Doris Fields (Lady D) & Xavier Oglesby

Where: At Doris Fields' home in Beckley, WV

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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Doris Fields aka Lady D of Beckley led an apprenticeship in **blues and Black gospel** with Xavier Oglesby of Beckley as part of the 2018 West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program, supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Doris Fields aka Lady D
Beckley, WV

Doris A. Fields, also known as Lady D, is a West Virginia native born in Kayford in Kanawha County. She is a graduate of East Bank High School and West Virginia State University with a bachelor's degree in communications. She is also a graduate of Phillip's College in Gulfport, MS with an associate degree in travel and tourism. She is known as West Virginia's First Lady of Soul.

Lady D has been singing since the age of three years old. She is also an actress, songwriter, director, and promoter. Since 2003, she has toured her one-woman show, "The Lady and the Empress," a musical stage play based on the life and music of blues legend, Bessie Smith. Her acting experience also includes a five-year stint with Theater West Virginia's productions of Honey In the Rock, Hatfields and McCoys, and various other shows. On the local scene, Lady D was very active in productions with the Charleston Stage Company, Children's Theater and Kanawha Players.

As a professional vocalist, highlights of Lady D's career include being the opening act for the legendary soul group, the O'Jays at Charleston's 2007 FestivALL. In 2008, her original song, "Go Higher," was chosen as the best Obama Inaugural Song and earned her a trip with her band, MI$$ION, to Washington, D.C. to perform at the 2009 Obama for Change Inaugural Ball. In 2010, Lady D was honored to perform at the live recording of the HistoryMakers: "An Evening With Henry Louis Gates, Jr." at the Cultural Center in Charleston. In August 2014, she was inducted into the "All Black Schools Sports & Academic Hall of Fame" (ABSSA) with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Fields is leading a 2017-2018 folklife apprenticeship with gospel singer Xavier Oglesby.

Xavier Oglesby

Beckley, WV

Xavier Oglesby, a Beckley native, was raised in the black Pentecostal church, learning gospel music from his family. From 1997 to 2003, he hosted "545 Live," a gospel music radio show on Beckley's WJLS in Beckley. From 1997 to 2002 he was an actor and singer at Theatre West Virginia. He recently narrated voice-overs for the National Park Service New River Gorge African American Heritage Auto Tour. He currently works as a corrections officer.

See our feature on Fields' apprenticeship with Oglesby here: https://wvfolklife.org/2018/12/03/2018-master-artist-apprentice-feature-doris-fields-aka-lady-d-xavier-oglesby-blues-black-gospel/

DF: Doris Fields

EH: Emily Hilliard

XO: Xavier Oglesby

00:00

EH: So why don't you introduce yourself, tell me who you are, where you're from, and where you were born?

XO: My name is Xavier Oglesby, I'm 47 years old and I'm from Raleigh County, West Virginia.

EH: And you live in Huntington now?

XO: I did live in Huntington but I've decided to move back to Beckley. I'm a corrections officer currently (thunder sounds) and so it's easier for me to live closer to where I work.

EH: Cool, welcome back.

XO: (laughs)

EH: And why don't you introduce yourself.

DF: My name is Doris Fields.

EH: And where you're from…

DF: Well, I'm originally from Kanawha County, Chesapeake, West Virginia is where I grew up but I've been here in Beckley, West Virginia for about 15 years now.

EH: And since we already sort of did a pretty long interview with you, why don't you talk a little bit about your experience singing, how you started, and what you're into now.

XO: Ah! How did I start singing? Lord have mercy! Well, to be truthful, I started singing in my mother's kitchen. My mom—she was a phenomenal cook and so I have 4 other siblings and my mother, my grandmother and great-grandmother, they had a group that sang a capella together at church. And so at some point, maybe when I was about 4 or 5 years old, ok y'all, you're gonna sing! And so she got all of us together, all the kids together in the kitchen while she was cooking and she, you know, asked us to sing different parts. And I don't understand how we knew what she was talking about, but we did, and we just started singing and I really didn't think much about being an artist or anything like that until I was 9 years old… I sang in the choir, but I always sang background. And my oldest brother—he had a song he led in the choir and it was called "God has Smiled On Me" and anyway, my brother had gotten to where he didn't want to go to church that much, and this particular Sunday, he was supposed to have been there to sing and he wasn't there. And the choir director looked at me and told me to sing and I was really stunned! And "I can't sing that!" And he said, "yes you can." And I was surprised too when I opened my mouth to sing it actually came out, and I've been in love with it ever since.

EH: And so what have you been doing lately? What brought you to the apprenticeship?

XO: Well what I did, Doris and I, Lady D and I worked together at a professional theatre company—at Theatre West Virginia, -- we worked there for a number of years. Doris played my wife in the show and at some point we would sing a cappella together and we always got a standing ovation and people just loved us and we would get people from all over the country to come and see the shows. Anyway, then after that, she went a different direction when we decided we weren't gonna work at the theatre any more, and she said she wanted to be… go into music full-time, and because I'm a more traditional kinda guy—I was raised to, you know, you get a traditional job and go to work, and so I didn't follow her there, but she continued to pull me in to work with her. And we did the Black Nativity in Charleston with West Virginia State College. And it was a success. I think we ran it for… how many days Doris—3 days?

DF: It was over 2 weekends.

