thought woman to woman hey let's hash this out blah blah blah, that was my thing. Well now it wasn't my idea for the ramp, the monologue, that was James' idea

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And that's how it all came about, the idea itself came about, like I said with James' ideas I didn't like. I know that's crazy, I didn't like the music, the melody and all that I didn't like that at the time but James used to sign off on hey man that's cool, then it was cool so he said it was cool and I went with that. Well until this day when we did the demo, we did the demo and the demo is not that much different. I mean the record is not that much different from the demo. The mistake we made when we did the demo, we didn't put a phone *ring* on it because we didn't have all that kind of stuff then and it bothers me today when I hear it. I don't even like to hear it because we don't have a phone ringer on the top and the conversation, the whole monologue is about a woman talking to w=a woman on the phone, that bothers me now.

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And everybody who's covered the song has not put a phone ringer on it and that's crazy with all the technology back then, we didn't have a phone in the studio, see I don't think we could do that and I hate we didn't but they came about and James thought the monologue would be cool but back then the only somebody doing a monologue was Allan Caves and a lady named Anail Sparks, it was presented to her manager at the time, her producer not manager, Brandon Stewart. Brandon Stewart loved the idea. She thought it sounded like something Isaac should do. We didn't fight with that because we knew It was a good idea. Shirley Brown wasn't even in the picture, she wasn't even in *line* at all cause she wasn't here. Albert King brought her to the company but that's how it got started you know the idea itself you know just two women. You see there are women who take care of men,

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they always have and I was at a, after the record came out, I was at a dinner and this woman was talking and she didn't like the record and the record was on fire. That didn't bother me cause I don't think she knew I had anything to do with it, I was just sitting there listening but she was talking about how disgusting it was for two women to be talking about taking care of men, one buying their clothes so a guy that knew I had something to do with it, we went out the room and he said, don't let that bother you. I said I'm not thinking about that. He said cause she taking care of the man she's with right now but she was arguing, talking, discussing this song but it was a controversial thing at the time and nobody would talk about that stuff on record about a woman taking care of her man so we just took a *bowl thing*. We thought it'll be cool. We didn't know if it was gonna get cut but we were in Detroit recording at Don Davis studio because we had *problems* in studio A at the time. I'm trying to think of the man who Jim

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hired to be over the studio. So, he was letting people go out of town so we went to Detroit at Don Davis studio, by the way Don Davis used to produce all of the *behind the table stuff* but you know it and we got a call from Rosie, I don't know if you know Rosie but that's my ex-wife, we used to work at the company. I think Al Jackson had asked her if there was anything that I had been talking about lately that I was excited about. She mentioned woman to woman to him so they went to Denver studios. They cut that while we were out of town but when we got back in town, like I said earlier I coached her on how to talk the raps cause she wouldn't be to whatever you know and turn somebody off but I think that's how that old thing came together.

Huges: So, the record obviously was the last number one record that Stax ever put out so

Thigpen: That's what I heard.

Huges: when it started to sort of catch fire and

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it's on the radio and singles are being sold out you know what was it like knowing you were part of a hit record?

Thigpen: Well, before that I, well that was pretty good but before that we had done don't take my kindness for weakness on the soul children and that was a regional hit so I was pretty okay but you know what I never was at a point where I walked around with my chest out. I definitely don't do it now, I didn't do it then. It was just that being an artist, being a writer, creative person just to see your work being accepted by a large number of people. That's a real good feeling, it really is and so that's what was rewarded to me that a zillion folks liked what you've done you know so that kind of validate cause even up to woman to woman I didn't think, and even after woman to woman, I didn't really think I had what people thought I had. I didn't realize until later years that I really had a gift and that I really could write. I don't know what I thought it was, a *duck* I guess because

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I didn't think of myself. Homer really thought I was a good rider and I respected Homer, I really did cause Homer was a heck of a writer. To me he might've been the baddest writer to come through this company, to me. There were other people who had hits, don't get me wrong but Homer had substance with all of his ideas but it was just a good feeling to know people excepted this.

