

Kathy Harden interview

Sept. 8, 2015

Participants:

Subject: Kathy Harden (KH), vocalist

Interviewers: Katie Nichols (KN), Sousa Archives and Center for American Music

KN: Okay, well let's get started. This is Katie Nichols, and I am here with Kathy Harden, H-A-R-D-E-N, and we are here at the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, in the Harding Band Building at the University of Illinois. It's September 8, 2015, 2 PM. Alright. Well, to get started, why don't you tell me a little bit about where you're from, your childhood, where you got your start.

KH: Okay...I grew up in Tolono, Illinois, which is about 10 miles south of Champaign-Urbana, small town. At the time I was growing up, there were about 1500 people, and taking a trip to Champaign-Urbana was a trip to the big city. I was very much a small-town girl, and I have really retained that status, reputation, into my current age. In fact, I have a song that I wrote called "Wonder Woman: Tale of a Small-Town Girl" and it's the story of my life growing up in Tolono and subsequently becoming a part of the music scene. And the line in it says "I'm a small town girl, but my heart is big, and I love my family, and I love my kids." And it goes on and on. But anyway...my musical beginnings were when...my mother played piano by ear. She was a natural musician. She also sang in the Sweet Adelines. You know, like, a female barbershop quartet. And my...I was first...I have a very memorable moment when I was 4 years old, of sitting at the piano with my mom, and my mom playing Jesus Loves Me, and my singing Jesus Loves Me, and my mother started singing a harmony part all of the sudden, and I just remember the feeling of joy and awe, of that music and...it was just a very memorable moment to me. And I have loved singing for as long as I can remember. I know when I was a toddler, I probably danced and loved music like all toddlers...but that was my...that was kind of a turning-point moment for me. And then, and you know, I sang in Sunday school, and that kind of thing. And then...my parents were both church folks at the time, and then they suddenly divorced, and they had a scandalous divorce, and...my life really changed at that time. And I was about ten, and my father retained custody of five children, so we began doing the household chores with dad, and I remember one night, at ten, doing the dishes with my dad, and we were just kind of singing some songs, and my dad began singing the Lord's Prayer. And you know, at ten, I had never really heard my dad sing in this way. And I had another one of those moments of joy and awe...my father had a beautiful tenor voice, and he sang the Lord's Prayer, and I was just filled with awe, as he sailed up, you know, to the top of the song, the beautiful climax of the song, and it was again, another really life-changing moment for me. I guess what I'm trying to say here is my music comes from...directly from my parents. In a natural way. And also...they from their parents, and they from their parents. My father's side was more trained, my father played the trombone, his mother played the...you know, was the organist...and my mother's side were I'll call them the hillbilly side, and they had the hootenannies, the banjos, and the fiddles, and the...and they were all just naturally taught musicians, and I always said that I have the best of both worlds. I have this more...proper, and then this more organic and earthy kind of musical combination. And I've always felt that's a large part of what developed me into a singer. I sang, you know, in school, in choirs like all the kids. In eighth grade I got