XO: Yeah, it was, it was… and it was packed every night and it was just phenomenal. And I went on to do a couple of shows with her and some other people that I met and then I came back and of course I'm still working at the same time. I have always performed and sang at churches and weddings and things like that, but you know, still working my regular job and whatever, and then at some point I decided that I wanted to you know, work some aspect of the arts rather than just doing gospel, and I talked to her about doing the Black Nativity at Christmastime and then I started to produce that, and she of course, I was going to look to her to direct because there's no other director but Doris…

DF: (laughs)

XO: And so that ran for a number of years. This is the first year we had done it in quite a while and then but we ended up with this—the apprenticeship program, and I can honestly tell you I have learned a lot. I would have never put together—I think she was able, Doris was able to quantify for me you know, how that we as a people, especially blacks, we made an art form, we created an art form, just doing something that we just naturally do. And it just opened my eyes to quite a bit—I have learned a lot from this Apprenticeship Program.

EH: So what part do you sing now? Do you sing lead ever since that?

XO: Lead, yes. I just, when you pulled the microphone out, that's why I made that joke, you know, I'm a microphone and a cord—it's just something that goes along with it, you just naturally… you know some people, they sing a little bit, and some people just have a gift to sing, and that's something that I wake up doing every day. And if I couldn't sing something—even where I work… I'm a corrections officer and where I work at the jail, I sing to the inmates, and they're always wanting to hear something. It's not always gospel, sometimes it's country music. I love country music. And I've got this dream that's been in the works for a long time—I've always wanted to sing country music and I love country music and so right now, I'm working with this program that you've given us and after this project, I'm looking forward to more of this. I have been so enlightened and Doris has been a very good instructor.

EH: So what sort of country songs do they ask you to sing? Or do you just pull 'em up?

XO: Let see—Garth Brooks, he and Kenny Chesney, I like Toby Keith, some Kurt Cob—I mean… what's Nicole Kidman's husband?

EH: Oh Keith Urban?

XO: Some Keith Urban—some of his. I think some of his may be a little bit too rock 'n' roll for me. But you know, the traditional… I love Patsy Cline (sings "Crazy")

7:18

You can't beat that!

EH: No wonder they ask you to sing!

XO: (laughs) So I love country music. Garth Brooks is probably my favorite of all time. I mean—oh the dance, his dance album, it was just crazy.

EH: I don't know that.

XO: I could go on forever about Garth Brooks.

EH: What about gospel—what do you get requests for?

XO: Gospel, um… I like more… the traditional gospel. You can't do better than Amazing Grace how sweet the sound. There's just so many of the old standards that we cover in this actual apprentice program. There are so many of the old standards that you, that we cover and because it kinda flows into blues and gospel kinda flows in together. It was, I guess it comes from a feeling, you know if you're having a hard time today… just, mmmm… (sings) You could, it's just something that comes up from the soul. And so I like contemporary gospel, but nothing moves me like a good old hymn. Nothing in the world. (laughs)

EH: So what have you been working on? Repertoire, techniques? What's the basis?

XO: Well what we did was, we decided, after we did this program on last Sunday, then this coming in August, we're working on doing a program where we get different artists in and we do nothing but a cappella. No music. We may have a percussionist there—someone to do drums, but we want to do it in just straight a cappella. And because I think—and that's what I'm really interested in. I just started picking up, you know, the piano, and I'm able to do pretty well with it, but I love vocals, I love voice, so if I can… because that's where I started. You know, my mom's kitchen. We didn't have guitars and all that stuff, but it just sounds beautiful to me. So if I can just stack voices and you know… and I think one of the greatest things for me is it's amazing how you can get people who are gifted to sing and you can sing, start a song that everybody knows, and people just automatically jump in there and start singing and you know, it just sounds beautiful. Like "Swing low, sweet chariot…" (sings)

DF: (sings)

10:47

XO: You see? And it's amazing how people can do that. Not everybody can do that. This is something that we, pretty much as a people, as a whole, you know, not all black people can sing, but you know generally, when you go to a black church on Sunday morning, somebody's gonna start singing something and I—it just feels like, I dunno it feels like heaven to me. (laughs)

EH: Could—I dunno—maybe this is for both of you. Could you talk a little bit about what you see being the gospel tradition in West Virginia? The black gospel tradition?

XO: Hmm! That's a good question!

DF: Well, you mentioned Ethel Caffie Austin earlier and to me she's like the epitome of the black gospel tradition in West Virginia, but I grew up in the Baptist church and there were several groups that made a big impact on me when I was little, and they were like super stars to me. Like the Penn Family, The Gospel Family Affair—there's some others I can't think of their names now. A lot of those people are dead now, they were older people that had family groups that would sing together, and you know, of course you would visit different churches and I was in the youth choir and we would visit different churches all around the state, and there was always a group of families that had a singing group and so to me, I mean I just thought that was very cool. And like Xavier was saying, you hear those, you don't hear those standard hymns anymore that they used to do back then… or the quartet style singing is—what you heard last week is—that's not as big as it used to be. So those kind of gatherings like last week have become fewer and fewer over the years and people who even know how to carry those tunes… we were talking about like the younger people that you saw playing the drums and the instruments and things… they don't even know those old hymns anymore, so they're kinda feeling their way around cause they're used to contemporary gospel and Kirk Franklin and people like that, so it's been unusually hard passing down those traditional hymns to this generation now who are you know, getting inundated by gospel hip-hop and that kinda thing. Not that that's not good, but at the same time, you don't want to forget those traditional hymns, and like he was saying, sometimes for what you're going through, only "Amazing Grace" is gonna take care of it (laughs). So… yeah, I think, just like everywhere else, gospel is probably still heading in to the future with a different sound, here in West Virginia now but you have a few people, like him, his grandmother, those people who are in quartet conventions that will carry on those traditions, so hopefully younger people will sort of, remember those tunes. They may not want to keep doing them, but at least if they can hear 'em, like I said, sometimes it's just one of those old hymns that you need that day and Kirk Franklin won't do.