Huges: And then just a few years after Shirley Brown's hit and Stax closed, Robert Mandrell had a big hit around the countries charts.

Thigpen: And that's another thing, we went to Nashville, we had some country songs we bought. We went to, I didn't get a chance to meet her but I met her sister and we tried to plug some songs there but again we didn't make that *lucrative* but in this business, it's a weird business but you get, then you go more rejections and now I don't have to do that now because of what I've done,

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what God has allowed me to do. At least people was listening too if *I was plugging songs* but I don't plug songs now because I have my own company, my own artists but back then somebody telling you no, it didn't crush you because that's just the way it was you know. Everything you did wasn't gonna get recorded you know, especially at Stax where you had a zillion people. You had people like Mac Rice, *Ben Respectious* and that was a big record you know and then you had David and Isaac but at that point I think Isaac had gotten into the artist things so Homer and Carl, they were like *Tablo Tee* for a while and so we was the lower team trying to come up and I had to come and stay open for about three or four more years. We would've been okay because Jim always believed, I'm talking about Jim Stewart, if you ever had a hit record, there was another one in you so only God knows what would've happened had it stayed open until

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1978. We probably would've been really on fire then but it didn't but like I said we didn't give up. Now James stopped a few years back. I don't know why and that was tuff for me because I had always relied on James to like put the stamp of approval to what we were working on. Well, I couldn't stop because the ideas kept coming and so I had to realize, I had to be the one to make the calls, do everything and I talked to him yesterday, still tried to get him to come today but he really doesn't do stuff like this, that's really what it is with him but what did you ask me, I just forgot what you asked me.

Huges: Well, I think you know one of the things you talked about going to Nashville to the country side. Talk a little bit about that.

Thigpen: Well, Ed Pollick, I don't know if that's a name you remember, used to be the controller here so he was handling our little publishing company after

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Stax had closed so he set up an appointment for us to go up there because after her having the number four record and Henderson Thigpen and *Jane Maxevery*

we just know you wanna see us in here *some we got, no we don't got the time.* We had to find our people, just because they do your song doesn't mean they want some stuff from you. They were real gracious to us, she wasn't in like I said I met her sister and I think her dad was working with her and I can write country stuff because R&B and country, to me I used to call them first cousins because country still tells good stories. R&B used to tell good stories. Every now and then an R&B song would come along that tells a good story but now unfortunately because of video you get three or four half naked women in a video and *cool and groove* and everybody happy but

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then in the country they do videos too but they still tell good stories and that's where I come from and I could still do that now and matter of fact I have, I don't have her signed but it's a lady and she's black which is odd to me for black people to do country. You remember O.B. *Matenda*? I don't know why I'm asking you this. This lady has a country song but I try to not get outside of what I do well. I need to do that, that just made me think I need to give her a call but nothing came from that Nashville trip, nothing came from there but again we were not crushed because being a writer, you're gonna write whether you get paid or not. If you're really a real writer you're just gonna write, you're gonna write and put it into a book.

Huges: Did you when you went to give the songs to Barbara Mandrell or at least Barbara Mandrell's sister, were these songs you had already written or were these songs they were like okay we came to Nashville and pitch this to Mandrell so you all wrote them there, I'm just curious, were this things you had in the vault that you were like these are good country songs?

Thigpen: Stuff we had to borrow because see we had a song, I'm looking crazy because stuff is coming back as we talk but on Shirley Brown's album we had a song called *come along wife*, okay well if you're not married to somebody and you live with them that's *call my life* and we pitched that to Shirley but it didn't make the cut so we still had that song layed around and since Barbara Mandrell did woman to woman we figured it might resinate with her but it didn't but those were songs we had in the vault. We didn't go up there and put them together, we had them when we went up there. I can't remember how many we had but we always had two or three whenever we approached somebody. We never went with just one song. We gave ourselves some options

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by presenting two or three.