my first solo...and I sang Moon River, and, you know, it was again, one of those moments where I knew that music was very integral to me. And it came with a lot of joy and awe, and you know, a lot of fear. But it was something that I needed to do. I was really, really drawn to do. And then, you know, from there I was involved in school things. Musicals, you know, I was in Hello Dolly and Oklahoma, you know, the kind of typical musicals that you saw in the high schools at that time. And then I did what a lot of small-town girls do. I got married and I had babies, and that was pretty much what my life was about for a period of time and then, you know, sadly, unfortunately, I was also divorced, and at that point in time, was when I began singing in bands. I was...I had a...my brother, Keith, was a musician at that time, a young musician, guitarist, singer and songwriter...and a...girl, a musician who knew Keith, asked me if I sang, and I said I do, and she said, "I'm looking for a backup singer." And so I was tickled. I join the original No Secret, which is a...somewhat of a historical band here in this area. Still going. And I was the backup singer for Dody Cosmedy. I just sang with Dody last Saturday night at a wedding reception, big rock-and-roll wedding reception that a friend of ours had...so that was wonderful...memories...and, you know, we're both still going, and we're both in our sixties, you know? So after a short bit with her, I had an opportunity to audition with a band at a place called Prairielands, in Thomasboro, which is up 45 North, few miles north of Champaign. (8:41) And I walked in, cold, and auditioned for this band, I was hired on the spot. And I...that was my very first time of being an actual full-time musician. And I had two little girls and I had a full-time music job. And that was thrilling, although it was from 9 PM until 3 AM, 6 hours a night, from Tuesday through Saturday. So I had this college-age babysitter, who came when my girls were...right after they went to bed, and I jumped in the car and drove to Thomasboro, sang for 6 hours, sang my heart out for 6 hours, came home, got in bed at 3:30, got up 6:30 a.m. to get the girls ready for school, got them to school, went home, went to bed...slept until it was time to pick them up. Anyway, I did that for a year of my life and I had the most amazing time. Now granted, it was a time, it was 1980...the owner of Prairielands was a very old-fashioned man, and he sent me home one night, from a show and told me to put on a dress. That he wanted to see me in a dress. He wanted the audience to see my legs. You know, and I had a real cool, kind of a rock-and-roll pants and top thingy going on, but he sent me home to put on a dress, and I was very angry, because this was 1980, and I mean, women were really...rising, in a very strong way. And I said a few expletives to him on my way out the door, and I was not going back. And I cried all the way home, and I got home, and I talked to a friend, and he helped me to weigh out what was more important to me at the time, and singing was more important to me...than this man's ignorance and control, so I took a dress and cut it off nice and short, slipped it on, went out there, and sang my heart out, and then I knew, every...on the weekend nights I was required to wear a dress or a skirt. So. A year later that place burned to the ground. And fortunately, the band did not burn to the ground, the band...you know, we were the phoenix, we rose. We were called Night Flight. And we regrouped, and we moved to the Ramada Inn, which was...now the...it's at Kirby and Neil, and it's...maybe it's called a Hampton or something? Not a Hampton, it's a...anyway, it was Ramada Inn, and they had a bar in it called the Viking Room, and we played there five nights a week. We played from 9 to 12. So it was like a wonderful...you know, it was a vacation, from a 6-hour to a 3-hour gig a night. But again, we were paid to be the regular house band, you know, and...now I've gone way beyond my roots, and I've just moved right into telling you what I started doing. So...what is something else—

KN: So how long did you sing with Night Flight?

KH: I'm thinking that Night Flight lasted...maybe 3 years or so. Well, including the one at Thomasboro, I'd say maybe about 4 years. And we went through a couple of changes, member changes, but...the band had 5 singers, I mean the drummer sang, the bass player sang, the keyboard player sang, the guitar player...so we had, we did songs, for instance, like Billy Joel, you know, Uptown Girl, and all these songs that had all these rich harmonies, and I was on top of the world with that, I was more or less the vocal director of that...show. And we had excellent musicians, and even...there's a guy named Jimmy Hill who plays with Duke Tomato and his Power Trio, which is a legendary group here. And they're still playing as well, now, these days. And...but Jimmy is, was, just one of those keyboard players that did everything, including like the elbow, and I mean he just...he was an animal on the Hammond organ. And Jimmy said you know, I've never sung, and I said, you know, I think you need to sing. And I encouraged him to start singing with us. And he credits me with being the person who kind of forced him to get out there and sing and...now he sings and is in the performances, and he's a great singer, natural harmonizer. But yeah, that was about 4 years long, I think, before everybody went their way. So were at about mid-80s at that point.

KN: And at this point you weren't living in Tolono, you'd moved.

KH: No, I was living in Champaign, I was a big-city girl.

KN: Well, so then, what was your next...your next thing after that?

