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FONTELLA BASS
COMING FULL CIRCLE

presented by

CHERYL ANDRYCO

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

MASTERS degree in TELECOMMUNICATION



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**FONTELLA BASS
COMING FULL CIRCLE**

By

Cheryl Andryco

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

Fontella Bass
Coming Full Circle

By
Cheryl Andryco

In 1965, the hit song "Rescue Me" was released and went to the top of the charts; it went gold in two months. The lady behind the famous vocals was Fontella Bass. Plagued by the music business of days gone by, she was never credited for that song she co-wrote and sent to the top of the charts. She didn't begin receiving royalties until 1990, nearly three decades after the song's release. Fontella Bass fell from the top of the charts and eventually left the music business to raise her four children.

In 1990, Fontella struck a deal with MCA, the current owner of the song, and finally began receiving her due credit and long awaited royalties. In 1995, Fontella made a comeback with a new album, No Ways Tired. Although known mostly as an R&B singer, she turned her life over to God and is now devoted exclusively to gospel music. Fontella is on her way up again, musically and spiritually.

This thesis is aimed at exploring documentary-style programs and virtually every aspect involved in their creation. To accomplish this, a half-hour documentary was made about Fontella Bass. The focus of this documentary video thesis was to capture the essence of Fontella Bass, the person and musician, and tell a cohesive, entertaining story about her. This documentary explores almost every decade of her life, beginning with her childhood and concluding with her life today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very thankful to the many people, from Michigan to St. Louis, who helped make the story of Fontella Bass' life a little richer. Fontella has many friends and fans who were eager to help out in any way they could.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	1
Fontella Bass	1
II. THE STORY OF FONTELLA BASS	3
Literature Review	3
Her Background	4
Return to Gospel	8
Bass Sues American Express	9
Her Comeback	12
III. THE DOCUMENTARY	14
History of the Documentary	14
A Documentary Defined	16
Documentary Style	18
IV. PRODUCTION PROCESS	20
Choosing A Subject	20
Interviewing	22
Budget	26
Entropy	27
Shooting Stills	30
The Production	33
V. EVALUATION	36
"Take Two"	36
Evaluation	38
The Evaluation Committee	39
Analysis	40
VI. CONCLUSION	49
BIBLIOGRAPHY	53
APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Fontella Bass	55
Appendix B: Video Script	66
Appendix C: Evaluation Questionnaire	72

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Fontella Bass

Today's youth is probably not familiar with Blues pioneers Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, B.B. King, Son House or Bessie Smith, but no doubt they are familiar with rockers Eric Clapton, Peter Wolfe and the Rolling Stones. Many musicians of today were greatly influenced by Robert Johnson, Son House and the others. Without them, the younger generation may never have come to know the Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton. Within the music from our past, there is a story to tell and something to learn from it. From the legends to the little-knowns, there are artists who write songs that touch us in many ways and stay with us for many years. In 1965 came a song that was often hailed as the national anthem for the soldiers of Vietnam. Today, the younger generation hears it in commercials for American Express and Pizza Hut, in movies like Sister Act, Mo' Better Blues and Air America, and on TV shows such as Murphy Brown and Young and Restless. The song is "Rescue Me" and was co-written and sung by Fontella Bass.

Some songs come along that have such stamina, they stay with us for decades. The original performers, however, are often lost and forgotten among the remakes and never heard from again. Fontella Bass is just such a performer. She disappeared for nearly three decades soon after her "Rescue Me" success. Where did she go, what did she do, and what is she doing now?

To answer these questions, Fontella Bass' story became the subject of a half-hour music documentary production thesis which tells the story of how she started playing

music at the young age of 5, the road she traveled, and where she is now, professionally and spiritually, with all that has happened to her throughout her life. Fontella Bass made a comeback in 1995 with a new album, and she does have a story to tell.

CHAPTER II

THE STORY OF FONTELLA BASS

Literature Review

Fontella Bass is well known among musicians of course, but little has been written about her in music literature. There are many books on the subject of Rhythm and Blues, Rock-n-Roll, music legends, etc. but nothing specifically referenced to Fontella Bass. A search using Lexis/Nexis, however, a journalism database which contains virtually every article written in the past five to ten years on just about any topic, provided over two-hundred entry's on Fontella Bass.

Information was also found on National Public Radio (NPR) in interviews with Fontella Bass conducted by Terry Gross and another NPR host. These interviews provided sample questions which were studied prior to the documentary interview as well as providing additional information for research.

Additional information was acquired through a public memo posted on a musical newsgroup on the Internet asking for information about Fontella Bass. Several replies came back with helpful information. A video distributor of the old music TV show, Shindig, on which Fontella performed back in the 60's, provided footage of Fontella performing "Rescue Me" back in the zenith of her career.

Recent magazine articles, aside from those on Lexis/Nexis, were helpful not only for the information they provided but also for the pictures they contained which could be used for b-roll. Locating recent magazine articles proved quite a challenge. Public libraries can be a wonderful source for magazines but the more recent ones are often checked out,

damaged or at the bindery. An article from an old magazine which featured Fontella Bass and Bobby McClure's latest duet together was located, however, as well as an article about Fontella's latest album release.

A personal interview with Fontella Bass completed the research by providing first-hand information as well as clarifying previously acquired notes. The compilation of this information tells the story of Fontella Bass.

Her Background

Music has always been a part of Fontella's life. Her mother, Martha Bass, was a member of the Clara Ward Singers, a gospel group which toured with the Reverend C. L. Franklin, Aretha Franklin's father. Her grandmother, Nevada Carter, raised her when her mother was on the road singing (Ward N. pag.; Sachs 41).

Fontella got her musical start at an early age:

Beginning at age 5, Fontella would perform at funeral services, providing the piano accompaniment for her grandmother's singing. And by the time she was 9, Fontella was accompanying her mother on tours throughout the South and Southwest.

Fontella continued touring with her mother until the age of 16 . . .

("Fontella Bass" N. pag.)

During her teens, her uncles would sneak her out to Blues clubs. Fontella would often get up and play with her uncles, who were also musicians. She was destined for a career in music and her moment finally came:

When I was 17, I started my career working at the Showboat Club near Chain of Rocks overlooking the Mississippi. The following year I accepted a friend's dare and auditioned for the Leon Claxton carnival show. I made \$175 a week during the two weeks they were here. It was fantastic. I

wanted to tour with them but my mother wouldn't let me go on the road -- she literally dragged me off the train.

Oliver Sain and Little Milton heard my playing at the carnival, and as a result I got a job backing Little Milton on the piano. ("Fontella Bass" N. pag.)

This was Fontella's big break and she was excited. Milton and Sain were talented musicians and they were making a name for themselves:

In the late 1950's and early 1960's, the St. Louis area was a thriving center of rhythm and blues. The patriarch of the scene was a band leader-guitarist Ike Turner, who, like many St. Louis musicians before and after, had come up from rural Mississippi by way of Memphis.

Turner had been here for a couple of years, leading a band called the Kings of Rhythm, when blues singer Little Milton Campbell arrived in 1955. Soon, an old friend from the Deep South, saxophonist Oliver Sain, joined Milton and became his band leader. They began recording on the locally owned Bobbin label, offering Ike Turner some stiff competition . . . With Sain sharing the song writing and adding the fluid drive of his saxophone, Milton (like Chuck Berry) became well known enough to be picked up by the pre-eminent blues label of the time, Chess, in Chicago. (Barnes 4C)

Fontella Bass started off playing piano with the band but eventually she began singing as well. "One night, Milton didn't show up on time, and finally Oliver asked me to sing something. I was scared, but I went ahead anyway, and everybody liked it. So after that, I had a little featured spot in the show for my vocals" (Perkins 24). Milton and Sain eventually split up, however, and Fontella left with Sain; they became known as the Oliver Sain Soul Revue featuring Fontella and Bobby McClure, which is when Bobby McClure, an up and coming young singer himself, entered her life.

Fontella's music career began to grow. Recording opportunities came her way as she and members of the band recorded songs on the Bobbin label and at Technosonic Studio. Ike Turner produced their songs at Technosonic Studio (Perkins 24). Fontella wanted to perform with other bands though, and she and Oliver began to have their differences. In January of 1965, they had an argument over a New Year's Eve gig and Fontella decided to go her separate way: "Bass and her husband, trumpet player Lester Bowie, moved to Chicago . . . and she signed with Checker, Chess' R&B subsidiary label" (Perkins 25).

It was through Milton that Fontella met Leonard Chess, of Chess Records. Fontella and McClure recorded their Top 10 R&B hit "Don't Mess Up a Good Thing" early in 1965 on Chess and "by August Fontella would take the music world by storm with a No. 1 R&B and Top 10 pop hit, 'Rescue Me'" (Perkins 25). Fontella vividly recalls the day "Rescue Me" was created:

I went upstairs and Raynard was in one of the rehearsal rooms and he was playing. So he say, "Come on, come on in, I got this great idea." I said "Well good, let me hear it." And I said "Well, why don't you do this, or why don't you do that?" You know, I put my input in and he said, "Oh ya, well that's great." So we just worked on like a rhythm but the actual melody was not there. In those days that's the way records were recorded. They would come in and somebody would give you some paper with some lyrics and they would play the rhythm and you could put any melody you wanted over those rhythms . . . So that's writing and a lot of artists, not only I, but a lot of artists wrote songs that way. . . (Bass Appendix A)

The song was released in October 1965. It hit the R&B charts and stayed in the top 40 for 19 months and went gold in two months. "Rescue Me" was not only popular but had a style all its own with some talented people behind it who helped make it a success:

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[The song] featured a crack horn section led by soul tenor Gene Barge. It boasted heated call-and-response vocals, with Minnie Riperton among background singers. And it was driven by a crack rhythm section including drummer Maurice White (pre-Earth, Wind and Fire) and bassist Louis Satterfield, whose monster riffs are frequently credited with the song's success. (Sachs 41)

Bass was thrilled with her success but the music business was quite different back then and success came with its share of disappointments; "I had the first million seller for Chess since Chuck Berry about 10 years before," recalls Bass. "Things were riding high for them, but when it came time to collect my first royalty check, I looked at it, saw how little it was, tore it up and threw it back across the desk" (Perkins 25). Her royalties never amounted to what she deserved, particularly because she had co-written the song. Fontella "demanded a better royalty rate and artistic control . . . 'At the time, these were things women singers rarely asked for but I really thought I could change that as part of a new breed. What happened really snatched my heart out' " (Sachs 41). Fontella tried to take care of the business side of things. She approached her manager, Billy Davis, about signing the papers for "Rescue Me" only to be told not to worry about it. Even after the record came out with her name still not on it she was told it would be on the legal documents. This, of course, never happened (Bass Appendix A).