Huges: Talk about Holy Ghost a little bit. That was right at the very end of Stax.

Thigpen: That was fun yeah, that really was fun. The motivation for Holy Ghost was I feel sanctified by the Commodores. We told ourselves that we could do something equally as good and that's how Holy Ghost got started but you see we were young, I think I was twenty-six, wasn't into the Bible, didn't know a lot of things. I wouldn't do that now, I have asked the Lord to forgive me but since I know what the Holy Spirit and all that is then because I didn't study, I didn't know but that came about, the lyrics didn't but the track, I think I was here when the track was cut. I wasn't here when the vocals were on there. I can't remember for sure but I think I was here. You probably heard both versions of Holy Ghost.

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It's two versions. The version that ended up getting on the street was not the version that would've gotten out had the company stayed open because Allan had a habit of mimicking other people's stuff and he played it safe. Now we knew and he knew it was a bad track, when I say bad I mean good but the emphasis was on the *one and we do two phones* so he went back and cut it over and had it sounding a little bit like I feel sanctified but luckily when the cover was sold *the masses ended up in LA*, *I can't remember the fantasy I believe.* There was a guy named Phil *Kapiell*, he went back and put all that bottom in it because it wouldn't have been that hard if they hadn't gone back through but the whole idea was we were trying to come up with something equally as good which I think we did as I feel sanctified because

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Until the Barcades did Holy Ghost they were opening acts and cold stars and after that they started headlining because I think that year they had shine number one, Holy Ghost didn't go number one but it wasn't really promoted, it was just put out there because the company was just trying to make some of their money back which they did. I think it went number nine but our whole motivation was to just do something that we thought was equally as good as I feel sanctified by the Commodores. That was our whole motivation for that. It was James' idea for the title, I didn't have anything to do with it; I just took orders. That's all I did from there but I think they ran into problems and I was at a concert at the Orpheum. The Barcades were headlining. Some woman, I don't know who she was, in the front of me had brought her mom and when that song came on the lady jumped up like she was in a Baptist Church. I think

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Just because of the word Holy Ghost she might've thought it was a Gospel song because of the lyrics definitely Gospel but I think it got them in quite a bit of trouble. Doing the song and knowing what I know now I can see how it would've gotten them in trouble but at that time like I said I wasn't in Church, I had gotten out of Church and the evening before then, I was young and I didn't study, I hadn't studied a whole lot you know but that's something I wouldn't do again. I really wouldn't but it was nice at the time.

Huges: Holy Ghost has been, we talked a little bit about sampling and how important that's been particularly for economics and obviously Holy Ghost and Woman to Woman, other songs that you've been involved with but also so many Stax songs and so many Memphis songs have continued to be the source of sampling. Why do you think that is, why do you think

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so many pop and hip-hop producers and R&B producers continue, I don't know if you've had any thoughts about why it's such, not just so many samples but so many hits that are based around Stax tracks.

Thigpen: You know that's true. Even before they started we started getting paid. Holy Ghost got samples I don't know how many times before they started. *Zero and in so to speak. * I don't know why other than the fact that they always sample hit songs and that's a million thing that people can identify with. To give a good example, I was telling this the other day, Bruno Mars. What Bruno Mars is doing to me a'nt nothing but 70's and 80's funk but it's a new generation out here and it's new to us but see I can grab on to twenty-four carrot and the other one, I can't remember the title of it but

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it's something about southern music, southern funk music and R&B music that's different from Detroit, *which you know that* and different from Philadelphia. We didn't have that slick, smooth stuff that they had, our stuff was raw and you could really feel it. It was just something about broadness of it but when you put a sample onto a hit song like a Ceelo Green sample part of Holy Ghost but if you put a familiar thing, let me change the subject. Snoop is on, what's his group name. You know the group, they coming back out. I can't think of the name of the group. It's an old girls group.