14:17

XO: And we do it differently down here as well. Some of the… I'll be listening to a song in particular… I was watching the… there's a movie that comes on TV, it's called The Fighting Temptations and they had Shirley Caesar there, she was singing this song called "Daniel Saw the Stone." Well, we sing that in church too. In West Virginia I've noticed that we have—we sing the same songs as someone would sing in another state, but we may change the words up just a bit, and so the song says, the traditional song says, "Daniel saw the stone," it was talking about Jesus. He saw the stone that was hewn out of the mountain. Daniel had a dream and about this stone that was hewn out of a mountain and it went rolling down through the city of Babylon. And so this song goes on to say—we say, "tearing down the kingdoms of the world." Anyway, the song actually, the words that they were singing on this movie was "coming down to redeem a mighty world." It's—we have a different way in Appalachia of singing songs and ours may be just a little different of the way somebody may sing it in Kentucky. They have more of a bluegrass feel to it. It is way different in our churches. And I'm glad you asked that question.

EH: Could you put your finger on what it is exactly? It's just different words, or is it a style that you could name?

XO: I just think that where you know Kentucky you're gonna get more of a bluegrass? In West Virginia you're gonna get a… I dunno you get more of a country feel because you know, we're in the hills. And so you'll get more of a country feel with it, it's the same thing, it's just, you're gonna have a different spin on it. Even from churches, different genres, like she's from the Baptist church and you know she grew up in the Baptist church, and they may sing it a certain way. They may sing Amazing Grace a certain way in the Baptist church, in the Holiness church where I grew up, they put a little bit more spin on it.

16:22

And it's a little bit more rockin' so it depends! I've actually attended snake handlers churches before where they take up serpents and things—my pastor used to preach at… he had a lot of friends and we would go there and they have a different way of presenting the same songs that we would sing at church and so it's amazing to experience the diversity and see that we're all worshipping the same god.

EH: And what's the church that you go to?

XO: I belong to the Church of the Living God, it's here in Beckley off of—it's on Broadway Street right off of Johnstown road.

EH: Okay. I think I may have gone by there once 'cause I went to… oh go ahead… um, anyway, I was going to the church where the Gospel Singaleers sing…

XO: Yeah, you're right. They sing…

DF: They sing in his church.

EH: Oh, ok.

XO: They started singing in this church, when they were little bitty kids.

EH: Oh yeah, they were cool. They had good stories.

DF: Something he was mentioning about the differences in… stylistically something that I was thinking… because I'm paying more attention to now because of what we're doing, the song that his grandmother did last week, "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah," that's a… something, the way she sings that to me is sort of indicative of West Virginia. Now I've been in other states where they sing that a little bit differently and it may not, it may not be a big thing to some people but whereas most people would sing it, "Glory, glory, hallelujah… since I laid my burdens down, glory, glory, hallelujah, since I laid my burdens down. (pause) I feel better…" and you get a little bit of pause in there before you go to the next verse, but especially in the Pentecostal churches here in West Virginia, and some Baptist churches too, they will come right in on the end of that. Like I said, it might not be perceptible to a lot of people, but if you're counting bars like most white churches will do while they're playing, they might be thrown by that because at the end of that it'll be… "since I laid my burdens down, glory, glory…" They go right into that and some people that might throw, but that's something I've noticed that's very West Virginia about a lot of the hymns and things that they do here. So I just thought of that when you were asking that question.

EH: Yeah, I love that song. Oh—the families that you were talking about—were they recorded?

DF: Um, not that I know of. 'Cause if they were I would have had every one of their recordings (laughs)! I don't think the Penn Family ever recorded anything or do you know, or the Gospel Family Affair… now the Gospel Family Affair is Andi Richardson—do you know her?

19:28

EH: In Charleston?

DF: She used to sing with—she's in Charleston.

EH: Or Charleston Community Choir?

DF: She used to sing with Ethel Caffie-Austin and they traveled all over Europe. She usually would do the opening Star Spangled Banner for Multifest—she did that for years, it was her family. Her aunt and her sisters and brother were the Gospel Family Affair and so they don't sing together anymore, but that's what I grew up on—is people like her.

EH: Yeah, I wonder—I just don't know very much about the gospel tradition being documented here other than really Ethel Caffie-Austin.

DF: Yeah, I don't know that anything has because everything sort of centers around Ethel here in this state. And Black Sacred Music Festival, you know, when that started coming along it got quite a bit of publicity, but as far as individuals and groups that I grew up hearing—and they were stars! Here in West Virginia, everybody knew who they were, but as far as I know there was nothing documented about them, which is a shame.