KH: Um...oh gosh, I've been thinking about his the last few days trying to get everything chronological, and I don't think I have everything chronologically. But at that point, I believe I began singing in in a band with my brother Keith, which was called H2O. And we did Talking Heads, Tina Turner...I can't really even think of...but it was a really fun time. Keith, who's just an amazing craftsman on guitar, decided to pick up keyboard, there was...a lot of keyboardy kind of music going on at that time. Like, two keyboards, and, you know, so he played a lot of keyboards, and another guy played guitar, and we had a guy with a standup stick...electronic bass...we were pretty progressive. And they all...and we also did original music. Not written by me, but written by my brother. At the time I hadn't begun my songwriting career yet. But that was a great time. We played at places like the Alley Cat, which is now called Fat City, and the Alley Cat had Friday night happy hour, and Sunday night hospitality night, and they had live music on those nights. So Friday night they had the happy hour band, and then Sunday nights, hospitality night, was supposed to be aimed at all the people who worked in the hospitality business. All the waitresses, and other musicians, people who couldn't go out on any of the other nights, this was kind of for them, and it was one of the wildest nights in town, you know? Great times, lot of memories, lots of friends, people I still see now, you know? I mean, thirty-some years later, and, you know, we're all still out there in some fashion...well, not all of us, some people are not...they don't, you know, frequent the music scene much anymore. But a lot of people do. Some of them with canes, you know, "Oh, my hip went out," and you know, you reach a certain age and things start to fall apart. But...anyway, that was a really wonderful time with my brother. And...then right around that time, I had a couple of bands with my sister and her husband, we had a band called Kid Sister, and we had a band called Great Dames, and we kind of did the music of Heart, Ann and Nancy Wilson, we did a lot of that kind of stuff, Cyndi Lauper, Stevie Nicks, you know...those were some of the artists of the time that were...that we were all into, you know, and then...during that time, you know, I had children. I had two daughters that were growing up, and I would have time, and I had started going to school, and I was working on a degree in social work from the university here, and so all of those bands are interspersed

with times of my just taking time off. So that I could devote more time to my family, and school. (19:04) So I would take a year or two off and then, you know, something would draw me back. Somebody would call and say well, we're doing, we're putting this together, are you interested? And it's really hard to say no to something that is really...a very strong calling, you know? So yeah, I...that probably takes me to somewhere, maybe '90s or so, about 10 years' worth...and in the 90s, there was a band called Obsession, and there were two other women in the band, Cindi Petticourt, who had been singing for years with Marvin Lee, who's a legendary country singer in this area, and is still playing, and then...another woman named Sandy Renshaw, who was this tiny little woman who played keyboards, who had this huge keyboard setup, and you know, she was just up there...we played like Boston and Kansas, and you know, all these songs with these big "nee nee nee nee" keyboard things, and we were really kick-ass. I mean, we were pretty hot stuff. And...then following that, I had a band called See No Evil. And that was with some of the really premier musicians in town. Jesse Brown, Josh Quirk, Ray Greninger, Roger Friese...almost all of those guys still playing today. And we did...we just rocked. We were just...we were rocking. We were all in our primes, and now, granted, it was a lot of top-40 rock, it wasn't heavy metal, which I'm not saying I had anything against that...but I had done a little bit of that in Great Dames. We did some, like Rush, and you know, some, and Led Zeppelin, and we did some pretty intense rock stuff. And I loved every minute of it. I've always loved rock. But I also, always liked a lot of the other genres too. I mean, the first, Night Flight at Prairielands, it was a variety band, and we played country, and we played rock, and we played jazz, and we played blues, and they were all really great musicians, and we...just kind of covered the gamut, you know. Somewhere around in that time, in the 90s, I had a duo with my brother, Keith Harden, and we had a duo for almost 8 years and we played a lot of blues. Keith really got into the blues and really became a student of the blues. And I was also very much interested in blues at the time. Somewhere in my late 20s and 30s, I started hearing Etta James and Rockin' Ruth Brown...I started hearing these women that were just like...I mean, they just sang with the biggest grit and sass and...I mean, they just put it all out there when they sang. Just knocked people over with their attitudes and I mean, that hit me like a ton of bricks. And I said, hey, I know how to rock, but the blues, honey, that's a whole new ballgame. And so I just soaked it all up. You know, I soaked it up like a sponge. And I began looking at the historical blues women, you know, like Bessie Smith and Sippie Wallace, and Memphis Minnie, and Rockin' Ruth Brown, and Etta James, and Alberta Hunter, and...Big Momma Thornton, and all these just amazing pioneer women who really paved the way for me, you know? And also, for instance, paved the way for Janis Joplin, who also became one of my driving forces, you know, from "Me and Bobby McGee." You know, my favorite lyric of all time is right here. "Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose." I mean, now she didn't write that, Kris Kristofferson wrote that. But...I mean, I've been singing "Me and Bobby McGee" for 30-some years, and people that know me, they know me for "Me and Bobby McGee." They say, people who have seen Janis Joplin say to me, "Janis Joplin would be proud." People, they cry, they say, "I saw Janis, and that's Janis right there." You know? And so I have a little piece of paper on my fridge that one of my fans left me on stage, and said, "Please sing "Me and Bobby McGee," I hear you're the best." And thought I have little things like that around and about, for times when I'm feeling insecure. But anyway...I...when those doors opened, my brother and I were kind of on the same wavelength with blues. And we formed a duo, just Keith and Kathy Harden, and we played...we played a lot around the area. And we...we played a lot of the historical blues, and people just ate it up. You know, people love the blues, because it's just so basic, and it's just so raw, and even the happy blues, I mean there's happy blues, but just, people are really drawn to that basic blues. And, I mean, Chicago has a Blues Fest every year, and I've been to it