Fontella knew the role she played in "Rescue Me" and she also knew she wanted her name in the credits. She made a fuss for a couple years but admits, "it actually side-stepped me in the business because I got a reputation of being a trouble maker." (Strauss 16C). Fontella's follow-up to "Rescue Me" was "Recovery." The two songs sounded very similar. Chess wanted to "keep the same groove" (Perkins 25) but this meant Fontella couldn't explore her musical creativity and her husband, who was then experimenting in avant-garde jazz, sympathized. "Lester was getting as disgusted as I was with the music scene, so in 1969 we moved to Paris with the [Art Ensemble of Chicago]" (Perkins 25).

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They were welcomed warmly with their musical performances in Europe but returned to the States three years later. Fontella was ready to try again:

She had received an offer to record for the Paula/Jewel label, a small, independent operation in Shreveport, La., run by Stan Lewis . . . but the record never was able to get good distribution.

In 1973, Bass signed with Epic Records, a major division of CBS. Things finally seemed to be falling into place, but the erratic world of the music business soon ended those hopes. (Perkins 25)

Unfortunately, there was a turnover in management and "no dollar signs were by [Fontella's] name" so the deal fell through (Bass Appendix A). Although her music career was seemingly over, Fontella rediscovered her roots and began again.

Return To Gospel

Understandably, Fontella was discouraged with the music business, but by this time, she also had a family to raise. Fontella and Lester had four children together, two boys and two girls; Fontella was very devoted to them:

Bass spent the rest of the 70s and most of the 80s dedicating herself to raising her children. She slowly began to perform again in public in the late 80s, working on occasion with Oliver Sain, doing European tours . . .

While she was away from the popular-music scene, Bass also rediscovered her love for gospel music. (Perkins 25)

In 1990, she made a gospel album with her mother and brother, David Peaston, called Promises: A Family Portrait of Faith. The album was quite popular with gospel fans, so much so, that Fontella was invited to join a "fall tour of the West Coast, called Juke Joints and Jubilee, which [featured] both traditional gospel and blues performers" (Perkins 24). Fontella rediscovered what had been with her all along:

"Gospel was something that I ran away from, because I was raised up on it," says Bass. "When I would sing, I'd fight to get away from my gospel sound, and then somebody would hear that flavor and say, 'Why don't you keep that there?' I'd think, wow, they really liked that? I wouldn't think it would fit other types of music, but finally I realized that music is about emotion and feeling, and it doesn't really have anything to do with labels." (Perkins 25)

Fontella is true to gospel now and she performs it almost exclusively. She can usually be found singing every Sunday at several different churches around St. Louis. "Rescue Me" is always a part of her act when she tours, of course, but gospel is where her heart is and it shows in her performances.

Bass Sues American Express

In 1990, Fontella came to another turning point in her life. Despite the fact that in 1965 Fontella co-wrote and sang "Rescue Me," she did not begin receiving credit or royalties until 1990. Why did it take almost 30 years for this to happen? She cites two reasons, the first being racism and the second, money. It's no secret that blacks, particularly black females, were taken advantage of in the music business:

Fontella says she talked about [getting her due credit for "Rescue Me"] with people. But she didn't take any legal action because "I didn't have any documentation. I scribbled some words on a piece of paper when I recorded 'Rescue Me,' but I threw the paper away.

"Besides, things were different in 1965. Integration was just starting. I had to sleep in homes because blacks were not allowed in hotels. I had to go in the service entrance.

"When I was touring, I was one of the first blacks to stay in the Howard Johnson in Pulaski, Virginia. I say stay, not sleep. I was too scared."

(Viets 3D)

In an interview with fellow musician, Papa Ray, the two concur about the music business of days gone by, ". . . people have to be reminded, especially black artists in a business predominantly controlled by white people, that the idea that artists can have autonomy and control over themselves was just unheard of in the past" (Ray 5). She also admits, "You can be aware of things that go on but you still have to exist, you still have to work, you know, and you still have to make a living for your family" (Bass Appendix A). And although the money was never as much as it should have been, money was coming in, enough to put her complaints over "Rescue Me" on hold:

Fontella said there is one more reason she didn't pursue the songwriter's credit in 1965: "I was living in a housing project for \$40 a month. All of a sudden I was making \$125 a weekend for playing the piano. And \$50 or \$60 in tips. For 1965, that was big money."

Years later, Fontella says she realized how important the songwriter's credit was. (Viets 3D)

The music business has come a long way since, however, and Fontella feels that she, and others like her, paved the way; "I think we were pioneers when it came down to talking about royalties and about money up front" (Ray 5).

Finally, Fontella did fight back. Although it's not clear what finally gave her the proof she needed to reclaim her song, she was able to make a deal with MCA, which owns the rights to the Chess catalog (Morris 9). In 1990, when Fontella heard American Express using her song in a TV commercial for an ad campaign that ran in 1990 and 1991, she was finally able to fight back for her royalties. This day marked a turning point for her and the song and she remembers it with great detail:

It was a very hard winter for me. This was a winter of just ice all over St. Louis and the home that I live in here now, I needed a new roof, I needed a furnace, I needed a hot water tank, I needed many, many, many things. As a matter of fact, my children . . . all came home for Christmas. And they said "Mom," you know they gave me a pep talk, "you're gonna have to do what you know to do, you've taught us everything that you can teach us, we know, we understand, now it's time for you to be Fontella again and stop trying to be Mom." That sort of snapped me back into it. And when everybody left, my youngest daughter stayed. And I was so out of it that morning, it was January 1, 1990 and she said "Let me make you a cup of tea." And she did, and when she made the tea, we had this little 12-inch black and white TV set up in the kitchen because there was no furnace in the house and we had the gas stove on for heat. And she said "Let's cheer the New Year's in, things could be worse, we have our health, we have our strength." Now she's teaching me all the things I used to tell her, right? And I heard da da da da da da, [the "Rescue Me" theme] and we had our cups in the air and our heads went to the TV . . . (Bass Appendix A)

In 1993, a suit was filed against American Express Corporation and its advertising agency, Ogilvy & Mather, for more than \$50,000 and punitive damages. "The suit alleges that American Express and Ogilvy & Mather violated an American Federation of Television & Radio Artists [AFTRA] agreement governing the commercial use of music to which Chess was a signatory. According to the action, the AFTRA contract requires parties licensing a performer's recordings to also obtain the performer's consent" (Morris 9). American Express and Ogilvy & Mather apparently didn't bother to get consent even though they were supposedly aware they had to do so (Morris 21). Although Fontella was in much need of the money, the law suit meant more than that to her. It meant that Fontella

had control over her song for the first time ever and now-a-days, she says, "the song is going great for me" (Herndon B20).

Her Comeback

In February of 1995, Fontella released her new album, No Ways Tired. Although she has chosen the non-secular path, her recent comeback is due in part to secular music. Soon after the Juke Joints and Jubilee tour, an old friend from St. Louis, Hamiet Bluiett, called. Hamiet, also a musician, is a member of the World Saxophone Quartet, a group considered to be one of the great free jazz bands (Sachs 9). Hamiet had Fontella on his mind when it came time for his band's most recent album, Breath of Life:

I've known Fontella since I was a kid . . . and she's a friend of the family, so she's always somewhere at the top of my brain when I'm thinking of vocalists. I went to (Nonesuch general manager Bob Hurwitz) and said I wanted to use a vocalist on the album and asked him what he thought, should we get a male or female. He said, "Well, saxophones always make me think of a woman. Who do you have in mind?" I said, "Fontella Bass," and he turned around in his seat and looked at me and said, (excitedly) "Do you know her? Can you get her?" I just jumped on the telephone and that was it.

Hurwitz was so impressed with Bass' performance on the three tunes she sang on the WSQ album . . . that he offered her a recording contract.

(Durchholz 3F)

Nonesuch Records proved to be a company Fontella could trust, and one that understood her. In 1995, Fontella released her new album, No Ways Tired under the Nonesuch label:

[The] album features Bass unaccompanied except for her own piano playing, singing songs in the manner you'd hear her perform at Mount Beulah Missionary Baptist Church in University City, where she is a church musician . . . Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the album is Bass' inclusion of a pair of pop tunes, Bill Withers' "Lean On Me" and the Burt Bacharach/Hall David Chestnut "What the World Needs Now." "These songs are still spiritual," she says. "We need a lot of love in this world, you know that. So if somebody's gonna listen to Fontella, why can't Fontella give them some kind of message of what they need in life?" (Durchholz 3F)

The album not only took her to new heights but to new places. Soon after the album's release, she performed at Carnegie Hall and later that year in Washington DC for the 25th Anniversary of the Kennedy Center. The weekend she was interviewed for this documentary she was playing at a Blues Festival and was proud of it. She said with confidence and joy, ". . . everybody's gonna be there doing the Blues and I'm gonna be there to spread the word!" (Bass Appendix A)

CHAPTER III

THE DOCUMENTARY

History of the Documentary

Although the producer had a general idea of how Fontella's story would unfold on video, defining a specific format was helpful in keeping the program design focused. Thus the program came to be defined as a documentary. The following is an in-depth look at the documentary and its history as well as its application to Fontella Bass: Coming Full Circle.

According to Lewis Jacobs in The Documentary Tradition, as far as can be determined, the documentary style began with simple point and shoot recording of events such as a sneeze and people walking out of a building. The recordings lasted only a couple of minutes and date back to 1894. The documentary slowly began to evolve with a variety of events recorded such as parades, coronations and winter storms. The length of the recordings also grew. From 1910 to 1920, giant leaps were made in the film industry, the biggest breakthrough being the development of the enlargement of films from one reel to six reels. These longer version films gave rise to the modern day terms, "features," distinguishing them from "shorts" (2-9).

Soon, large, lavish buildings were built for the showing of movies, fictional style films that were backed by the commercial industry. The non-fiction film had been all but abandoned. This style of film was left to amateur cameramen such as big-game hunters, scientists and explorers. The types of films these amateurs produced had titles such as Empire of the Ants, 1905 and Amongst the Natives of Borneo, 1908 (Jacobs 4). As Jacobs points out, "These films exhibited a common quality. They isolated and defined

actuality with a sense of participation that marked a transition from a straight record toward a more personal expression on the part of filmmakers. There was a growing interest in probing into the social environment" (4). This is where the documentary really begins.

What these amateurs seemed to lack as far as commercial success, and what would catapult the documentary into one of the most respected of modern day film formats, was captured by an amateur filmmaker turned professional, Robert Flaherty. Due to perseverance in his endeavors, Flaherty came to know the film medium well. In 1922, his, and the industry's, first feature-length "film of fact," Nanook of the North appeared (Jacobs 7).