Kollath: TLC.

Thigpen: Thank you, thank you, thank you. Since hip-hop is the new thing for hip-hop artists to do

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A sample on somebody well you know Snoop gave a whole new life to Charlie Wilson. Snoop was gonna give a whole new life to TLC. It's just, cause you kept a whole new audience and I mean a huge audience. See when rap first came out, a lot of us didn't realize how powerful it was. I knew it was gonna be around but most of my peers thought it was a fed you know but for them sampling something like that you're gonna capture that audience too. If you got a sample of Snoop on your album you're gonna capital his fan base, they're gonna listen to you because he's on there and because of social media they follow, really follow the artists you know so I think it's just a marketing thing from that standpoint because believe it or not most rappers are smarter than we give them credit for. They really are smart; they know how to market themselves well, something that a lot of us older guys from my generation, see it took me a while to really embrace this digital age because

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see up til about 4 years ago I'm still pressing up a thousand CD's that nobody wants. I got three hundred CD's at home in my studio now on the artists I was dealing with so I don't do that now but *it's my artists* and I don't mess with anybody if you're not performing. I only press up a hundred copies because somebody gone ask you for a CD if you out there doing something because it's totally a digital age but Snoop is on there. Snoop is showing up as an icon. I mean whatever you think, everybody knows Snoop Dog. Well I had Joel Santana, he sampled apiece of woman to woman which was crazy. People be familiar with the groove or the line in the song or whatever it is, people be familiar with that for one thing and that'll help pull that audience in. I think that's why a lot of them do it, I really do; but I'm thankful they do it like I said earlier I need somebody to sample some of mine, that would be nice cause you do make a ton of money

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you really do, you really do.

Hughes: *And sort of the last on that, it's pretty popular that you worked on that. That's what love will make you do. *

Thigpen: I don't know how that came about.

Huges: Well it's little Milton.

Thigpen: I don't know how that came about, I mean I really don't. That was probably a James thing more so than it was my thing cause we all brought stuff to the table and like I said James would always decide on, he just put stuff together better than we could, he decided on it but if you had an idea that had a nucleus, had some to it you know he would pull something out of it so that was

really his thing. I don't know the history behind that. If he was here he could probably tell you that.

Huges: You kind of hinted that a little bit but one of the things I wanted to ask you about is sort of growing up in real Mississippi and coming from an agriculture background as you did and worked on the farm for a number of years, what was

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it like making that transition or coming to Memphis and coming from the world setting that you were accustomed to coming to Memphis? Talk a little bit about that.

Thigpen: It's funny now but that was huge because coming to Memphis was a big thing although *it just what, well it was fun to me because we have four lanes now* but that was really big. Being a country dude and I was quiet. At the time I didn't talk as much as I talk now. I mean you had to pride stuff out of me. My wife would tell you otherwise but people who know me know that I used to be quiet. All I dealt with was writing and reading. I used to read a lot but coming here was a huge, it was a country shock for me because when I was at home, the little town Holy Springs which we lived about eight miles from and you always claim the closest town. Well where are you from? I'm from Holy Springs although I'm not from Holy Springs, I'm from about ten to twelve miles in the country somewhere. I didn't even go to that town. We had to ride on the back of trucks to get to town, we didn't have cars. We had our farm truck plus our

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Sunday car too so I never did go. I stayed at home all the time. So, coming up here I stayed with my uncle. I came up here, did what I had to do, ride the bus back to Mississippi but when I moved up here it was a little too fast for a country boy, it was top fast not slow but it was too fast for me but I knew why I was here. I was here to do one thing and that was to get it in when they offered me a contract but I still did nothing but write. I didn't hangout a lot. I would go to the club to see somebody perform. The Stax artists that we liked I'd go to the club to see them but they weren't all going wild because I was country. My main reason for coming here was to be closer so I could be here every day to do music because I didn't like Memphis, still don't like Memphis. I don't like Holly Springs either but I came here