EH: Yeah. Why do you think that is?

DF: I think nobody really thought that that needed to be done, and if somebody was gonna do it it was probably, you know, somebody from the black community but like Xavier said it's just something we do, so we don't think about it as being something that needs to be archived, you know, and this is history. It's just, you just do this every Sunday, this is what you do. And I think this is a great opportunity to shed some light on that and leave some memories for people. I'm hoping we can get some people—"Oh, I remember that!" You know?

EH: Oh yeah.

DF: That kind of thing, because that was, last Sunday, a lot of those songs I was hearing were songs I grew up with and I haven't heard in years because I'm not a regular church-goer now, so…

EH: Yeah, do you think it would be worthwhile to go to a few of those conventions? Do they happen quarterly?

DF: Well yeah, like he was saying, another one is coming up in August so we're gonna take a small segment of that to do nothing but a cappella.

EH: OK. Yeah, I mean I could go and interview…

XO: That would be great.

EH: …or I could come and you could use my recorder and you could interview folks…

XO: I would actually like for you, because you ask some really, really interesting questions and there are actually people who actually belong to the convention. The singing convention. They have their own history. And I would love to have you, you know they have sung in groups and have traveled all over West Virginia. And I would love to have you do that.

EH: Cool! Yeah, that would be great.

XO: That would be fantastic.

EH: And the Gospel Singaleers—I interviewed them awhile back too, but I don't know if they're singing much out anymore?

XO: They, I think they still do. As a matter of fact, Robert Anderson is—not only did the Singaleers start in our church, but Robert was actually the choir director that started me on being a lead singer—it was him.

EH: Oh!

XO: And I really look up to him and I think a lot of him today. And I actually—if you would come and do the interview, I would actually ask him to be there for that.

EH: Cool! Yeah. I interviewed him and Richard.

XO: I… Yeah.

EH: Yeah, that'd be great.

XO: Is it Richard or Randy?

EH: I think it's Richard.

XO: Oh yeah, we call him Dale. I know who you're talking about. Yeah. We're good friends—cause we get on the river a lot. Fishing. (laughs)

EH: Yeah. So I guess one of the things that I notice is that there isn't—people don't really recognize a West Virginia gospel tradition and maybe because it hasn't been documented, it's hard to know who to point them to…

XO: Correct.

EH: Like, I point them to you (Doris Fields) and to Ethel, but… yeah. But that doesn't mean there isn't one!

XO: There were powerhouses!

EH: Yeah!

XO: There were powerhouses that come from West Virginia, you know? When you… (sings "Lean on me") When you can't go anywhere in the world and somebody not know that song.

EH: Right.

XO: And if you—I think that because you're looking at a pretty much impoverished area, not only that, but this guy that sings that song [Bill Withers] he had to leave West Virginia to, to get where he was. And don't get me wrong, back in the day when those artists all those big groups and whatever, they were on the Chitlin Circuit, they came through West Virginia.

EH: What's the Chitlin Circuit?

XO: Ahhhh! (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

DF: (laughs)

XO: You haven't heard of the Chitlin Circuit!

EH: Uh-uh!

XO: Well, you see back in the day when artists were aspiring to be great, there were, you had to take jobs in faraway places. Ultimately what happened was, because of Jim Crow and things like that, you had a lot of black artists that were wanting to be great, and you know, they had to get their music out there so people would know them. And so they had to go into a lot of these places in town and you know, they may have to stay in somebody's house. Especially a place like West Virginia. Even Nat King Cole, you know, a lady that I take care of, she was telling me that when Nat King Cole came to Charleston, you know, he had to stay at Ms. Hale's house I think it was, or something like that. You know, they had certain places in their club, the black clubs where people played at, as famous as Nat King Cole is, you see? And so these guys—my great-grandparents had a place, um, called The Dewdrop Inn and it was down in…

EH: I've heard of this place.

XO: This place was—they had, you could get girls there…

EH: (laughs)

XO: You could gamble there, and they had live entertainment and this was down in what's called (Urie), West Virginia, the nickname for it was Cooktown.

EH: Okay.

XO: So they owned this hotel down there.

EH: What county is that in?

XO: It's still in Raleigh County.

EH: Okay.

26:00

XO: It's… when you, when you'll go down through Sophia to get there. And anyway, Robert Byrd's from down in that neck of the woods.

EH: Okay.

XO: Anyhow, they owned this place, and they would get people from the Chitlin Circuit to come through, you would get Lloyd Price, you would get Ike and Tina Turner, you've got Ray Charles, before he became really famous and like that. And my grandmother actually in the movie you will see where Ray Charles it tells you that he would feel these women's arms and stuff—that's how he knew whether a woman was pretty or not? He made the mistake of running his hand up my grandmother's dress! And she slapped him! Down there in that hotel—those were her parents, which was my great-grandparents. They were the ones that owned that place down there. And so those people came through there and on that Chitlin Circuit, I mean you would get all of the best acts that ever was. Same way was in church, I mean these church acts, I mean, good lord! You got to hear everything and on Sunday morning in the Pentecostal Church, you might be in church until 2 or 3 o'clock in the evening, you know from Sunday morning service. They were playing guitars and drums and the piano and the organ and all that, and you heard just about every genre of music that there was! But the reason that you know, you don't get more of this stuff recorded or whatever is that most people were poor. They didn't have money to get that done. And so if you wanted to be great and you wanted to make it in the business you had to move out of West Virginia or go someplace else to get it done.