many many times, and I've heard Sweet Home Chicago sung so many times I couldn't even begin to count them. And I also sing Sweet Home Chicago. But Keith and I had this duo, and we just, we really...we had a great time doing that together. And Keith lives in Nashville now, but he comes home to see you, four times a year, and we, we play music together, when he comes home. He also does solo stuff as well, and his old Keith Harden band, which plays Stevie Ray Vaughan and all kinds of originals, they're just the best ever. But we did that for about eight years. And it was tremendous fun. It was the kind of thing, you know, you're at the Embassy. Now it's an Indian restaurant on Race Street in Urbana. But it was called the Embassy, and they had Tuesday night – I'm sorry, that's my phone -- Tuesday night music every week, Keith hosted Tuesday night acoustic night, and...I mean, we'd just get everybody so worked up, and I was younger at the time, and I'd get up on the bar, and walk down the bar, you know, and bang my tambourine, and people, I mean, it was just the most incredible, powerful, fun, relaxed, friendly, love-filled times for us, and really for our town, you know, because it had kind of become our town. And we still carried small-town Tolono up to the big city, but it was our town. And we, we loved every minute of it. I...I also feel like I owe some of my...the recognition that I have to my brother Keith, because, you know, he kind of paved the way...everybody knows Keith Harden. Everybody knew Keith Harden, everybody knows Keith Harden. And he played in this area for thirty-five years before moving to New York, and then from New York to Nashville, and continues to write and record, and he's a big piece of the history of Champaign-Urbana. So anyway...Oh. Do you want me to tell you what happened after that?

KN: Yeah! Please do.

KH: Well, I...when Keith left, you know, I just kinda, started...I was just taking a break. And you know, started having grandbabies, and you know, the girls are all grown up, and...I just got a wild hair one day and decided I was going to audition for a show at the Station Theater in Urbana. I hadn't done anything like that since high school. And I saw it was a show about Woody, the music of Woody Guthrie. And I thought, what could be cooler than that? So I just, on a Sunday afternoon, I walked in there cold and just laid down my audition, and I mean, boom, I just got the part, and there were two women and three men in the show. And it was one of these, you know rich in history and rich in harmony...I mean I was on cloud nine. I was...I was just...I was so happy, until I learned that there were no cue cards, you know, and I said...and the director was adamant. I said "Oh no." Rick Orr, who's the founder of the station of the Station Theater, he was the director of the show, and he was a florist by trade, and he just arranged his shows like flowers, it was a wonderful experience to be directed by him. But I said "Oh no no, I can't possibly remember all of the words to these, you know, seventeen songs, and the dialogue, no Rick, I have to have cue cards." And he said, "Nope. You must memorize." And I truly thought I had forgotten how to memorize. But...but I didn't. I worked hard, and fretted, and panicked, and it ended up being just a most...well, it was another one of those joy and awe kind of things. It was like, "Oh my gosh, this is beautiful." So we got to perform that show...and then...someone, a local boy-made-good, named Mark Roberts, who was the creator of Two and a Half Men, and Mike and Molly, and is a playwright, and is, you know, I think he was in LA, now he's in New York, he comes back here and does, you know, special things for Urbana High School where he graduated from, he was originally a Tolono boy. So that's how I knew him. But he saw me in that show, and he invited me to be in a show that he had written for the Station Theater. So I got to be in a show the next year called "Where the Great Ones Run." It was not a musical, however, it was still a thrilling experience. And then from there, "Well, I think I'll just do another show." So I auditioned for a show called "The Great American Trailer Park Musical," which was