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So, I could come here every day because I couldn't ride the bus back and forth every day and at that time I'm out of school and I did two and a half years of

college and I dropped out and I came in and worked the job the four years and then music too but it was quite a shock. I almost went to California after Stax but I'm glad I didn't because that would've been too fast for me because I'm really a county person. I like living in the country; I like the room. I don't like how it was bent all up on me like that. That's what I don't like about city living. In my house I could walk out the door nude and nobody would ever see me because I live up in the woods and I like that kind of lifestyle?

Huges: Where did you go to school for those two and a half years?

Thigpen: I went to high school Olakinston

. Another school called W.T. Stems, that's where I did my high school stuff and I do have a little musical background because I could sing. I still can sing, I just don't like the way I sound but I went to college off of a choir scholarship. I had four scholarships when I got out and I went to

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a college out there called Mississippi Industrial College. It's closed now. It's right across the street from Rust College and I went there for two and a half years and the job I had, I was making so much money back in the seventies, it just didn't make any sense for me to get a college degree when I was making money because that's what the whole thing is supposed to be about making money. Other than singing in the choir I had a good high school choral teacher in college too. Then it didn't hurt the fact that I had a few records out you know so I got special *in teaching the night. * What's the man's name, Chuck Holmes. It had something to do with ring my bell on *Neda Warren*, I couldn't think of her name, yeah. So he and I kind of, because of my little writing, I hadn't had a hit record then but I had had some stuff out so we formed a little thing and he was over, Rust College was known for the

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Occapella choir and he was a flamboyant dresser, you wouldn't remember but people that know him, if he walked in here you would look at him twice because you knew he did something other then work at the plant but my background in music is not that much but just like I said I did two and a half years of college and majored in Business Administration, probably why I got a little business and my stepfather was a businessman. He was always self-employed. He worked for himself. That's why it was hard for me to work for anybody else. I could take orders but I just figured I had to much sense to be helping someone else fulfill their dream you know, that's why I'm doing what I'm doing now.

Huges: When you moved to Memphis where did you live, when you first came?

Thigpen: When I first came, this is crazy, I saw the house just there when I came in. Oak Greenwood, I stayed in a *Roman* house. I was telling my son about that yesterday because he had

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a job and he has to move to Lebanon, Tennessee and it was a room where you had to knock on the bathroom door before and everybody had access to the kitchen. I stayed there, I came in and it wasn't that long and I got an apartment on Pilkington which runs into Lamar. I stayed there until I got a house off of Ansel road over here back in what used to be the army *depot* and after that I went back to Mississippi, I went back home. That's where I stayed, yeah. Never did make Germantown, Homer made Germantown. I didn't make that, I was on my way because that's where everyone was trying to go. I'm just being honest.

Huges: Thinking about, you were obviously here or you were working when the company closed and you kind of referred to it a couple of times you know,

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what was your sort of experience of that happening you know from your perspective, what did it mean when, beyond the obvious, when Stax closed?

Thigpen: Well you know what, there wasn't gonna be a place where we could get together no more. We didn't have a place. It wasn't just me and my team, it was everybody but we knew it was gone close about a year before you know you would hear. Now, there were some people who were in denial you know we kept coming because it was over but we knew it was on its way out, we knew that. *The signs were there and if you wanted to see them you could* and we did but we hung around. Now what we didn't do was when they tried to resurrect it, we had sense them not to come back you know we didn't do that but we knew it was on its way out. That was kind of painful because it had been good for a lot of people because it was the only place you came through and you didn't have a resume to show you know they would let you,