EH: And the Chitlin Circuit—did that go up north too?

XO: It was everywhere.

EH: Okay.

XO: Everywhere that you had black folks, you had the Chitlin Circuit. (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

XO: They would go all down south, and it wasn't—it wasn't uncommon to go down south someplace, and you had to drive for miles just to get to a bathroom. Or you had to go behind a tree, because you wasn't welcome in the facilities that you know, white folks could go through the front door, you know, we couldn't do that. And if you went to a restaurant, you went to a restaurant, you had to go to the side door, get your dinner, and go eat on the bus or sit out under a tree and eat, you see?

EH: Yeah

28:16

XO: Duke Ellington actually talked about that. I was reading an article where Duke Ellington was talking about—they were not able… he's great! They weren't able to stay in hotels or whatever, and so they decided that every place that they would go they would stay on the…on a train. So they would put a

couple of train cars there and that's where they would stay, and he said, you know, if it was good enough for Abraham Lincoln, it's good enough for me!

EH: (laughs)

XO: And they lived off of this train and that's everywhere they went, they would have a couple of cars for he and his entourage.

EH: Wow.

DF: That's what I talk about a little bit in the Bessie Smith show…that's one of the reasons she bought, she got her own railroad car. That made it a lot easier for her to travel down south and they didn't have to worry about staying in somebody's house or finding a black-owned hotel or rooming house. Yeah, and the Chitlin Circuit that you're talking about, part of that, I mean a lot of it is like certain promoters would come up with—it's basically bookin' a tour for whatever acts they could put together and sending them to different towns, but there was one big promoter, the Theater Owner's Booking Association—so check that out. Google that. That was, Bessie Smith was part of that, a lot of blues acts were part of that. They… it was the Theatre Owner's Booking Association, but the nickname that black performers had for it was Tough on Black Asses. (laughs)

XO: (laughs) Okay! I didn't know that either!

EH: (laughs)

DF: And that was the Chitlin Circuit! (laughs) Because they would get booked into these small clubs.

EH: I see

DF: Juke joints, shacks, whatever.

XO: They may get paid and they may not!

DF: And they may not, yeah.

EH: Yeah, yeah, okay.

XO: A lot of times people got 'em in to sing and they would do a whole show and right before it was time for them to come off the stage or whatever, the guy with the money would take off and run so they didn't get paid.

EH: Yeah. You said that you found a connection with Bessie Smith in West Virginia through Diamond Teeth Mary?

DF: Yeah, she was her half-sister. Yeah.

EH: Where was she born?

DF: In Huntington.

EH: That's crazy.

DF: Yeah. Yeah.

EH: And so did Diamond Teeth Mary perform on the circuit as well?

DF: I'm sure she did. A lot of the research that I did about Bessie, I always heard about Mary, but I didn't make that connection because it—they didn't play up on Mary at all. It was all about Bessie, but Mary's father, yeah, Mary's father was Bessie Smith's stepfather. Mary went on the road with Bessie Smith early and she stayed on the road with her for years and years until she went out on her own. So she basically learned from Bessie.

EH: Wow. That's cool.

DF: Yeah.

EH: I know like in your apprenticeship application, you were talking about finding these commonalities between the gospel and the blues? Could you talk a little bit about that?

DF: Um, because… I don't want to… I want to say it right.

XO: (unintelligible)

DF: Yeah…

XO: (laughs)

DF: And gospel basically comes from the blues. I'm actually, I'm putting together a written package to present too, at the end of this.

EH: Oh cool.

DF: And one of the things—I do something called Blues 101—I've gone around to different schools and talked about it, and churches and civic organizations and things like that, but one of the things, especially church people they know Thomas Dorsey is considered to be the father of gospel music. What a lot of people don't know or want to accept now, is that Thomas Dorsey was known as Georgia Tom and Texas Tom and his wife was Ma Rainey's wardrobe mistress. Ma Rainey was of course Bessie Smith's mentor. And Thomas Dorsey, he wrote over 400 blues tunes. Blues and jazz tunes. And his father, I believe, was a preacher, so he grew up in church. But he played blues and jazz. It wasn't until his first wife died, the one who was Ma Rainey's wardrobe mistress, when she died in childbirth, he wrote "Precious Lord, Take My Hand," which was his biggest hit. And he sort of just went into the church after that and he was the one who basically coined the term gospel music because he took the beat from blues and put it behind religious music so that's where you get the handclapping and the tambourines and all that in gospel music. So it's basically the same music—he's using all the same chord changes in the blues—we were talking about—there's one song that I use in Blues 101 called "Take This Hammer" and it's a work song which is basically a precursor to the blues, and it's basically a 12 bar blues.

XO: Show her yours and then I'll show her the way we do it.

DF: (Sings, "Take this hammer, carry it to the captain, take this hammer, carry it to the captain, take this hammer, carry it to the captain, tell him I'm gone, tell him I'm gone."

XO: Then "Glory, Glory"

DF: (Sings to same melody: "Glory, glory, hallelujah, since I laid my burdens down, glory, glory, hallelujah, since I laid my burdens down") It's basically the same thing. So one is a blues work song, the other one is a gospel song.