Robert Flaherty was an explorer by trade. In 1910, he set out on an exploration into Canada. On one of his explorations, his employer suggested he take a film camera. Flaherty came into contact with many Eskimos on his journey and this is where his film obsession began. He recorded many, many hours of the Eskimo life. His work on the Eskimos was impressive and people began to notice. In 1916, tragedy struck and the valuable lesson Flaherty would learn proved to be the turning point in his career and perhaps the one thing that set the documentary style format in motion:

In 1916, while he was preparing to ship the film to New York, his cigarette fell from the table onto scraps of film on the floor. Within moments his entire negative -- 30,000 feet of film -- was exploding into flames before his eyes . . . What remained was his work print. It was not considered feasible, at that time, to make a new negative from it. Flaherty persuaded himself the disaster had been for the best. In spite of enthusiasm he had aroused, he was not satisfied with the film. It was, he felt, too much a travelogue -- "a scene of this and that, no relation, no thread." Talking it over long hours with Frances, [his wife] he decided he must return to the north and make a different kind of film. It would center on one Eskimo and his family, and reveal characteristic events of their lives. (Barnouw 35)

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Flaherty's main character became the Eskimo hunter Nanook. Nanook of the North led to a deal with Paramount which led to Flaherty's second documentary entitled Moana (1926). It is with Moana that the term "documentary" was first coined (Barnouw 47). John Grierson, who was well known in the British documentary movement, is said to have had a "stormy hate-love relationship [with Flaherty], hailing [him] as the father of documentary while deploring his obsession with the remote and primitive" (Barnouw 35). Grierson's determination was to 'bring the citizen's eye in from the ends of the earth to the story, his own story, of what was happening under his nose . . . the drama of the doorstep' " (Barnouw 85). In the February 8, 1926 edition of the New York Sun, Grierson wrote in a review of Flaherty's Moana: "Of course, Moana, being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth and his family, has documentary value" (Rosenthal 21). Rosenthal notes in his book, New Challenges for Documentary, that "This is generally taken to be the first time the word 'documentary' was used in connection with film. Of course, what we understand by that term precedes Grierson's coining of it" (21).

Ellis called Flaherty a "visual poet" who "used film to show people he loved and admired to the rest of us" (24). The documentary has come a long way since Nanook of the North and today can be defined in many ways. The basic principles are the same, however, as the documentarists may be considered to be visual poets exploring their own pleasures and curiosities. And documentaries may be seen as Mike Wolverton puts it, "a kind of magical window through which one should be able to peer, see and hear all those intimate little things that sustain our reality and give us the vision to make it better" (4).

A Documentary Defined

According to Jack Ellis in The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video, there are three types of "creative modes" in film:

documentary, narrative fiction, and experimental avant-garde (1). Within documentary, Ellis identifies five distinctive characteristics: 1) subjects; 2) purposes, points of view, or approaches; 3) forms; 4) production methods and techniques; and 5) the sorts of experiences they offer audiences (1-2).

"As for subjects -- what they're about -- documentaries focus on something other than the general human condition involving individual human actions and relationships, the province of narrative fiction and drama" (Ellis 2). This point may be argued, however, because the documentary is often said to portray the world as it actually is and as people are in it, a capturing of reality. Ellis does illustrate his point, though, by comparing a 1940 British documentary, The Fourth Estate, with the well known 1941 Orson Welles' film Citizen Kane. The Fourth Estate is a documentary about a newspaper and the publishing process and Citizen Kane is about the character of a newspaper publisher and not considered to be a documentary.

The "purposes, points of view and approaches" aspect is "what filmmakers are trying to say about the subjects of their films . . . the purpose or approach of the makers of most documentary films is to record and interpret the actuality in front of the camera and microphone in order to inform and/or persuade us to hold some attitude or take some action in relation to their subjects" (Ellis 2).

The "form" characteristic says that documentaries "are derived from and limited to actuality. Documentary filmmakers confine themselves to extracting and arranging from what already exists rather than making up content" (Ellis 2).

The "production method and technique" characteristic "refers to the ways images are shot, the sounds recorded, and the two edited together. One basic requirement of the documentary is the use of nonactors . . . rather than actors. . . The other basic requirement is shooting on location (rather than on sound stages or studio back lots)" (Ellis 2).

Lastly, in the "audience experience," "communication rather than expression is what the filmmaker is usually after. Consequently, the audience is responding not so much

to the artist (who keeps under cover) as to the subject matter of the film (and the artist's more or less covert statements about it)" (Ellis 3).

Documentary Style

After all characteristics are analyzed, it is apparent that these characteristics, in conjunction with one another, begin to form certain documentary styles which co-exist. Depending on the message, these styles are important in shaping the documentary. Although from one author to the next, many styles of documentaries can be identified, Bill Nichols, in his chapter "The Voice of Documentary" from New Challenges for Documentary, has identified four: direct address, cinéma vérité, interview, and self-reflexive (Rosenthal 48-49).

Direct address is probably the earliest style of documentary. It is often referred to as the "Griersonian tradition" after John Grierson who is often credited as the founder of the British documentary movement (Rosenthal 48; Lovell 10). Direct address "befitted a school whose purposes were overwhelmingly didactic, it employed a supposedly authoritative yet often presumptuous off-screen narration" (Rosenthal 48). No recent examples are given of this style but old time, black and white, war documentaries would fit this style.

"Cinéma vérité" allowed for "an increase in the 'reality effect' with its directness, immediacy, and impression of capturing untampered events in the everyday lives of particular people . . . letting the viewer come to conclusions about them unaided by any implicit or explicit commentary" (Rosenthal 48-49). This style has been criticized, however, for lacking "history, context, or perspective" (Rosenthal 49).

A third style, "interview," uses direct address in that "characters or narrator [speak] directly to the viewer. In a host of political and feminist films, witness-participants step before the camera to tell their story. Sometimes profoundly revealing, sometimes

fragmented and incomplete, such films have provided the central model for contemporary documentary" (Rosenthal 49). Interviews might be considered to act as personal testimonials and emphasize the individual (Rosenthal 54).

Lastly, the "self-reflexive" style reflects "films moving toward more complex forms where epistemological and aesthetic assumptions become more visible. These new self-reflexive documentaries mix observational passages with interview, the voice-over of the filmmaker with intertitles, making patently clear what has been implicit all along: documentaries always were forms of re-presentation, never clear windows onto 'reality'. . . ." (Rosenthal 49).

Fontella Bass: Coming Full Circle contains some elements of "direct address" in that there is a narrator who assumes part of the story telling in a somewhat authoritative manor. Cinéma vérité is used in the live musical performances in which Fontella performs. The "self-reflexive" approach is also present in that the "voice" of the producer is evident. The story unfolds, to a great extent, the way in which the producer chose to tell it, although it is no doubt following the path of Fontella's true life. The "interview" style is the most pronounced style because of how heavily this documentary relies on Fontella's interview. Thus all definitions converge and the final product is a collective mix of styles.

CHAPTER IV

PRODUCTION PROCESS

Part of what made this thesis such a valuable experience was the amount of knowledge gained from producing it. Knowledge often came as the results of problems, however. This chapter discusses some of the problems that arose during the production of this thesis.

Pre-production was done between June and August, 1995. All arrangements were made as far as travel, crew, equipment, and scheduling. Preliminary research was also done at this stage. Production took place during September, 1995. Remote shooting was completed in St. Louis and Ann Arbor. Post-production occurred between September, 1995 and February, 1996. Final studio shooting was completed, narration recorded and on and off-line editing completed. Problems in the production occurred during all three phases.

Michael Rabiger discusses the specific aspects involved in the documentary process in his book Directing The Documentary. His book provides a vantage point from which to start in examining the following problems.

Choosing A Subject

Choosing a subject proved to be the hardest part of this thesis process. There were few limits to the possibilities of topics. So where does one begin? Rabiger suggests nine questions a producer should ask his/herself when choosing a documentary topic:

1. Is there an area in which I am already knowledgeable and even opinionated?
2. Do I feel a strong and emotional connection to it -- more so than any other practicable subject?
3. Can I do justice to the subject?
4. Do I have a drive to learn more about this subject?
5. What is this subject's real significance to me?
6. What can I find that's unusual and interesting about it?
7. Where is its specialness really visible?
8. How narrowly (and therefore how deeply) can I focus my film's attention?
9. What can I show? (28-29)

These questions are intended to help in choosing a documentary subject as well as assure that the topic chosen is one with which the producer can work over a long period of time. Even after taking these questions into consideration, choosing a subject can still be difficult.

Choosing an interesting subject was the first step. Much time and energy goes into producing a documentary and burnout can occur quickly, especially when a subject isn't interesting. As Rabiger points out, "It should be said loud and clear that making a documentary is a long, slow process and one must be prepared for one's initial enthusiasm to dim over the long haul. I cannot stress too strongly how important it is to wed yourself to more than a passing attraction" (28). Prior to deciding upon Fontella Bass, quality programming on television, which was to be studied by doing a case study on the TV show Northern Exposure, was being explored. The TV show proved interesting and entertaining enough to work with for the time period needed. Interviews were arranged with the executive producer on the set in Seattle, Washington. Permission to shoot on the set for one day was granted. Some of the show's writers in Los Angeles, California were also

contacted and agreed to be interviewed. This was all pending the return of the show for the 1995-96 season, however. In early June, the show was canceled by the network and the process of choosing a subject began again.

Rabiger also suggests reading, "Many documentary makers are omnivorous readers of newspapers and periodicals, and hoard clippings of anything that seems promising. Merely reading over your clipping file can start you thinking" (29). This is where this documentary began. The July, 1995 issue of Newsweek magazine had a short article about the release of Fontella Bass' new album, highlighting her life over the past thirty years. Research then began on this forgotten musician. Quotes and past interviews were found and Fontella and her story came to life. A topic was tentatively decided upon.

Interviewing

Fontella Bass' interview was the most critical element of this documentary. Interviewing can be particularly challenging if the interviewer has no training in journalism or any other specific area that might lend to the expertise of interviewing as was the case with this documentary. Thus research on the topic of interviewing had to be done.