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I'm from Mississippi, didn't know anything. They let me learn on the job so to speak because I didn't even know how to structure a song. I just had an idea and some words that rhyme but at Stax I learned that you had to put some substance in between those rhymes. See kids today they want to hurry up and get to the rhyme but I make sure I give you something in between the rhyme because I was taught here. See you couldn't play here because you had some real writers here; David and Homer and you couldn't play, you had to write. The groove wasn't just gonna get you buy, you had to be saying something unless you were *booted to

the MG's* and the groove could get to you but that was kind of painful because new people weren't gonna have a place to come and I think that's missing in the music business now that people don't have a place where they can just come and hangout and develop their craft. In order for you to be good you have to hang around somebody

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because we all study somebody. Nobody just popped out of you mama womb and the you showed up here nineteen years later and you on fire. You studied somebody, you had to be somewhere around somebody who didn't, whether you studied them on TV or radio you had to mimic somebody but here, you could come in here and actually put your stuff together. I don't know any other place that has that so that was the thing that was kind of paid for but anything was to me when it closed was that people weren't going to *eat.* I knew we were gonna be alright because we were just gonna keep going forward, I knew I was because I was gonna keep trying because this is all I know how to do. I mean I'm not a brain surgeon, can't fly a plane, so what I know how to do is music but like I said I knew a year early, me and my team did and I think some more people did, I know some more people, they knew

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it was gone close but they were hoping for a miracle that didn't happen. I'm so thankful for this, I really am because it can be an inspiration to up and coming kids who want to get in the business you know because what people don't know in this country is how big Stax music is overseas. They really don't realize it. See sometimes when you got stuff at home and you see it every day you don't realize the impact it makes on the world but I get people, I've done interviews. People calling me from England and stuff and I'm amazed they know more about what I've done. I'm sitting here trying to think up and remember stuff, they can give me my whole little records, I can't even remember the title of. They weren't hits but *court.* They were guys who know that because they researched it and I'm told because I've never been there, there was a store over there, record shop I think and Stax stuff was still upfront like it was curry, Id don't know if that's true but

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what was done here it did impact the world, it really did although we didn't look at it, we didn't know all that without it but it was some pretty cool stuff up there and what's being done with the kids *in that cabin* that's pretty cool because there's room for all genres of music. Do I like all of them? No. There's some rap I don't like. I don't just like it because it's a black thang, it a'nt just a black thang

you know. It really isn't but that's how we think but that's not how it started. There are some R&B I don't like, there's quite a bit of heavy metal I don't like but I like all types of music. I love country music for the story but I like good, if it's good I like Adel, I really do. She can sing her but off for one. I'm not confined and if you go into the music business you can't be confined, you shouldn't be confined to just one style of music, you really shouldn't but I feed off of everything, I really do, truly I do.

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Huges: We obviously want to talk about what you're doing now but before that even after Stax closed you know did you, you know you took that trip to Nashville hoping to get some songs on with Mandrell. Did you work at all with Malaco or with any of the labels that were kind of around, you were working with a lot of the former Stax *phoones. * Did you do much with those clients?

Thigpen: See then we formed our own publishing company, *Sweater Music* and Malaco always wanted half of your publishing. Well I had a problem with that because see well nobody's going to record your song if they don't think it has the potential of doing something but they want half of your publishing of the popping and at that point I just wouldn't and I don't care if the artist was an unknown artist, they wanted a part of your publishing and I never tried to deal with Malaco, never did and still got a problem with someone wanting a publishing now but if you got a named

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artist, I have no problem but if my name is bigger than your artist and you're asking me for publishing than your feelings gone get hurt and I'm serious but you see because I had a lady, definitely can't call her name because she still work. *Mede de I A I was out there to see Barbie* and we introduced each other and I told her what I had done and she asks me well she said, present some stuff because she had to have publishing. I sat for a while, I said I'm bigger than your artist, why would I give you some publishing just because you asked. I said I tell you what how we're going to solve this I said give me part of your *royalties off of your artist sales when she sells product. She looked at me like I was crazy, of course nothing happened there but I didn't work with anybody, we're from the only production company, we had a guy named Witness Singleton, Rochester, New York,