EH: Mmhm. And this, the first blues is--- sometimes that gets carried over with John Henry. Like "this is the hammer that killed John Henry".

DF: You can—the thing about blues is…

EH: It's all mixed up!

DF: It's everything. (laughs) Yeah! Everybody, you know, adds verses or I mean, that was the reason for using "Take This Hammer." What I usually do is I get kids to come up and line up and they pretend that they're working on a railroad, and they're taking this hammer. And I'm showing 'em that they have to keep time. That part of the reason for having a work song is to make the work go a little easier. But it was all about rhythm too. You can't have somebody that doesn't have rhythm working on the railroad track and swinging the hammer, 'cause you got you know, people on this side and people on this side, so if somebody swings at the wrong time, somebody's gonna get hit in the head with a hammer! (laughs) So that was sort of a you know, a demonstration of how that worked and how work songs work and how one they finish working, cause a lot of times these men who were working on the railroad or on chain gangs or whatever, they didn't get to go home you know, for lunch or dinner or things like that, they didn't get the weekend off. They would go, you know, they may be out, you know, in the middle of nowhere working on a railroad, so they go and lay in tents, you know, on pallets on the ground. So even when they lay down after working, you know 13, 14 hours a day, they may take that same work song and put some other words to it because they're laying there with nothing to do. They can't do anything else, so they keep singing.

EH: Yep, yep.

DF: So you've got all kinds of verses that are interchangeable just depending on how you feel at the time. In the same song.

XO: And that's where the blues comes into it because you know, as she was singing, "take this hammer, hand it to the captain" and you know, in church they take the same "glory, glory." (Sings: "Glory, glory, hallelujah, since I laid my burdens down. Glory, glory, hallelujah, since I laid my burdens down. I feel alright now, feel alright now, since I laid my…" then they go on to say, (sings) "I can treat my neighbor better, since I laid my burdens down." So the words are changed because it's basically a different message. You know?

EH: Mmhm. Yeah.

XO: The blues comes in and they're talking about you know, my wife, my old lady, she done messed up on me. I caught her with another man! (Sings: "They call it stormy Monday, but Tuesday's just as bad. Wednesday's worse and Thursday's oh so sad.") It's the same thing!

EH: So there's also the floater verses in gospel too.

DF: Mmhm.

XO: Oh yeah!

EH: And it's just… so I was just reading this blues… or book about the blues, and they were saying a lot of it is just how long the dancers want to dance…

XO: Absolutely.

EH: So you just like throw in verses to make it longer.

DF: Yeah, you just make up some verses.

EH: And probably the same for gospel. How much you're feelin' it, how the congregation is responding.

XO: And there's no structure. There's no structure in that. You're exactly right. There is not structure. You know, if they show up to a dance or you're at the juke joint, and you playing and people are, they're feeling the music, you know, you gotta keep that thing going!

EH: Yeah!

XO: So I mean, it is what it is. And it's the same thing. It's the same with the black church, you know if the people are really feeling the spirit or whatever, and the music, you keep the music going as long as you know, the spirit is moving, and that's the way it works! Same stuff!

EH: Yeah. The other thing they were saying in there—they were talking about people who sing the blues on Saturday night and then go to church and sing gospel, and they were like "I don't 'cross up'" It's one way or the other.

XO: Well, see, that's… she and I were talking at the Black Sacred Music Festival, we were talking to Ethel Caffie about that. You know, because you know, Ethel was from the Pentecostal Church just like I was, or am. And her father was a Holiness preacher, and I'm a preacher's kid. And so they taught you in the Holiness Church, that you can't, they say, "You can't sing the blues on Saturday night and then get up and sing gospel music, the Lord's music on Sunday morning." But the truth is, most everybody who was an artist, that's exactly what they were doing!

EH: (laughs) Right, yeah.

XO: I posted a link on our website there for this particular project about Lou Rawls. You know, he and Sam Cooke. That's exactly… and the truth is, most of those artists, whether it was Sam Cooke—the greatest artists that you remember—all of 'em came out of the church.

EH: Mmhm.

XO: It's… they were doing the same thing. Lou Rawls was singing with a quartet, as was Sam Cooke, singing with a gospel quartet, but at the same time, they were playing when Sam Cooke went over to… doing Rhythm and Blues, well Lou Rawls was doing background and if you listen to his music now, you can hear Lou Rawls 'cause he has a very distinct baritone—you can hear him in the background singing. I mean, it's just clear. But he would never tell that until years later when he was very successful, then that's when he told, "look, this is what we were doing."

EH: Yeah-huh. Yeah, Aretha Franklin's father was a reverend.

XO: Absolutely! Absolutely! The Staple Singers? Absolutely!

40:09

EH: Totally. Um, so what is your hope for how the gospel tradition and blues tradition will continue in the state and in your churches and communities?

XO: I think that with programs like this. I think that in that, and especially where you were talking about nobody really recorded and was able to do that with what we're doing here in this state and have been doing for centuries. I think what more programs like this would actually spur this. We're living in a time now, as we were talking at the Black Sacred Music Festival, you know, these kids are… we, everybody when I was coming up, I'm almost 50… When I was coming up, everybody played some type of instrument and sung in some kind of group, and everybody went to church. That was just expected of you. And then we got to a time where we came to the late 70s, early 80s where rap music came on the scene so they went from singing it to saying it, so it went away from having to learn to play an instrument and do it the old fashioned way.