Rabiger suggests formulating questions ahead of time so that they are focused; "you want to direct rather than follow your interviewee" (60). This can be difficult or even uncomfortable in some cases. Interviewing Fontella was a bit intimidating due in part to her celebrity and in part because of the pressure that her interview would be the basis on which the whole documentary would rest. During Fontella's interview there were several questions and confusions which required some probing, that is, some of her responses didn't completely clarify the question. For example, probably the most critical part of Fontella's life revolves around her "Rescue Me" fame. It is interesting and controversial because for nearly three decades she was never credited for this song that she co-wrote; she never received royalties for the song either. During the interview, the producer was trying

to determine the reason this was so and how Fontella finally got her due credit. The producer said to Fontella, "So now, you mentioned that, early on, you didn't fight too much for royalties perhaps because you were getting paid good at the time and you didn't know what it meant to have your name on those credits but in later years you didn't have any proof." Fontella went on to explain how her manager at the time told her not to worry about her name not being on the record and assured her her name would be on the legal documents. This never happened, of course. The producer wanted to know what, after all these years, was the proof that enabled her to finally receive royalties so she asked, "So why is it that today you're credited? What told America that I sang this song?" Fontella's response was, "Well, cause I did, I sung the song!" She then talked about some of the band members who performed during the recording and other trivial things that didn't really answer the question. The question was clearly poorly asked and did not clarify what the producer was really after. The producer should have continued to probe but felt that Fontella might have been offended by such an obvious question -- "What told America I sang this song?" So the producer moved on with a consoling comeback to redeem herself, "It seems you've left all the bitterness behind and you've come out on top." This illustrates what Rabiger talks about in his chapter "Believing In One's Authority:"

If you, the fledging director, doubt your importance and your authority to do what you are doing, remember that the man in the street probably doubts his even more . . . All this indicates that the filmmaker is not only allowed but even expected to make incursions into people's lives, all in the name of record making. Beginners find this hard to believe and even harder to act upon. At first one asks favors with an almost grotesque sense of apology and obligation. (64)

Prior to the above segment of the interview, during the New Year's Eve story, Fontella alluded to the fact that she did have what would later prove her business part in "Rescue Me." She said, "I knew things were gonna happen because I had set everything

down and spread it over the dining room table, do or die, and I got letters and letters and letters and I spent about \$200 on stamps and I located a lot of people to make those things happen" (Bass Appendix A). The producer should have followed up on this by asking Fontella exactly what she meant. Did Fontella mean that things were going to happen because she was going to get her due credit for the song, and what exactly did she set down over the dining room table? Later then, when questioning Fontella about being credited for the song, the producer could have easily said, "Let me rephrase the question" or "That came out wrong, what I meant was . . ." and perhaps received a better answer to clarify what exactly did happen.

It would have also been helpful to clarify the order of events that occurred around the song. For example, Fontella heard American Express playing her song in 1990 but she didn't file a law suit until 1993 -- why the delay? And was the American Express commercial she heard in 1990 the last straw, so to speak, which initiated her fight to get control of her song -- or did Fontella already have control of the song by January 1, 1990?

Interviewing can be difficult if the interviewer doesn't want to offend anyone by asking the wrong questions or probing too much when it seems that the interviewee wants to sidestep the question. Fontella seemed to sidestep the first question asked about her ex-husband, Lester Bowie, on how they met and the time they spent in Paris, even though she spoke highly of Lester later on in the interview (Bass Appendix A). The case may have been as simple as Rabiger suggests, "People often recount the same events in more than one way. When first posed an unexpected question, your interviewee will search and struggle to explain" (62). It may be that Fontella was simply caught off guard by the question about her ex-husband. In this case, the producer asked about Lester and felt a bit sidestepped by Fontella's response but still wanted to know more about their life together. One way in which to "initiate a sensitive topic is to first invite generalized, impersonal comment" (Rabiger 62). Whether or not this strategy was achieved, the producer left that topic of the ex-husband alone for the time being and came back to it a bit later after having

rephrased the question from "I want to talk about your ex-husband, Lester Bowie. Tell us when you first met him . . ." to "What was it like touring with your ex-husband?" For whatever reasons, Fontella opened up a bit more about him and provided some very good sound bites.

Rabiger also brings up an important point to remember at the end of the interview which was forgotten during Fontella's interview. That is to record a minute or so of quiet atmosphere at the scene of the interview for use during editing. This provides correct "presence" for the background atmosphere (68).

Interviewing is an art, and, as Rabiger and many others will often say, the secret to interviewing is the ability to really listen. This is not as easy to do as it might sound. Overall, the producer should have listened better and probed Fontella more on answers that needed more clarification.

Budget

Rabiger didn't discuss budget as it pertains to the overall production. Nor was there any budget information found in other student thesis productions. However, budgeting is the first step to determining what one can do. When creating this documentary, determining what kind of budget was available was crucial. It determined important factors in choosing a subject, such as what kind of travel was possible, what tape format could be used and what type of post-production could be utilized. For this documentary there was about \$2000 to work with. The expenses broke down in, roughly, the following way:

Vehicle Rental down to St. Louis	\$525
Betacam deck rental	\$500
Betacam tapes	\$250
Hotel in St. Louis	\$352
Expenses in St. Louis (food, tips, parking, etc.)	\$200
Phone calls	\$60 (est.)
B-roll footage (i.e. records, cassettes)	\$20 (est.)
Gifts for production crew	\$80
Narrator	\$40
Equipment	No charge
Editor	No charge
TOTAL	\$2027.00

The total cost is quite reasonable for the length of the documentary and subject matter involved. Equipment and labor costs are by far the most expensive aspect of a

production and in this case there was no charge for these services. One thing that, regrettably, could not be included in this production due to budget constraints was a professional stereo mix of the audio which would have cost an additional four to five hundred dollars.

Entropy

In his chapter "Avoiding Breakdowns," Rabiger says "If you prepare for the worst, you are seldom disappointed" (233). David Smith's Video Communication: Structuring Content for Maximum Program Effectiveness provides a term for this phenomenon -- "entropy." "Entropy" is the capacity of elements to undergo spontaneous change that leads to disorder and chaos" (13). It is the one thing that is forever present in every type of production. It is a curse which, though always present, has the unique power to console. As Smith says, "once we understand that [there's] a natural tendency of equipment to break down or of people to get hungry or tired, it's easier to maintain an attitude of composure when these events interrupt our production" (14). One who knows that things can be expected to go wrong at some point and accepts entropy as a force over which there is no control will prosper. This is due to the notion that entropy, usually only in retrospect, is often the most valuable part of the learning process, particularly in video production.

The following discusses the entropy that surfaced during the videotaping of this documentary. Though most of the discussion pertains to the technicalities of video production, each element affects the whole.

A good crew is critical to the success of one's production. Three different videographers were used for this production, a recent graduate of MSU, employed by WILX, channel 10, the local NBC affiliate in Lansing, and two telecommunication students who were actively involved in student organizations which gave them first hand shooting experience. It is not the intent here to put down the crew and producer in any way but to

point out what can go wrong under any circumstances, with complete innocence, experience not withstanding. The purpose here is to examine what can be learned when something does go wrong, no matter how it goes wrong.

Every part of the videotaping incurred some kind of entropy. For example, at the St. Louis Blues and Heritage festival where Bass performed, two cameras were used. A Betacam was used for close-ups and cut-a-ways of the audience while S-VHS was used for a constant wide shot of the performance. The producer recalls white balancing the S-VHS camera with a white piece of paper from her notes. The producer was informed by the cameraman on the Betacam camera that he had already white balanced using the backdrop of the festival stage, which was a white-colored tarp. Upon viewing the footage back in Michigan, the producer discovered that the Betacam footage was green throughout the whole tape. There are a couple possibilities for this, one being that the videographer white balanced incorrectly or that the tarp used to white balance on was a poor choice to use, for whatever reasons. Another possibility is that the camera was the cause. The producer came to learn that filters two and three were not working properly and could have therefore caused the discolored footage. Exactly what happened has not, and probably never will be determined. A very innocent mistake occurred here, whether technical or human error, but nonetheless, it happened. The problem could have possibly been avoided if a video monitor had been used.

The last song Fontella sang that day in St. Louis was her signature song "Rescue Me." Due to contract limitations, only four songs were allowed to be recorded during festival performances and to ensure that "Rescue Me" was one of those four songs, the producer had to be selective in which songs were recorded and therefore tape was stopped at certain times during the performance. This song was, for obvious reasons, an important one to be recorded. The producer instructed the videographer to record this song when it came up. The videographer even verified that he was indeed recording. It was later discovered, however, that the song had not been recorded. Again, it was never determined

exactly what happened but it is assumed that the battery was dead or the record button simply wasn't pushed hard enough. Both possibilities should have been noticed through indicator lights in the viewfinder but were not. Had the producer checked the viewfinder herself, this situation also could have possibly been avoided.

Entropy again persevered during Fontella's interview which took place on her front porch at her home in University City. One camera was used with crew consisting of one cameraman, one person monitoring the audio and video, and the producer conducting the interview. The image turned out wonderful but during post-production the producer soon discovered that there was a shrill, droning sound throughout Fontella's interview which would fluctuate in pitch. After some experimentation with the audio, it was determined that the sound was not a technical mistake but was part of the natural outdoor sound. The sound was made by bugs, most likely Cicadas. Fontella was interviewed on her porch in the hot summer air, where bugs are present, and the sound was constant though it did fluctuate. The interview footage had to all be re-edited and run through an audio board, eliminating some of the high frequencies so that the "bugs" were not as loud. The crew did not recall hearing this sound but since it was such a natural sound in the atmosphere, it was obviously missed by all. An audio production house in Lansing was contacted to see if the audio could possibly be fixed. Ironically, the company had itself experienced the exact same problem when recording a commercial with Dave Thomas, founder of the fast food chain, Wendy's. The producer was told there wasn't much to be done about the problem. The only solution would be to re-shoot the interview inside the house which was too late to do at that point. Eliminating some of the high frequency's helped the whining sound significantly but left Fontella sounding a bit muffled.

Entropy is not exclusive to technical aspects of a production. Arrangements to videotape at the St. Louis Festival were made with the festival management one month in advance. Two days before leaving Michigan, the producer received a call from the St. Louis Festival inquiring whether approval had been obtained from Fontella Bass' festival

manager to videotape Fontella's performance. The producer was not aware of this formality nor knew that such a person even existed, neither Fontella or her publicity manager ever mentioned this stipulation. The producer called New York and got in touch with Fontella's festival manager, Joe Killian. Fortunately, Mr. Killian was very understanding and willing to grant the producer her request. He drew up a short contract stating his two stipulations: only four songs were to be videotaped and Fontella Bass and himself were to have exclusive rights to the footage aside from the producer's thesis purposes.

The day the crew arrived in St. Louis, the producer called the festival people to again verify last minute details. The producer was asked if she had also verified everything with the festival lawyer. This was also a requirement in order to videotape at the festival the next day. The lawyer was contacted and he drew up yet another contract giving the festival exclusive rights to all the footage gathered outside of this thesis. The producer explained that the festival manager had these rights according to the previous contract she had signed with him. Fortunately this did not present a problem. The details were to be worked out if a conflict were to come up in the future. Twice, the threat of not being able to gather festival footage came up. Although there was disappointment in having to sign away all footage rights outside of thesis use, the producer was grateful for being able to gather any festival footage at all.

Although the entropy incurred during the production of this thesis was quite stressful at times, in retrospect, it provided many valuable lessons for the producer to learn from.

Shooting Stills

Prior to the trip to St. Louis, writing about a topic such as this seemed trivial. After the trip, however, it is with great regret that this topic was not explored more. An

important part of Fontella Bass' life involved pictures -- her baby pictures, her family pictures, and her career pictures all tell a part of her story. And within each picture, there may be another story to tell.

Rabiger calls his discussion on this topic "Picture Composition Analysis."