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Sound just like *the older version* and we fell in love with it and got our hearts broken. Nothing had ever happened, that's one of the guys we went to Detroit to

cut. Never got anything released on him but we did a couple of things and we did stay connected with *Alab* Jones and he did a couple thing on Shirley Brown. I think she was on twenty central I believe at that point if I'm right and we did stuff like that. It made no real money than after James decided he didn't want to do it anymore I started my own company but nahh I didn't interact with anybody because like I said they always wanted publishing and then if your artist sold two or three hundred copies or even a hundred thousand maybe I could see myself split publishing. So most of the people that came to us they were trying to develop an artist and they wanted publishing so I started doing my own thing. They pretty much forced me to do my own thing because I can do what you're doing and in most small

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Companies they make a little money. They not gonna pay you because they need that to keep operating so I started my own thing but no I didn't interact, I just kept on doing what I'm doing and I'm still hanging on.

Huges: In closing why don't you talk about what you're doing now and music that you're trying to put out.

Thigpen: In 1998 I started, well my wife Evelyn and my partner Heaven Haywood who lives here, we started OTM music group and under that umbrella we have Ham records which is my Gospel label and Red Banks which is my Blues/Southern Soul label and OTM which is my R&B/Hip-pop label and currently I have a traditional *being* out on a man named

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Phineas Carter from Louisville, Mississippi and I have a Blues thing, I know a lady named Shewolf Jones from the Holly Springs area. She really lives in Past camp and currently I'm excited about a young guy named Bird Williams who lives here in Memphis. When you get time google him and put him up on Facebook. This kid is special, he really is so I'm excited about that then I'm working on a Gospel song also with my Pastor, Meverin Buver out of Bolivar, Tennessee and he's another gifted man then, who else am I working with. I'm gonna do a Gospel single on myself this year which is surprising to me because I never thought I'd be singing but I sing with the mirror, I close at Church so I'm gone be a Gospel singer. I got a couple copies I'll give you before I leave but that's what I'm doing now and I'm kind of excited about that. I got a couple of songs being considered for Mullers;

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need that to happen and I plug in songs for Mullers and I have some unplugged songs made for TV mullers you know and all that kind of stuff. I got a couple of things that are pending but nothing has happened but this been a good year, a really good year.

Huges: So you've been in the music business for over fifty years.

Thigpen: That's weird.

Huges: You say that's weird, just kind of put that into perspective for us, for you. What's that been like to see such a massive change in business and sort of your role in it.

Huges: The whole changing of the music business has been a shock. I'm okay now but I really was messed up a few years back when I realized people didn't want to buy CD's anymore cause that's when I knew streaming and downloading you know I'm not computer literate, I check my email

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and forward something, that's what I do, that's all I do but I had to transfer my studio to an analog studio because I was *a-dasked* to all digital which I did a couple years ago. I had to do that, I didn't have a choice but I'm adapted to it now and what I do like about it, you can reach the whole world just like that, that's the good part. So now since I've gotten smarter, since I realized it wasn't gonna stay the way it used to be just for Thigpen, it was gonna go away. It was already gone. I promote online and in the streets. I do it all the time. I have a promotion firm now that was my promotion although I used to do it, I didn't have time to do both. I talk a lot but there are days you have to allocate just to stop talking and hiring somebody to do that so I have a promotion firm that does that but it's not a bad thing. It saves me a lot of money because it used to cost some serious money to put out my Blues album and I had some favorites cause

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I do a lot of tradeoffs. I let people use my little studio blah blah blah but I put a whole album together on this Blues lady for \$1900 dollars. I couldn't do that without my studio. I couldn't even do that without borrowing or trading off with people and it wasn't a hard thing to do but I kind of like where it is now, I kind of like where it is. It's a good thing; it's just like anything else, it changes and you either adapt or you get left behind and I was behind. Like I told you I have three hundred CD'S now that I'm going to probably give away that I can't sell because nobody wanted it and the artist I had at the time wasn't performing. He wanted to perform and go straight to 106 and Park at the time and that's not the way it's done. You're going to have to get a *trenches to work* but the change is good, it's

really good but you know the only kind of well selling music that I don't think will come back is cassetts but quiter the kept. Sony started doing vinyl again.