a comedy, and I played Badass Betty, the proprietor of Armadillo Acres Trailer Park, since 1973, and I had the...the most wonderful role, I got to play this big, bawdy, bosomy, red-head, these big red wigs, I mean, it was...I had to get a spray tan for the whole thing...but it was another joyful, awe-inspiring experience. And then the next year, Rick Orr, the director, who I just have so much admiration and respect for, called me and said, "Kathy, I would like to do a show called "Always Patsy Cline." And I will not do the show unless you agree to play Patsy Cline for me." And, you know, I was...be still me heart! And I said "Yes I will," and that show ran for four weeks, sold out every show, and it would have been extended another week, except my husband and I had plane tickets for Paris. And I said "I'm sorry, but Patsy...Paris trumps Patsy." And I learned twenty-seven Patsy Cline songs for the show. It was two-woman show. I was Patsy, and Joi Hoffsommer, who's a very well-known actress here, played Louise, Patsy's friend, and the show was just kind of based on a friendship that they struck up while Patsy was rising, in six year's time, to become an amazing icon. And was then killed in a plane crash. In fact today is Patsy Cline's birthday. Yeah, September 8, 1932. During my research, you know, she was--I discovered that she was born 6 days after my dad was born, you know, and it really kind of put things in perspective for me, about the time. And now, I'm known around town, you know. "Patsy!" Someone, I saw someone yesterday, when I was at the Labor Day parade, who hollered, "Hi Patsy!" (Laughter) That was a...27 songs, 10 costume changes, and I mean, starting with the full cowgirl outfit, the wagon wheels, and the fringe, and the white hat, and the white boots, and the whole deal. And that's when I began singing on a Patsy mic, you know, the Elvis mic. And I've used it ever since. I fell in love with that microphone. It's a Shure mic, S-H-U-R-E brand, and it's got a warm sound, and it...it does magical things with my voice. And anyway, that was four years of theater, and the Patsy experience...oh. My husband and I went to Paris. The show was over and I was like...swimming in joy and awe and excitement and sadness that it was over, and we went to Paris. And I told all my friends and I said well, it took Paris to get me over Patsy. It really did, it's the only thing that would have ever worked. And so, anyway...got back from that, and I...my husband said, "Honey, what do you think? Are you ready to do some music again?" And I said, "I really am. My creative juices are really flowing, and I'm...and my notoriety is very high right now, and I think it would be a great time to do something." And decided to form a duo. And my husband said "Well, who would you like to do a duo with? And I said, "Andy Baylor." Andy Baylor started playing around this area as a teenager. He was a kid. Used to sneak into the blues clubs...Raphael's...downtown, where the Hyatt sits now. And used to get to sit in with some of the really great blues players around here. And he could really hold his own. He was gifted. And as his journey went on, you know, he was in rock bands, metal bands, you know, you have big '80s hair, and the Spandex, and the...you know, just the flinging of the head, and the big shows, great band called Clockwork Orange that brought him huge notoriety. Huge notoriety. They were together for ten years. Which is really long in rock-and-roll time. Which Andy always says it's like dog years, you know, 10 years is like 70 years. So anyway, I said "Andy Baylor, that's who I want." 'Cause Keith was—my brother, was not around. And I called Andy and said "Would you like to form a duo?" And he said, "Yes." And we formed a duo, and my husband came up with the name, we called it the Diva and the Dude. And that was a little over 5 years ago. And you know, sadly the Diva and the Dude just ended. We played the Sweet Corn Festival for Scott, and that was our last gig. And it's been very emotional, because we both invested five years of our lives in it, and we were both, we were kind of like mutual muses. We just fed off each other. And the five years was truly dog years, like 35 years. It tore us up, it took a big toll on us both, because we both really laid our hearts and souls out there every show. But some things in life happened and we both decided that it was time to put it down. And anyway, we did, we've played here in, for the last five years, we've really made a