According to him, a static composition can have "visual rhythm," "dynamic composition," and/or "internal and external composition" (190-192). Within "visual rhythm" there is:

. . . an optimum duration for each shot to stay on the screen, according to its content (or "message") and the complexity of its form (how much work the viewer must do to interpret the message from the presentation). That duration is also affected by an invisible third factor, that of expectation. For the audience will either work fast at interpreting each new image, or slowly, depending on how much time they were given for immediately previous shots. This principle, in which a shot's duration is determined by content, form and inherited expectation, is called visual rhythm. (Rabiger 190)

Although this principle is more applicable during the editing phases, it is also an important factor to consider in the shooting phases. Being aware of this principle determines how long a shot should be held as well as determining exactly how it should be shot.

Thus, "dynamic composition" comes into play. In dynamic composition, "a new problem emerges, for a balanced composition can become disturbingly unbalanced if someone moves across the frame . . . A zoom in from a static camera position, for instance, almost always demands reframing since compositionally there is a drastic change, even though the subject is the same" (Rabiger 191). With this in mind, it is necessary to determine the motivation behind any movements to be used within a static shot in relation to the overall effect desired.

Lastly, there is "internal and external composition" in which there is a "momentary relationship between an outgoing shot and the next or incoming shot" (Rabiger 192). This is where the eye is intentionally directed to follow the movement on the screen from one

place to another. This can be done for any number of reasons, depending on what the director wants to achieve. This is a "hidden [tactic] because we are unaware that it influences our judgments and expectations" (Rabiger 192). This principle could have been used to create some interesting transitions had it been employed.

The above principles would have eliminated the following problems/mistakes and made the overall use of stills more interesting. The first mistake occurred while shooting a poster that hung in the Missouri History Museum advertising the Oliver Sain Revue which featured Fontella Bass and Bobby McClure. It not only told the story of the band but of Oliver, Fontella and Bobby individually. As it turns out, this poster contained one of only two pictures found of Oliver Sain. When Oliver Sain is introduced in the documentary, a single head and shoulders shot of him would have been nice to cut to but was not available. This would not have been the case, however, had the poster been shot differently. Oliver, Fontella and Bobby should have been shot individually, making it possible to tell Oliver Sain's story with a nice head and shoulders shot of him. This problem was solved by using the computer program "Photoshop" which was able to crop the original shot, eliminating Fontella and Bobby McClure. The program could not re-size the picture like a Digital Video Effects machine (DVE) could without much distortion of the picture, however, so an interesting design was generated and used to fill in the cropped edges.

A similar problem arose with a picture of Ike and Tina Turner. Fontella only mentions working with Ike Turner with no mention of Tina Turner. The only picture of Ike Turner is a two-shot of him and Tina. This picture could have been shot in the following way: a close-up of Ike, a close-up of Tina, a two-shot of both, a close-up of Ike's personal autograph to Fontella, and then perhaps some experimentation with zooms and pans from different angles. The length to width ratio of this picture was too awkward when cropped in "Photoshop" as Ike's single was very long and narrow. Thus, the whole picture ended up being used in the documentary.

Following the above principles, the more variety and number of shots a videographer can get out of a still picture the better. Not only will there be more shots to tell the story, but unique ways of stretching b-roll if needed will be created. An example of this is seen with the Nina Simone album cover. This section of the documentary lacked b-roll and a significant amount of jump-cuts needed to be covered due to the edits made in Fontella's narration. Initially, one long zoom from a close-up to a full shot of the album cover was used. This lacked interest, however due to the fact that the segment was quite lengthy for just one shot. The zoom was not motivated either since nothing specific was being revealed. After re-shooting the cover, three different close-ups were used with slow dissolves between each. This not only lengthened the b-roll but made it far more interesting and added a bit of intrigue by revealing only parts of the whole album cover at various times, toying with the viewer with respect to what he/she was seeing in relation to Fontella's story.

This section can be summed up in the way Rabiger concludes his:

If form is the manner in which content is presented, then visual composition is not just embellishment but a vital element in communication. While it interests the eye and even delights it, good composition is an organizing force that exists to visually dramatize relationships and to project ideas. Superior composition not only makes the subject (or "content") accessible, it also heightens the viewer's perceptions and stimulates his imaginative involvement, just as language does when used by a good poet. (193)

The Production

To explore the documentary style for this production thesis, a 25-minute documentary was created. Initial contact was made to Sara Lilly, Fontella Bass' publicity manager, at Nonesuch Records in New York during the early summer of 1995. Nearly

two and a half months after initial contact with Ms. Lilly, and much persistence, Ms. Lilly contacted Fontella on behalf of the producer. Fontella agreed to be interviewed and the producer was given her phone number to make all further arrangements.

A five day trip was made to St. Louis, Missouri with two videographers. The interview took place on Friday, September 1, 1995 at Fontella's home in University City, just outside of St. Louis. On Saturday, September 2, Fontella performed at the St. Louis Blues Heritage Festival in downtown St. Louis where footage was also gathered. Two cameras were used at the festival. On Sunday, September 3, Fontella performed at her church, Mount Beulah, with her No Ways Tired Band, in from New York for the festival. Two cameras were also used here. B-roll was also gathered at the Missouri History Museum, at sights in and around St. Louis, downtown University City, and from personal pictures Fontella lent the producer for a day. A hand-made portable "card-hod" was brought to St. Louis so pictures could be shot there and returned promptly to Fontella.

On Sunday, September 17, Fontella performed at the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival in Michigan. Footage was also gathered here with two cameras. Two videographers were again used and an audio feed from Creative Audio Co. in Ann Arbor was also permitted.

Pastor Shields of Mount Beulah Church in St. Louis and Clarence DeMyers, an old acquaintance of Fontella's who now lives in Lansing, Michigan, were also interviewed. Attempts were made to interview Hamiet Bluiett of the World Saxophone Quartet. Mr. Bluiett worked with Fontella when she performed three songs on his latest album Breath Of Life. The producer also attempted to contact the Nonesuch General Manager, Bob Hurwitz, the man behind Fontella's latest recording contract. Contact with these men was unsuccessful and the producer therefore chose to include no additional interviews aside from Fontella's since key players in Fontella's comeback, such as these men, could not be interviewed. The video, therefore, consists of Fontella's interview, festival footage from

St. Louis and Ann Arbor, church footage and b-roll pictures. The majority of the video was shot on Betacam and some on S-VHS.

The documentary was narrated by R.J. Lister, although three versions by three different narrators were recorded. Clarence DeMyers, as previously mentioned, was interviewed initially for one of several interviews that were originally going to be included in this program. Mr. DeMyers interview was not used but his voice proved to be quite impressive and he was again contacted regarding the role of narrator. Contact with Mr. DeMyers regarding the narration was difficult, however, so other narrators were sought out. R.J. Lister from the Theater Department at Michigan State recorded the first narration and Dan Bayer from WKAR Radio at Michigan State recorded the second. Contact with Mr. DeMyers was finally made after the other two narrations were recorded and his narration was also recorded. After comparing the three narrations, R.J. Lister was chosen. A professional narrator would have been the first choice for this documentary, however the cost would have run between \$200 and \$300 and budget constraints would not permit this.

The crew consisted of three videographers. All other arrangements and production were completed by the producer.

CHAPTER V

EVALUATION

"Take Two"

Although budget constraints limited what could be included in this documentary, many additional ideas were considered. More funding could have provided the opportunity for a second, follow-up interview. After reviewing the initial interview, many questions still remained, and the producer was, more or less, locked into one way of telling the story due to the nature of the questions asked and how they were answered in the first interview. Additional interviews in St. Louis could have also been included such as members of Fontella's family who represent a big part of who Fontella is as a person and an entertainer. The producer would have liked to interview at least one of her children as well as her mother, Martha Bass. These additional interviews would have provided perspectives on Fontella as daughter, mother and possibly on her love and talent for music through the eyes of those who witnessed it most profoundly and closely. Interviews with club owners and/or employees at the clubs in which Fontella performed when first starting out might have provided interesting insight about her career before "Rescue Me." Of course, these all would have taken more time to organize and would have required more than one trip to St. Louis.

A trip to New York would have been beneficial as well. An interview with Hamiet Bluiett of the World Saxophone Quartet, who, as mentioned previously, worked with Fontella when she performed on his latest album, could have provided testimonial as to Fontella's singing talent and overall stamina as a comeback performer. Bluiett's album

played a big part in Fontella's comeback and an interview which articulated that aspect of her life would have been beneficial to the development of this documentary.

The World Saxophone Quartet album was also inspirational in Fontella's comeback when it impressed Bob Hurwitz, the general manager of Nonesuch Records, enough to offer Fontella her own recording contract with the company. An interview with Hurwitz could have provided insight into this great turning point in Fontella's life as he could relate, first-hand, what it was about Fontella that impressed him so much and why he decided to offer her a recording contract.

With each of these interviews, b-roll would have probably increased two-fold. This is one thing the producer found she was in desperate need of. This documentary could have definitely benefited visually from less use of Fontella's interview and more b-roll conveying the stories she was telling.

From B. B. King to Al Green to Natalie Merchant, Fontella has performed with and alongside talents across the musical spectrum. Interviews with some of these performers might have lent credence to the stamina of Fontella and her music that has withstood decades of musical change.

In retrospect, many additional ideas could have been included to re-create this documentary many times over. There are also things that the producer learned along the way that should have been handled differently and would have had an impact upon the final project.

As the thesis advisor suggested, the initial contract made between the festival manager and the producer regarding footage rights could have been drawn up differently in ways that both parties would benefit from, such as allowing the producer unlimited recording rights during the festival and use of them afterward in order to promote the documentary for possible broadcast. The producer, Fontella, and ultimately the festival manager could have all benefited from more exposure of Fontella's comeback. The same should have been done with the S. Louis Blues Heritage Festival organizers. By limiting

the use of Fontella's footage at their festival, they limit the potential publicity of this annual event.

Evaluation

Though video production is typically a highly subjective medium, basic guidelines and methods do exist and form the basis of what one might call a learning pyramid in video production. One can learn and grow from this base as experience is gained by working within the video production industry. The evaluation process is geared toward gathering information about some of the basic video production guidelines. The evaluative process also aims to gather opinions from various industry professionals to acquire a basic knowledge of what may or may not influence program design. Evaluation from these different backgrounds covers a broader base of knowledge and experience than if evaluation had been geared exclusively toward one type of industry professional and can thus serve many purposes for the new producer. Although evaluation is mostly subjective, the evaluation data is useful to gauge overall program effectiveness by determining if the viewer has a clear understanding of the program message.

Questionnaires were designed for use as an evaluation tool and were distributed to video production industry professionals to gather feedback. The questionnaire contained nineteen questions, six of which were closed-ended and thirteen open-ended. Of the six closed-ended questions, two provided room for additional comments. The questionnaire was designed to elicit subjective feedback; even where an objective response was asked for, evaluators could elaborate on their opinions.