EH: Mmhm.

XO: And now I think it's going back to that, and I think with programs like what you have offered with this apprenticeship program, I think we continue with that and do more recordings and what have you, I think that it would just make it, open it wide open so that today's generation can see, you know, what it really sounds like. Cause I've listened to a lot of this stuff that these kids have put down now, most of it sounds the same. If you gave, showed up to a program, and most of 'em are singing to, or lip synching to some kind of recording in the background. But if you made them turn that music off and left them standing on the stage, many of them could not—they couldn't hold their own. But you take an old artist, you take somebody like Lionel Ritchie, or somebody, they can rock the crowd with or without someone behind 'em. It just is what it is. (laughs)

EH: So are there young people, you know like the Gospel Singaleers started when they were kids, are there young kids doing that today?

XO: They're starting back to do that but it just wasn't as, like I say, when rap music came on, it kind of engulfed everything. And kids went that direction and everybody wants to be a rapper at that point. You had people coming up with gospel rap and all that, everybody wanted to be a rapper, but now, you're starting to see, like my nephew—he's a percussionist, he plays the drums for our church. And there are still, you know, people who work with, in the studio and whatever, and they know that they have to have music in order to do what needs to be done and so these kids, they will learn to play keyboard, the

problem is, with what we do, you couldn't go to a church or any program or anything like that and start singing a song—everybody's gonna know it—but if you have a musician there, a piano player, they could automatically follow you. But the difference was, as she was saying, Sunday when we were down there [at Eagle Central Baptist Church outside of Montgomery, WV] I was singing a traditional, one of the standards for the black church, and the guy gets on the piano and he starts to play, but you know, he was basically feeling his way through it. It wasn't familiar to him and I could tell—even though I was leading the song, I could tell that this guy was feeling his way through the song.

EH: What song was it?

XO: "God Had Smiled on Me"

EH: Oh you were just talking about that.

XO: Yes. Absolutely. As a matter of fact, Lady D just posted, she posted a video from me singing that, and we started the song off a cappella and you know, it sounded pretty to me a cappella, and you know, I would have preferred if we were able to sing it without the music, actually, 'cause it sounds better. I love voice.

EH: Yeah. Yeah, what about you—what do you think? What's your hope for the continuation of the tradition?

DF: Well, gospel, I don't think there's any problem—I think it'll do fine in West Virginia, and there's plenty of people that I know personally that are advancing gospel music here in the state, even though it's contemporary gospel mostly. But hopefully, like he was saying, through programs like this, people will start to remember the old gospel, the standards again, and you know, maybe go back to that every once in a while. But as far as blues, blues is really sparse here in West Virginia. There's not that many truly blues bands. You know a lot of people, they want to put blues in the title of their band, but they're just playing rock and roll, course, the way I look at it, it's all the same because it all comes from the same source, but still you have, you have genres and people like it when you're true to that genre and you don't have a lot of that here in West Virginia. I mean, I don't sing strictly blues, even though I've got the label of being a blues singer, I don't sing strictly blues. And the people who are doing strictly blues here in West Virginia are white bands.

XO: And we don't touch it!

DF: (laughs)

XO: Very few blacks that… even, not just in West Virginia, just it's not.

EH: Yeah.

DF: Yeah, it's a thing where—and we talk about this all the time—black people, we've created all this. We've created all this music, but we create something and then we get tired of it and then we throw it away. And white people pick it up and run with it. But at the same time, we still look at that as being old hat. Like the old gospel standards—"Oh we don't want to do those anymore because now we got Kirk Franklin and Yolanda Adams and we're just gonna do all those songs. We're gonna make those the new

standards." That's cool, but don't forget, you know, where all that came from. And it's the same with blues and so, you can't… Any blues show you go to is gonna be 90% white people there, because they're still into this, you know, and they're taking it over—appropriating! (laughs) and they're running with it.

XO: Well Europe saved it! You know, you had Muddy Waters and Little Walter, and stuff like that, Europe—the European artists, Rolling Stones and all that, they were interested… That's how the Rolling Stones got their name. Well you know, when the blues stopped or ceased to be a big thing in America, it was old hat as she says, well of course, Europe picked it up and that's, that's how it's basically… continued on was because of the Europeans.

EH: Yeah.

XO: That's exactly right!

EH: And was there a big blues tradition in West Virginia?

DF: I don't know that there's been a big blues tradition, but somebody that you really should talk to is Hubert Jones, I don't know if you know—they call him Rabbit?

EH: Oh yeah, I've heard of him.

DF: Yeah, he, he knows the history of all black music in West Virginia from years and years back.

EH: Okay.

DF: He's told me about…

EH: Is he in Logan County?

DF: No, he's in Charleston.

EH: Charleston, okay.