wonderful name for ourselves...I go...anywhere I go, "You're the Diva, you're the Diva." Just even today, I went to a funeral this morning, the woman, I hugged her and told her I was sorry she lost her father, and she said, "I just heard about the Diva and the Dude, and I'm sorry about the Diva and the Dude." And I just kind of said...thank you, but...(laughter) but anyway, had a lot of fans and...that's who I began writing with, was Andy, we started songwriting together, and never recorded, never put out a CD, but performed our music...our original stuff at our shows, and Wonder Woman being one of our biggest numbers, and I'm still kind of whirling around in the sadness and the heartache of letting that go. But I know it's the right thing to do. I've already been offered an opportunity to join a Patsy Cline tribute band, and I've agreed to do it. (41:50) They don't play often, once a month...but that's fine. Andy and I played, over the five years, we went from playing 3, 4, 5 nights a week, down to...every weekend. Eight times a week, sometimes nine, ten times a month, sometimes...and I mean, that takes a toll on you. I'm in my sixties, Andy's in his fifties. About two years into The Diva and the Dude, I had...I developed nodules, and I had to have surgery. I took 6 weeks off. Boom, right back at it. So...you can't...it's in my blood. Another line from my Wonder Woman song is "Music's in my blood, yeah it's red and it's blue." I mean, hat's just the way it is....So I have these...you know, as I'm letting the Diva and the Dude go, I've got Patsy waiting in the wings, and I also perform monthly with a band called the Painkillers Blues Band, and so...you know, I still...the opportunities are there, and I am now at this point where I just want to be really choosy about what I'm doing, because, I mean, the family, the children, the grandchildren, they've all come along for the ride, and they've all been loving and supportive, but it also has just taken a toll on me physically, you know. I have the greatest of respect and admiration for performers of any kind, because you step out there on the stage and you...you know, you give it everything you've got. And...then you get done and you move on. You have to pick it all back up, put it all back together. And it can be glorious, really glorious, and also you show all your vulnerabilities...and, so it's beautiful, it's a beautiful line of work. It's great work if you can get it. And you know, I mean, the joy, and the awe, and the gloriousness of it, you know, it all, it's all connected, and it's all interwoven throughout who I am, into who I am. I was reading something a friend of mine had told me, that, just a couple weeks ago, she said, "I lost my Dad, and he was a musician," and...I think it was a Facebook friend of mine. And (that would be great, thank you) – she said "my dad was really in his element when he was on stage." And you know, I've heard that expression before, but I thought...that's the way it has been for me, my kids, you know, there were times when they were the adolescent years when they're like "Oh my god, look at mom," you know, "Look at my mom, she's up there, she's rockin' and rollin'!" And they were so embarrassed. But then they went thought the...they matured and it was like "Wow, that's my mom," and their friends were like "That's your mom?" And now, my grandkids, you know, I've performed at their schools, and they're like "Wow, your grandma kicks ass!" I mean, not...kids, but you know what I'm saying, "Your grandma, that's your grandma?" And you know, just because of the whole musicality, the essence of my life, that I've been invited to be a director for the holiday program at my grandkid's school, and...you know, I brought my brother into it, and we've played John Lennon's "Happy Christmas, War is Over," and you know I...I really wouldn't trade it for anything. But it has been a long and sometimes arduous road. And...it's good to look back.

KN: Was there anything attractive about the Champaign-Urbana scene in particular? It was the big city...

KH: it was the big city for me...and truly Champaign-Urbana has always been really fertile ground for growing musicians, you know, REO Speedwagon has roots here...for some reason the others who came from here, I mean, there are just people, musicians, who came from here, who have really spread out

and made their mark on the country, and really the whole world. Some Champaign people, you know, and that's pretty cool. I can't really think of any other ones right at the moment, but people that sprouted up here have definitely made their mark.

KN: How has the local music scene changed in the time you've been in it? Have you noticed any major shifts or differences?