There were limits in this documentary that, in some cases, hindered the final project as mentioned in the previous section. These limits were also briefly eluded to in the questionnaires sent out for evaluation so that the evaluation focused on what was done with

the documentary rather than what could have been done with it. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in appendix C.

The Evaluation Committee

The industry professionals chosen to evaluate the video production which accompanies this thesis were contacted in January of 1996. Initial contact was made by phone, followed by a letter accompanying the video and questionnaire. The following is a brief description of the panel members.

Eric Schultz is a producer/director at WKAR TV-23, the local PBS station at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. Eric is an Emmy award winning producer and an accomplished musician. His productions often include musical style programs.

Professor Lawrence Redd serves as Assistant to the Dean for Minority Affairs in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences at Michigan State University. His interests in music date back to his thesis entitled The Impact of Radio, Motion Pictures, and Television on the Development of Rhythm and Blues and Rock and Roll Music. He has also authored the book Rock Is Rhythm And Blues: The Impact of Mass Media.

Keith Bassar is a videographer for the local NBC affiliate in Lansing who shoots and edits a popular weekly series entitled "Route 10."

Sandra McPhee is a producer/director in the Detroit area. Having worked at all three network stations in Detroit, she is currently employed at the ABC affiliate, WXYZ, Channel 7, working in "Special Projects."

John Hammond is a Producer/Director with the United Auto Workers (UAW) in Detroit, Michigan; he specializes in industrial video. He is also the President of the Michigan Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (NATAS).

Professionals were chosen on the basis of their background experience. For example, four members have technical experience in video production, but only John Hammond and Keith Bassar have a full working knowledge of videography and audio skills. The technical aspect of the evaluation is important and although all panel members may be capable of comment on the subject, specific technical knowledge was desired.

Acquiring panel members with some knowledge of music was also important. Eric Schultz was not only a musician himself but has experience in producing music programs similar in design to this production thesis. Dr. Redd is well versed on music, specifically Rhythm and Blues music, through his writings, and no doubt he was familiar with the era of music in which Fontella Bass began her journey.

Analysis

The following section discusses individual questions and the strategy behind using them and then examines the panels response to these questions. Determining if the viewer was aware of who Fontella Bass was prior to watching the program was important. It is possible to watch a program about a subject one has never heard of and still enjoy it. It is also important, however, to clarify what the program is about early on so that the viewer will not be confused. Question one and two were designed to determine if the panelists had known who Fontella Bass was prior to viewing the program so that the clarity of the program could be evaluated. Two of the panelists knew who she was, two did not and the fifth panelist marked "name was familiar." Question two asked if it was clear at the start of the program who Fontella Bass was and what she was known for. Four out of five panelists said this was clear, one panelist said it was not. Interestingly, the panelist who did not think it was clear who Fontella Bass was at the start of the program also did not know who she was prior to watching the program. The other panelist who did not know of Fontella Bass prior to watching the program did think it was clear at the start of the

program who she was. This may mean that the program is more clear, at least in the beginning, to those who have some knowledge of Fontella Bass. If this is the case, however, the program is not completely detrimental to those who are not familiar with Fontella as evidenced by the panelist who did not know who she was and yet found the beginning of the program to be quite clear.

Panelists were asked to rank their general attentiveness while watching the video. Three of the five ranked their attentiveness as "high," the fourth ranked it "average" and the last ranked it "above average." The panelist who had not known of Fontella Bass and was unclear about who she was at the start of the program, still ranked attentiveness as "high."

General attentiveness during a program can be directly related to how the story unfolds. Although most panelists attentiveness was high, they found that the flow of the program could have been smoother. Most panelists seem to be referring to content flow in their comments. One panelist said, "References to various musicians assumes the viewer knows who they are. Set up track would help." Again, this is the panelist who did not know who Fontella Bass was. Another said to "tighten the bytes." In contrast to this comment, another panelist approved of the flow saying, "She was allowed to tell her story in a leisurely pace." And yet another panelist said, "I was left with a vague impression that Fontella repeated herself unnecessarily, but perhaps this was intended as a way of emphasizing a strong belief or important story."

Most of the panelists agreed that the program conveyed a complete story, taking into consideration the program length. Comments were quite positive from "covered very thoroughly" to "I feel like I really know who Fontella Bass is." One panelist who did not think the story was complete remarked, "No, not complete 'story line.' Many people were mentioned and shown but left me wanting to hear from them to add more body or completeness to the story." "Completeness" to this panelist meant that more variety and testimonials and/or proof backing Fontella's story was needed in the "story line" in order to satisfy this viewer. This panelist interpreted completeness differently from the others; the

"completeness" the question specifically referred to was the overall story and whether it adequately covered each aspect/era of her life.

Question six asked: Although budget constraints limited additional interviews, they were considered. What other interviews, if any, would you have included in this program? There are many possibilities for additional interviews and although the producer had a good idea of other interviews to include, knowing what others would have included was interesting. As mentioned previously, other interviews the producer had in mind included Fontella's children, to highlight the personal side of the singer; someone from Chess Records who could collaborate Fontella's story; her old friend Hamiet Bluiett of the World Saxophone Quartet who could comment on her as a singer as well as friend; and Nonesuch Records General Manager Bob Hurwitz. The panelists had similar ideas regarding additional interviews. They suggested "other musicians, record company representatives who were there in the early years, and maybe her ex-husband and children . . ." Another panelist mentioned "a Checker Record producer for Ms. Bass; musicians who played with her; notable people in the business. Barry Gordy, Quincy Jones, etc. talking about her impact and importance." Although one panelist did mention possible additional interviews, this person was not completely convinced they were needed: "I'm not sure I would have included much in the way of additional interviews. I liked the blend of narration and Fontella Bass' comments." The producer, however, believes that the documentary could indeed benefit from additional interviews.

Question seven asks what one thing could have been improved in this program. This question's purpose was to limit the response to only one improvement of the program in hopes to acquire the most important or bothersome element on the viewer's mind. The reactions were mixed and are as follows:

"The purpose of the program was unclear in the beginning. A track may have helped let the viewer know who Fontella Bass is and why her story is worth watching. It could also have set up the 'full circle' idea early in story development."

"Softer video transitions (more dissolves), more period video. Pacing could be better. Too much from Ms. Bass -- not enough other interviews."

"Don't know. I thought it was just fine. I liked the attention to good audio. I played it on a HI-FI stereo VCR and good stereo speakers and the quality was great. The narration was okay but maybe could be better."

"Additional interviews."

"I'm not sure, but I am thinking that some of the interview passages might have been more tightly edited."

Two responses touched on the same thing -- more interviews, but for the most part, all panelists had different ideas about improvements. One panelist was concerned with the story, or script, one with flow (transitions and pacing) and one with the narrator. Although many things might be improved, no one production element stands out as detrimental.

Next, panelists were asked to comment on the overall content of the video, thus looking at the video as a whole, and not focusing on the smaller elements that they may have liked or disliked. Most comments were positive. Ms. McPhee said, "The quality of the video was excellent. Nice creative use of video transitions. Great compositions in many of the shots. Effective multiple camera look in many of the performance sequences." Mr. Bassar and Mr. Hammond both commented on the turntable shot at the opening of the video, saying that they liked it, however Mr. Hammond noted that he thought repeating the shot later in the video didn't work. Professor Redd felt that the "perspective was very good -- concept was clearly focused." And Mr. Schultz commented, "I think the video is excellent in most every way. I have a real sense after watching the video of who Fontella Bass is and was and the struggles she has gone through."

Clarity of the video was again brought up in the questionnaire when panelist were asked if the program left them with any questions regarding Fontella Bass' life after viewing it. The strategy here was to have the panelist answer a few questions about the video after thinking about it and then be asked to determine whether they had further

questions about Fontella's life. Although panelists may not have been clear on some aspects of the video, most panelists had no further questions regarding Fontella's life. One panelist did not give a positive or negative response but did comment saying, "Not really [a] burning question, but a desire to hear more of her music." The panelist who was left with questions after the program remarked, "Briefly -- look at her mother -- and visually place her in context with the Clara Ward singers. The connection is mentioned but not shown." Although it is not completely clear where the lack of clarity in this comment lies, it could be assumed that the viewer wished or expected to see some interaction between Fontella and her mother and perhaps be given an explanation of how her mother's singing influenced young Fontella. The narration could have also failed to clarify this connection. It should be mentioned that one panelist did not respond to this question.

Similar to the question on attentiveness, panelists were asked to rank their general enjoyment of the program. The panelists who did not know who Fontella Bass was still enjoyed the program, marking "high" as their responses. The other panelists marked "high," "above average" and "average."

Production elements, as always, are important. Panelists were asked to comment on the following production elements: overall interview with Fontella Bass, pacing, quality of image, lighting, quality of sound, continuity (smooth transitions between shots), b-roll used, and music used throughout.

Comments on the overall interview with Fontella Bass were positive overall. Ms. McPhee said, "Great job! Off-camera interviews are challenging. You really brought out her personality and captured her energy. Good clean in-cues and out-cues." Mr. Hammond said that it could be cut a lot but that it was basically informative. Professor Redd, Mr. Schultz and Mr. Bassar all thought it was very good.

Pacing received "good" and "excellent" remarks. Mr. Schultz added, "There were a couple places where I sensed dragging toward the end, but in general, I thought the pacing was quite good." Mr. Hammond felt the pace was not quick enough. Mr. Bassar

commented: "I especially like how the changes in her life were allowed to unfold only after each aspect of her life was given time and attention."

With regard to image quality, Ms. McPhee thought it was exceptional overall and added, "Nice elements and attention to detail." The other panelists remarked "good."

Lighting was also regarded highly by Ms. McPhee, particularly in the interview, but she did mention she thought the church scene lights were a bit low. Mr. Schultz also commented that he particularly like the lighting in Fontella's interview. Other panelists again remarked "good" and "excellent."

Quality of sound received very positive comments -- two "excellent's," a "Fine!" and two "good's" Ms. McPhee also mentioned that mixing natural sound in when using cut-away's that call for it would help. She gave the example, "like shots with hand-clapping call for matching audio." It is not clear exactly what she meant without a specific scene mentioned. It's assumed she was referring to the hand clapping in the church scene which does coincide with the natural hand clapping sound but her point seems to be that natural sound is a valuable element in audio and warrants close attention.

There was some conflict on the continuity of transitions between shots. Ms. McPhee thought the transitions were effective and the matching action edits were clean. Mr. Hammond, on the other hand, thought the program could use more variety in transitions. Professor Redd, emphasizing the fact that a transition involves more than just video, felt that, "the visual and audio were sometimes not parallel. For example, the moment she and daughter were together toasting and "Rescue Me" came on the radio, I wanted the song rolled in under the storyline but it was late though present."

Panelists had much to say about the b-roll used throughout the program.