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Radiographics out here in Bartlet, they do universal machines and they run eight machines twenty-four hours a day so you need to produce it in every genre that people want it in even though stream and download are the two top things but I saw somewhere where Sony was doing vinyl again so some people you know, I'm gonna do some vinyl depending on the artist but I wouldn't waste my time and money doing I on arod this year you know it depends on the artist but like I said it depends on the artists now but it was a shock to me because you talking to somebody who came from, and I still got some forty- five who came all the way to nobody to people just steaming your music and just listen to it and not even download. That was crazy but being in it so long, you know what happened to me when I realized I was sixty years old and I've been doing all this stuff and I really haven't made the money

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that I want to make. I probably never will. If I had three or four million I still wouldn't have all the money but you know what I've done, I have enjoyed doing what I love to do because most people, I ask people well hey man what do you do, well I do so and so. I say do you enjoy your job; if they pause for a second I know they don't enjoy it and that's hat kills a lot of people, when you're doing something just to make money. You gonna end up being stresses out. I love what I do. Do I worship it? No, but I love what I do. I don't have any rules. The business side of the music business is what I had to embrace because I don't like dealing with the business side of it. Although now I realize a few years back if it was gonna work for me I had to take care of the business side which I know how to do but I love the creative side. I love being in the studio, putting stuff together but you said fifty, I heard you say that.

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That's crazy that I've been doing this that long you know but I said earlier, my passion for this now is probably stronger than when I first was signed to East Memphis music. First of all I know what I'm doing now so I'm not nervous so when I get an artist I know what I can do. Any artist that I have when that contract is over they choose to go somewhere else you're gonna be further along than you were before you got with Thigpen because, I'm so sorry. I know what I did but I'm thankful to still be here. I was telling a young lady a little while ago I'm sixty-nine and I don't have any major health problems. God has been good to me and I still get a chance to do what I like to do and love to do every day of the

week. Sunday is the only day I take off. I do Church on Sunday. I don't do music on Sunday, I do Church. I'm going somewhere to sing with the male chorus on Sunday

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But we going to Selma, Tennessee this Sunday but other than that I do this six days a week and I think I'm pretty good, pretty blessed. I know I am, a'nt no think in it. Do you enjoy what you do? I'm asking do you enjoy what you do.

Huges and Kollath: Yes.

Thigpen: That's a blessing. What about yawl? It is? It's important for your physical health. People tell me well I'm not stressed. Well if you hollar that's stress. You gonna stress yourself just hollaring but I'm calm all day even when something business wise comes to me that's stupid, rea stupid and you gonna get some stupid stuff. My Blue's artist she upset me one day and stormed out of the studio and she didn't know. She's never done this before, this is her first time. I knew she'd find out so she had apologized, apologized to me last month. I told her I said this business

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I'm not upset with you. You don't have to apologize, I knew you'd find out how this really works later on but I don't let people rattle me. There's things I'm not gonna do. I don't let people use me because people would try to because of the little success I've had, they want your input on what they do and they doing it just to see if it's gonna happen but I'm not doing it to see if it's gone happen, this is what I do you know but the whole fifty-year thing, when you said that I never had thought about it. That's how long I've been doing it. Most of it has been fun though, it really has, most of it has been fun. I can smile when I do think about stuff even the crazy stuff I can smile, I really can.

Huges: Well I think that's a good place to stop. Thank you so much Mr.Thigpen. Thank you for your time.

Thigpen: Thank you, thank you.