KH: Well, I mean...the live music scene is still alive and well. There have been times, they say, where it's been...it goes up and it goes down, and it goes up and it goes down...I personally have not found that to be true for my own career. It's there...if I want it, it's there. But I know that it has had some cycles. The Elvis Brothers, that's the band I was trying to think of that has really made a huge splash, and really did something, and now Brad Elvis, the drummer, plays with The Romantics on tour, and Sven has his own band, his wife Chloe, and on and on. But anyway...yeah, there were some awesome old bars around, you know the Red Lion, Ruby Gulch, Nature's Table, a real jazz hub...that have come and gone, you know. Gosh, there was a Red Lion reunion. It was like 40 years later, something like that, that took place over near what used to be the Alley Cat, which is now Fat City, that all the old Champaign-Urbana folks, musicians and the bands, all converged, and it was just absolutely huge, a huge party. Performances and such. Yeah, I can't...I know there's been changes, and even with today, the music of today, which has...a lot of the music has a little bit more of a technological edge to it. Those...the young people are out there now, just going strong with it. And there's still some that have the real acoustic folk type sound, but the DJ is very strong now, and...there's a huge variety out there at this point. I think that might be one of the things that's changed the most, it's pretty much just rock and roll, and jazz, here in CU and it's really kind of grown and blossomed into a little bit more of a, you know, more spices, in every direction. So.

KN: And aside from what you've touched on already what would you say are some highlights of your music career?

KH: Well, my first full-time paying gig at Prairielands was one of the most exciting things that have ever happened to me, just...I really cut my teeth during that time, as a stage performer. You know, that really...you know, I mean, I knew I could sing, and I could do...I did the high-school musicals and such. But that's when I really developed...you know how, for instance, Beyoncé has Sasha Fierce, it's kind of like her alter ego, and that's kind of where...I began to experience that of kind of stepping outside of myself, who I was a mom, of young children, I kind of turned into somebody else. And over the years that person became known as Koko. That was my...I mean, there's a lot of people around town that see me and say that, and say, "Koko!" But that kind of became my alter ego. It is...and you know, as you, during the day, you know, you've got a show that night, and...you're doing all of the things that you do during the day, you know, you're doing the dishes, and fixing lunch, and maybe babysitting for the grandkids that day, or way back when at Prairielands when I would fix dinner for the girls, get them ready with their baths and get them tucked in, and the babysitter comes, and off I go, and you step on the stage, and all of a sudden, it's just like...boom, you know, "Here I am!" That person is way tucked in the back, and it's uh...that's a big experience. But the Prairielands, and honing that, cutting my teeth on being an actual stage performer...and the Patsy Cline. I don't know if I've ever enjoyed anything I've ever done, performance-wise, more than that. Getting to wear all the clothes of the period, and some of the

being my great-aunt and my grandmother's jewelry, from the cowgirl outfits to the cocktail dresses, it was...you know, the little button-up sweaters and the pencil-leg pants and the scarf, and the wigs, that was one of the biggest highlights, and...I loved playing with my brother. And him helping me to really reach my full Koko potential. And the Diva and the Dude, I believe, being...feeling free and open enough to write music with someone, and play it out...and then get the inspiration...from playing with my muse. My brother was my brother, okay. Andy Baylor was my muse. The Dude was my muse. And...I his, and it was...it was some of the freest, freest and happiest that I've ever felt in performing. So there have been...there have been a number of highlights over the years...over the years since 1980...that's...that's 30-some years, 35 years...

KN: And you plan to continue... writing music? Writing your own music?

KH: I do...I really do. I'm feeling very very...I've got a lot of music swirling around in me right now, a lot of lyrics, a lot of music...and I think, as you age, you know, you carry so many life experiences inside you that...it's almost as easy as, you know, falling off a log, to just put it out there and lay it down with some music. So I don't have my music-writing partner anymore, but...but I am pretty capable of, you know, creating on my very own. I don't play an instrument, so...you know, I've played a little bit of guitar. And I play a lot of percussion. But that doesn't...doesn't have melody to it. But I do, I sing into my phone and record snippets here and there, and that helps me to save ideas, and...I've got a lot of songs written that have not come out yet, I mean a lot of songs on paper, but I just have to find a way to make that happen at this stage of the game.

KN: Well...Is there anything that I didn't touch on that you wanted to talk about?