Ms. McPhee: The b-roll that was used helped advance the story line. Good use of historic footage, and I especially liked the use of the film clips. I would, however, liked to have seen Ms. Bass in other situations . . . recording in a studio, or maybe at home with

family and friends. These additional scenes would have given her more depth and made the viewer better appreciate her experiences.

Mr. Bassar: Good, it was effective and not distracting from the story which was really just Fontella Bass. Actually I'm not sure I remember anything specific which would mean that all shots just seemed natural to the story and the flow of the story.

Mr. Hammond: Basically good -- but more movement on the still images and record covers and more period motion video would help it.

Mr. Schultz: Creative use of available b-roll and great historic footage. I liked the effect of dissolves with sheet music early in the program. At a climatic part of the program toward the end, there is a gospel performance. I wondered why there was a rather long shot of a instrumental solo, rather than shots of Fontella? Perhaps you could have used this music and added a collage of images from Fontella's life.

Professor Redd answered this question by referring back to his comments on continuity which suggested that the b-roll used was not always used in conjunction with narration.

Lastly, panelists were asked to comment on the music used throughout the program. Both Ms. McPhee and Mr. Hammond brought up good points. Ms. McPhee noted that although music was used to punctuate certain scenes effectively, from a production perspective, she thinks it is distracting when video and audio are in conflict. She gave the example of people singing where the music doesn't match. Although it is unclear exactly where in the video she saw this, her point is a good one. She also emphasizes once again to use natural sound whenever possible. Mr. Hammond strayed a bit from the question but his comment is something to consider: ". . . it looks as if she only had one song that led her life. That's very little to build a show around. I would focus more on her accomplishments legally to protect her rights." Keith Bassar thought the music was "excellent." Mr. Schultz felt the "coordination of music with images and narration seemed quite effective and integrated."

To complete the questionnaire, the panelists were asked an open-ended question in order to elicit a response to the program in their own words. Ms. McPhee praised the work overall but again emphasized the importance of a strong beginning:

"I was very impressed with the program. Technically, the quality of the video and audio was good and the editing was clean and effective. Creatively, the producer made good use of a variety of techniques to keep the story interesting. It is also evident that a tremendous amount of time and effort went into the research and pre-production process. Documenting history in an interesting and compelling way is a difficult thing to do on videotape. It calls for the producer to be creative and to look for photographic opportunities that help advance the story without threatening its integrity. The producer did a great job in this effort with the use of elements like the carnival film, and the funeral home shots. Fontella Bass tells a wonderful story of struggle and success, but a television program has to hook the audience at the very beginning. If this effort has one short-coming, it's that it doesn't give the viewer a reason to care soon enough."

Mr. Hammond's remarked: "On the 'live' performance, a wireless lav should have been used to get more presence." It would have been nice to know what specific performance he was speaking of due to the fact that the Ann Arbor performance music came from an audio feed and was very professionally done. It would be interesting if this comment was directed at all three live performances since they all had very different audio sounds.

Mr. Bassar was very gracious with his comments, saying he enjoyed this video as much as a biography he recently watched on the cable program Arts & Entertainment (A&E). In fact, he thought some of this video's transitions were somewhat smoother than those on A&E. He also liked the order in which the story unfolded, that the story touched on a little bit of every major aspect in Fontella's life.

Mr. Schultz said, "My overall reaction is extremely positive!"

Professor Redd's comment: "To this point the information was well presented and illustrated creatively for the most part. Just a few places in question. Top marks for what is done. Nonetheless, without additional interviews it stands as a narrated interview. One aspect of defining documentary is compelling the viewer toward a point of view. While I want to accept Ms. Bass's testimony, a more compelling focus would be made by a cross section of deposits."

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Overall responses from the questionnaires suggest that this video production has been a worthwhile endeavor and is certainly a good start to a broadcast quality program. The evaluations were helpful in that they provided constructive criticism which gave the producer objective views of the program. Evaluation comments were positive overall despite the fact that panelists had varied backgrounds which seemed to influence their comments. It is interesting to speculate how each of the panelists may or may not have been influenced by their professional experience, background, personal opinions, etc. For example, one of the panelist who did not know Fontella Bass seemed confused about design elements within the video such as clarity in the introduction and the identity of musicians who were mentioned throughout the program. It could be assumed that this program will work best only with those viewers who are familiar with Fontella Bass. It may also be assumed that confusion is a frequent occurrence with any type of program in that every viewer cannot possibly be familiar with every topic explored in a program. This may be a strategy for some, to hook the viewer and not tell them up front exactly what they are about to encounter. And it could be taken at face value that the beginning of this program was simply not as clear as it could have been.

There is also the issue of professional background. Mr. Hammond works in industrial TV, Ms. McPhee works in news but specializes in "special projects" which often involve programs similar to this one, and Mr. Bassar works exclusively in electronic news gathering (ENG) where it is not uncommon to have to put one or more segments/stories

together in one day, and sometimes a couple of hours. However, Mr. Bassar also works with one of the journalists who does a weekly segment on anything from making apple cider to marble collecting. These segments are relatively short but do tell a complete story. Mr. Bassar is thus familiar with putting together short, cohesive stories involving all elements of production. Mr. Schultz is a musician and does have many credits to his name in music-style programs. Professor Redd knows a great deal about music through his studies and own personnel interviews with musicians. Taking into consideration the panelist's backgrounds, it is interesting to speculate about their comments.

The producer had the opportunity to work with Mr. Hammond for a day and observed the editing of one of his projects, the UAW's video newsletter which is sent out across the country. The newsletter called for an "upbeat" look. That is, a program, not unlike magazine shows on network TV, which is fast-paced and focuses on a variety of camera angles, graphic effects/transitions, etc. in an effort to be anything but dull. Mr. Hammond's comments seem to support what he does in his own program. He used phrases such as, "pacing could be better," "not quick enough," "use more variety in transitions," "more movement," and "(interview) could be cut a lot." Ms. McPhee, on the other hand, who works on projects similar to this one, seemed not to be as concerned with these elements. Her comments are somewhat contradictory to Mr. Hammond's: "transitions were effective," "good clean in-cues and out-cues" (on interview), "good" (pacing), and "nice creative use of video transitions." Mr. Bassar, who may be said to fall somewhat in the middle of McPhee and Hammond as far as video work, and is most accustomed to faster-paced segments by nature of the news business, found the pacing to be "good -- I especially liked how the changes in her life were allowed to unfold only after each aspect of her life was given time and attention." Professor Redd, coming from an academic background, made comments that emphasized his need for clarity and complete presentation of information and definition of stages, as you might find in a well designed story, such as a cohesive beginning, middle, and end. Some of his comments are as

follows: "not a complete story line," ". . . add more body or completeness to the story," "a more compelling focus would be made by a cross section of deposits." This last comment might be viewed as character development through the use of other characters as a writer might do in a story or perhaps it could also be viewed as third person dialogue as the writer speaks to the reader about the character.

Professor Redd's comment regarding his overall reaction to the program was probably the most insightful. He points out that "One aspect of defining documentary is compelling the viewer toward a point of view." It is evidenced that this has been accomplished to some extent by the comments that Mr. Schultz and Mr. Bassar make. Mr. Schultz: "I have a real sense after watching the video of who Fontella Bass is and was and the struggles she has gone through." It could be assumed that Mr. Schultz is more sympathetic toward Fontella after having watched the program. Mr. Bassar: "I feel like I really know who Fontella Bass is; before this she was only the name on the song and the voice that indelibly etched those words "Rescue Me" onto one's soul thirty years ago." Mr. Bassar certainly seems to care more about Fontella as a person. Both these panelists could be said to be on Fontella's side, thus accepting her point of view on life, music, etc. It should also be noted that the producer also shares Fontella's point of views. It seems as though this program has not failed completely in swaying the viewer's point of view, yet, as Professor Redd emphasizes, while he wants to accept Fontella's testimony, "a more compelling focus would be made by a cross section of deposits." It is not absolutely clear what is meant by "deposits," however. Perhaps he meant testimonials from others to "secure" what Fontella was feeling and had experienced over the years. Nonetheless, his point is well taken and the producer agrees with his assessment.

Regardless of the feedback, this has been an invaluable and worthwhile experience for the producer. What has been learned on an individual and personal scale can never be measured by a grade but perhaps only by the success that will follow. As many different views as there are within the video production industry, there are a vast many more outside

of it. And while it is impossible to please everyone, the feedback producers receive from colleagues and viewers -- and oneself -- is an ever-present force which keeps them forging ahead on the never-ending road to perfection.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FONTELLA BASS INTERVIEW

FONTELLA BASS INTERVIEW

CA: Let's start at the beginning when you first started performing at funeral homes, talk to us about that.

FB: Well, you know my grandmother had other children, one uncle is younger than I am and there's, you know, the rest are older than I am. And my uncles, all of them were musicians and they played the piano. And one night my uncle, he didn't want to go, so I was always afraid of, you know, dead folks, so they talked me into going, he told me he would buy me a popsicle, ice cream for the whole week if I would go. So I did and that's how I got started. That's how I started playing for the funeral homes. And Mr. Walton would walk me in and walk me out, you know, so I would actually never, you know, see the bodies, you know, I was just taken to the piano and my grandmother and I would sing and they would, you know. And a lot of people around me from St. Louis remember me from that because I played for their mother or father or uncle or somebody you know, relative in their family, so that's how I got my start.

CA: Tell us a little about your mother and grandmother, what were they like?

FB: Well, they were homebodies but yet they were musicians, ya know, my grandmother sang in the choir at Pleasant Green and my mother went out on the road with the Clara Ward singers and . . . my grandmother was very strict but she gave you your way. As I got older I realized what she was doing, you know. We would have a talent show in the family and everybody would, you know, sort of practice for the week for the big talent show like, you know, what are you gonna play? And I could fool my grandmother but I couldn't fool my mother, sometimes I could fool her, like when I started taking music lessons, you know I would just play anything and my grandmother would love it, she'd say "Oh, just play that again," and I would have to remember what I'd played but it wasn't the lesson! So one evening my mother heard me and she said, "No, that's not your lesson." So I got in trouble for that. I used to, when I wanted to go out and play or if I wanted to get away from the piano or music lessons, you know, I would just serenade them with anything, other than my lessons.

CA: How did they feel about secular music? 3:03:55:29

FB: I don't remember ever being into secular music. Matter of fact, we were into radio then, television wasn't a big thing. My mother said I could watch TV anytime but secular music, no, it was just something that wasn't played in the home.

CA: What was it like with your mom away on the road, you said you were raised by your grandmother? 3:04:30:17

FB: Ya well, at that age it wasn't a miss because I was the only child at one time and being with my uncles, you know, that was fun to me because I had someone to grow up with, someone to play with, you know, someone to put a knot on my head, a permanent knot.

CA: Did you want to have a music career when you got older? 3:05:02:05

FB: Oh ya, oh ya, definitely, that's all I've done all my life.