DF: Yeah. And he's told me about all the coal camp traditions, and everything, and the people he used to play with—Count Basie-- and all these people that would come through Charleston, cause you know, they would play at the Municipal Auditorium, and then they couldn't go anywhere else—the black people couldn't see them at the Municipal Auditorium, so they would go and play in the different black clubs around Charleston after that show, he said, until 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning. And you know, so the West Virginia musicians would get to play with these national artists like Count Basie and Duke Ellington and all those people, Sarah Vaughn, all these people have come through Charleston, so they've gotten, you know, they learned certain licks, he said, from these different artists, and so then they carry it on, they teach it to somebody else, you know, here in the coal camp, because that was a big thing. They would come through on the Chitlin Circuit when the mines paid. So the coal miners would come out of the coalfields to Charleston or to Logan or to Huntington—wherever the big facility was to have a concert. They would come and they'd spend the whole weekend partying with all these big names. And learning from them, because they played music too. And so you got those people going back home to Cabin Creek or whatever, and they're throwing their house party on the weekends and playing the same music. So, it's just sort of faded out now, so hopefully that would come back. Like I said, blues, when Nat

Reese died, I think blues kinda died in West Virginia. And so I would love to see more people doing blues here, more people of color doing blues and picking up that tradition.

EH: Yeah, I also wonder about, you know, some of the mining families that maybe moved back south after the jobs went away. They went back to the home place and took some of the traditions with them that they learned in coal camps.

DF: Yeah, I thought that was in the movie *Matewan*,

EH: Yeah, yeah.

DF: The scene in there where you know, everybody's sorta getting together from all over and their combining the music.

EH: Yeah, the harmonica.

DF: Yeah, like my father, he worked in the coalmines for 50 years and he was from Alabama, and they came up during the time of the Mine Wars and things like that, so nobody in my family was musical, but I thought about that. You know, I would see that movie.

EH: Totally. Yeah. Let's see, well I hope that… I was thinking—you should write a book about this.

DF: (laughs)

EH: (laughs) I'm serious! Or at least an essay.

DF: I would try, 'cause I've talked to Rabbit. I've got lots of notes from him and I actually got to interview him and Henry Womack, Henry Womack is dead now, but I think the first or maybe second Festivall that they had, they had a station set up, oral history station set up, so I got to interview both of them.

EH: Cool.

50:57

DF: And Henry Womack was actually Bobby Womack's uncle and he would drive them around when they were younger, with Sam Cook, and they would… 'cause they started out singing gospel, and he said he drove them all over the country, cause they were all under-age. So he said he had to go with 'em. Yeah! (laughs) So he gave me a lot of insight into what was happening. One of the things about that—Bobby Womack, I got to sing for him before he died. They honored him at the Marriott in Charleston, and I asked him why when you google Bobby Womack it says he was born in Cleveland—he was born in North Fork [West Virginia]. In McDowell County. So he said you couldn't say you were from West Virginia back then. (laughs)

XO: Right!

DF: That wouldn't get you a job!

XO: Podunk! It was Podunk!

DF: Yeah! (laughs) So I asked him, if you could make that change on Google, I would love to see it happen. He said, I don't know about that! (laughs)

EH: Someone's got to—as a Wikipedia editor or whatever.

DF: Yeah. (laughs)

XO: You can't look around anywhere now and not see West Virginia in the news. West Virginia's all over everywhere now. I… I think probably it's because of our current president, but everybody's talking about West Virginia.

DF: They know we're here now.

XO: Yeah, they know we're here!

EH: Yeah, for better or for worse.

XO: (laughs)

DF: (laughs)

EH: Yeah, uh… oh what was I gonna say. Did he have family in Cleveland?

DF: Yeah, they had some family in Cleveland so they just decided they would say they were all from Cleveland. But yeah, their family is right there in Charleston and McDowell County.

EH: Huh! Yeah, I'll have to… he's still around? No he's not.

DF: Yeah, he died a couple years ago. Yeah.

EH: Okay. Yeah, you should make a website—you have the Facebook page, but yeah, this needs to be documented. You should be the one to do it I think! Let me know if I can help!

DF: (laughs) Is there a grant for that?

EH: Actually I was thinking, there is a fellowship—there is a fellowship from the Humanities Council. I'll send it to you.

DF: Really? Okay. Okay.

EH: Yeah, we should talk about it. 'Cause I think that would be really important.

DF: Okay!

EH: Um… let's see… is there anything else either of you would like to add?

XO: Like I say, I am very, I've been very enlightened and just some of the factoids that Doris—because she has done so much study in this area, and I'm just amazed. I love music and I love the blues. I love gospel, different genres. As a matter of fact, I don't really care that much for rap—some artists, but you

know. Like I say, country music. You couldn't grow up in West Virginia without listening to country music. It just is. And so, I've written a lot of country tunes and I would like to get into that.

EH: So a country band is next for you?

XO: I would think.

EH: That'd be cool!

XO: I would think. You know, I've been thinking about it is—the soul, country music soul or something. Because I love it. I love it, and you can't get any better than that. And this program, this apprenticeship program has been so much, it's done so much for me. Very enlightening.

EH: That's great. What about you? Anything else?

DF: Um, you know, I just want to keep doing what I do and I want to keep making this a full-time job for me, like he says. He's been working a full-time job for years since we met each other and I've been trying to pull him over, you know, you need to do this, but he doesn't like to live on the edge like I do, wondering if he can pay the rent every month! (laughs) But you know, I'm just at the age and the point now, where this is what I'll do until I die and that's all there is to it. I just can't punch anybody else's time clock, so I have to do the things that make me happy now. So… I'll just keep doing it.

EH: Good! Thank you both so much.

DF: Thank you.

XO: Thank you.

EH: This is fun!

55:13

END OF TAPE