KH: I was thinking about, you know, nature versus nurture, and about, you know, having a natural, having a genetic musical ability, and then, you know, having...my brother was self-taught, I mean, our uncle taught him a few chords, and now he is a...I mean, a master craftsman on the guitar, and he's been playing since he was about 7 years old, you know. He's sixty...three, 63, and...then I think of the people who are so lucky to have been raised in an environment where music has been encouraged and, you know, required. Now, some people, they don't care if it's been required, they're not gonna do it. But if you have the innate gift, and you are encouraged...I mean, I just think that those are...those are the people who are unstoppable, you know, out there in our world, and I...I have longed for, you know, a re-do, where I...where my parents didn't divorce and I had the opportunity to really to have someone help me focus and put me...now, my brother did it, he was a different animal than I. And...but I've longed for that, you know, where I could have possibly gone, had I had a tiger mom, or...that kind of environment, I think that those are some of the luckiest people...in the world, you know, to have had that. So, I...I adopted at a certain point in my singing career, the...Popeye's motto, "I am what I am and that's all that I am." you know, and I said, "I've done what I've done with the best...in the best way that I could with what I have," and so...if...I always thought, "Well, if they didn't like me...that's...that's their opinion." And I just have always thought that a smile and a connection, an eye connection with an audience member, was...were my greatest strengths. And I teach now, I have performance students, and I work with people on performance skills, and one of the very basic things, besides teaching them just to open their mouth and sing, use your face to sing, not just the little sounds...one of the things that I just keep working with them over and over and over again, is to tell the story of the song. That every song is a story, you know. And I think that's where my small-town sensibilities and my upbringing did give me some gifts, of being able to really take a song in and feel it, and then, you know, present it, and

tell it, tell the story. And the biggest compliments I have ever received as a performer is, "You made me cry." I've always sung "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," you know, and I often will sing it to someone who's just lost someone, and I've actually sung that at some funerals. And you know, whenever I sing that song, people always say "You made me cry" and I would say, "Thank you." So that's always been very important to me, touching people....that's kind of what it's all about for me.

KN: And have you ever gone outside of the area? Have you gone elsewhere?

KH: Um, not...not too far. I mean, I was in a band, I forgot about Doctor Bop and the Headliners, a crazy band out of Bloomington, Indiana, and I was with them for a while. And...And I actually kind of performed in some other places besides Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. Um, yeah, I've been that far. But...oh, and my husband is a biologist and he's traveled quite a bit. He works in museums, and rivers, around and about, and...we've, I've traveled with him, so I've sung in Paris, I've sung the blues in Paris, I've sung the blues in London, we've been on trips to the Bahamas where I've sung, we've been to our...the King Biscuit Blues Festival in Arkansas, and I've sung there...my husband is kind of like a stage mother. And he'll go right up to the band and say, "My wife sings." And they'll get me up there, and I'll sing, and they'll...they always are really nice, and they always say, "Oh, come back any time!" And you know, Paris and London, that's pretty cool. We met a street performer in Paris, and we just started chatting with him, and he said, "Oh, I'm playing in a band on such and such and such and such tonight." And so we found our way on the train, and played there, and the owner, he had a bubble machine, and we were doing blues, and they were like a three-piece trio, and the owner's like, "Oh, Kathy, oh Kathy, you've got to come back, any time you come back..." So yeah, I have, I've sung in Europe.

KN: You're internationally known!

KH: Not officially...in London, we went to an open mic, and they paired me up with this awesome English guitar player named Barry, and we did Chicago blues, you know, for...and people loved it. Everybody thinks of Chicago blues, so it was pretty cool. Yeah, I've had some awesome experiences with music. And as you can see, it's very close to my heart, and my soul.

KN: Well, I know you're not feeling your best, but if you wanted to SING a little bit for the recording...we'd all be very happy about that. If you don't want to, it's totally okay.

KH: Yeah...I was thinking if you asked me...well, a song that the Diva and the Dude, we always end our show, and it's acapella, and of course it's from one of my faves, Janis Joplin, and I don't know if you want me to sing an entire song, or if you just want me to sing a little --

KN: Oh, whatever. Little bit's fine.

KH: But Andy and I, the Diva and the Dude, we always finished our show with, of course, we'd get people to clap (clapping noises)

Ms. Harden sings "Oh Lord, Won't You Buy Me a Mercedes Benz."

KH: So that's sort of like, the rough-and-tough and then the other side would be...

Ms. Harden sings "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

KH: There you have it.

KN: Thank you so much.

KH: Thank you, Katie.

[AUDIO ENDS]