CA: Dream about that?

FB: Ya, ya.

CA: Let's move to when you were older, you said you started your career in the showboat club. Tell us about that. 3:05:23:22

FB: I was grown, and I was married and I was living in the projects and I would go out and, oh what's the name of the amusement park? Chain of Rocks. And I would play showboat tunes, "Georgia," "I Can't Get Started," "St. Louis Woman" and that was fun because on the weekend I only worked like Thursday, Friday, Saturday and I was off on Sunday because St. Louis was a dry state on Sunday. The fellow who used to come pick me up, he was the bartender, his name was Bill, I still remember Bill. And he would pick me up and drop me home or either my father would come out and pick me up and drop me home because at that time I didn't have transportation and there were no buses running to Chain of Rocks because this is like up in the hills from St. Louis. I remember that like it was yesterday. It was for white only and they used to have a little table by the kitchen door set up for me and one night this fella came and he say "Why do you sit at this table all the time?" And I said "This is my table." He said, "Well, I'm gonna take you and your table and put you over here." And he did, you know, and he got on this statement about how, you know, you got entertainment here, some of the great entertainers in here and you make them sit by the kitchen door. Ya know, like I'm not gonna come if you're gonna do that. And, so one night, in his drunken stoop, he said, "Play Georgia again!" I said "ok." About the third time everybody said let her move on to something else, let her get our requests in. And he said, "Well, here, here's \$200. Play Georgia again." So I had to say sorry folks. But it was a lot of money made during that time and my first professional gig cause we're talking about 1960, 61 and to make \$175 or \$250 a week was a lot of money then, a lot of money and then to come home with \$200-300 worth in tips, that was really good money.

CA: Now at one point you were working with the Leon Claxton Carnival, tell us about that. 3:08:25:27

FB: My girlfriend who is my best friend now, Sophie, and Janice, we went to the carnival. So we ran into the tent and they were having rehearsals for ah, well they were doing auditions for singers, and they sent my name in without me knowing it. So I'm sitting there in the tent and we're giggling about the people that are coming on for the audition and things like that and finally they call me. Well at that time, you know, I was doing this song by Nina Simone -- "I love you Porgy." And I went up and I did it, and he hired me! He said, "Hey, you got it, can you go with us?" And I said "Ya." Well they were going to be in St. Louis for two or three weeks and I figured by then I would know whether I would want to go. Well, I wanted to go. And my same girlfriends that talked me into the gig, they called my mother and told her "She's gonna leave with the wrong Americans." And that night my mom came down on the train and literally pulled me off the train, I mean pulled me off the train. Everybody laughs about it now but I'm sort of glad that she did, knowing what I knew then -- nothing, I'm glad she did.

CA: Talk about how Sain and Milton heard you singing at the carnival . . .

FB: They heard me singing at the carnival one night, the Midnight Rama, and they said if I didn't leave St. Louis they would just love for me to join up with their group. And I'm going "Oh, wow!" And at that time I'd never heard of Little Milton, Oliver Sain or anyone

because I was quite a young lady and then I was working every night so I never got a chance to really get out and go into the clubs and things.

CA: So what made you decide to join them?

FB: Hey, it was my career! I mean, you know, it was a step forward, not as a singer but as a musician and I liked that.

CA: So you initially started playing piano with them, tell us about how you started singing.

FB: Milton gone kill me. Well, one night Milton was late for the gig, we'll put it like that. And the crowd was getting restless and Oliver say, "You know how to sing, you play the piano don't you?" And I said "ya." And he said "Well, why don't you sing something." And I said "Well, you guys can't play what I sing." He said "Yes we can." So I called a little jazzy tune out right? Cause it was a blues band and I did it and the people loved it! And I had to do this song over and over and over. That's how I got started, then everybody knew that I could play and sing. So we went out on the road and I would have like 15 minutes of singing and then Milton would come on.

CA: What was it like touring then, talk about some of the racial barriers you came up against.

FB: Oh ya. We went through in January and February, the slow months for musicians. We went all through the South, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, we were stationary in Greenville Mississippi and we would live in peoples homes. At that time they had rental homes, you know, rental rooms in the homes because there was no hotel available. The facilities on the highway, we couldn't stop to use the rest rooms. Last stop for the rest room was Memphis. One hotel in Greenville, it was open for about a year, but the bed I had had bricks under it, a bed held up by bricks! And it had holes in the door and I would have to take toilet paper and stuff the holes. But at that time, you know, everyone knew what time it was and we knew what we had to do and it wasn't a bother. It's more so a bother now than it was then because it was a thing that was understood and we were just trying to make things better for ourselves.

CA: Now let's, you recorded on the Bobbin label . . .

FB: Ya, Bob Line, he was the owner of the KTZ station here, a local station here in St. Louis.

CA: Can you tell us about some of those recordings? 3:13:36:17

FB: All I remember about those sessions is the recording studio on Grant and Olive and Technosonic that's still there on Brentwood, I think there into commercials now. And the band members, that's all I can remember about those sessions. I remember doing the sessions.

CA: Now Technosonic, Ike Turner produced those, what was that like working for him?

FB: Oh that was exciting. Ike was living in Illinois and I would go over with Oliver and we would rehearse. I did many exciting things, you know, just to sit there and be around the band and his members was exciting.

CA: We're moving into, I guess the separation of you and Oliver Sain, tell us about how the breakup came about and why you decided to sign with Chess, I know they had been asking you. 3:14:39:07

FB: Well, when I broke up with Little Milton, I left with Oliver Sain and I became the featured vocalist along with Bernard Mosley, he was the first. And then Bobby McClure, the late Bobby McClure was the second. Then after I broke up with Oliver, that's when I went to Chess Records.

CA: Now let me ask you this, the Bobby McClure songs, you or was it Lester that referred to them as Mickey Mouse music. 3:15:15:17

FB: No, Lester, you know, that was a personal thing with him and I because he was a serious jazz musician and he knew that I was and then I would go out and he'd say, "Ya, you be out doing all that Mickey Mouse music," but now, you know, that was just personal between him and I.

CA: Let's move into "Rescue Me." I guess, let's go from, you had signed with Chess, you were doing the Bobby McClure songs, talk to us about how you walked in the studio one day and "Rescue Me" came to be. 3:16:11:15

FB: The story of my life . . . One vivid, Friday morning, I went into Chess studio's which was located 2121 S. Michigan, and I was early and I decided to stop in at Chess Record's and I went upstairs and Raynard Minor was in one of the rehearsal rooms and he was playing. So he say, "Come on, come on in, I got this great idea." I said "Well good, let me hear it" and I said "Well, why don't you do this or why don't you do that?" You know, I put my input in and he said "Oh ya, well that's great." So we just worked on like a rhythm but the actual melody was not there. In those days, that's the way records were recorded. They would come in and somebody would give you some paper with some lyrics and they would play the rhythm and you could put any melody you wanted over those rhythms and that's how "Rescue Me" was really originated. Because we did the rhythms and I just sung the melody lines for whatever I wanted to go with that rhythm. So that's writing and a lot of artists, not only I, but a lot of artists wrote songs that way, they were just given lyrics and they come in and have a rhythm track and say, hey. Nobody showed you how they went or anything, you know, so you just keep writing your own songs, over rhythm tracks. And that's what happened with "Rescue Me." Now all the other writers that were on "Rescue Me," like Billy Davis, he was the PR man at Chess Records, I mean, definitely no writer. Carl Smith, the late Carl Smith, he wasn't even around when this went down. But all these people, you know, I guess because Billy Davis, at the time was my manager and he had the writers team and he was in control of Raynard and Carl Smith. So his name automatically went on every piece of material that went out. And that's what happened with "Rescue Me" also.

CA: So how did that make you feel? 3:18:57: 08

FB: Well, in the modern age now, in the 20th century, it make you feel dumb! You know, but it happens even now. You can be aware of things that go on but you still have to exist, you still have to work, you know, and you still have to make a living for your family, so you gamble. And this is what the music world is all about, it's taking a chance, a give and take, you know. It's like a professional gambler, a professional hustler, and that's what music is about, the more you hustle, the more gigs you get.

CA: The Mhmmm, Mhmmm's, I love that story.

FB: Ya, cause you know, you're fooling around and dancing and singing in the mic and we had the live band because a lot of folks, you know, over dubbing was illegal at the time that I was doing "Rescue Me." You couldn't go in the studio and really like over dub, everything had to be done live. So when the paper slipped off the stand, you know I wear glasses and I went Mhmmm, Mhmmm, you know, reaching. And then Billy said "Ooooh, I like that so why don't we do another tape and we'll leave that in," and that's how we did it. Ya, we thought we were gonna do another tape and it would be better but I think that we went with the original tape. Ya cause "Rescue Me" was recorded like, you know, the first tape through the middle and then we taped it and that was it. It wasn't an over and over session.

CA: How does it make you feel when people play that today? 3:21:12:13

FB: Good, I mean really good. You know, you read alot and you hear about record through history about records that sustain themselves, I think "Rescue Me" was ahead of its time. I think a lot of things that I did at that time was ahead of its time because it's still acceptable now. And I think that's one of the feelings of raw talent, real talent, lasting talent, to be able to do that. To have an effect on millions of people for a lifetime. So how else can you feel but great.

CA: Let me ask you this, speaking from the younger generation. I talked to several people before I came out here, my generation and older generations. A lot of the younger generation, all they've heard are the remakes, does that bother you that people don't know its you? 3:22:02:15

FB: Sometimes, sometimes. But ah, I'm still here and I know, for sure, they will hear of me, one way or the other. And I hope so through gospel. Since I've left the secular world for working I've chose gospel and God as head of my life, those things don't bother me anymore, because I have turned it over. And once you turn things over in your life, into the masters hand, those secular things that you once had in your life, they're no problems to you no more. It's just like the song I have on the CD, "All Of My Burdens," like if I pray, you know, for salvation and to be saved and I go to the alter and I pray my prayer for forgiveness or understanding or whatever for faith or whatever, and then when I get up off my knees I bring the faith and everything back with me, there's no sense in bringing it to the alter. So what I've done is put my whole life on the alter and I have left it there and I think that's good news in my life, that's the best thing that could ever happen to me.

CA: Speaking of that, I want to read you a quote, it's from Ray Charles, and this has to do with the music, it says, "Blues and Gospel are pretty much the same, the main difference is that in Blues you sing 'Oh Baby' and in Gospel you sing 'Oh Lord'" Talk about your music past and present in relation to that quote. 3:23:58:25

FB: So that's a big difference, if you're saying "Oh Baby" and "Oh God" because I don't get the same feelings when I sing "Oh Baby" or "Oh God."

CA: So you disagree.

FB: I understand what he's saying, but at the same time, it's the feeling. I have felt God and I have felt "Oh Baby" so maybe Ray ain't felt "Oh God," but I can't say that.

CA: I have a question here about your voice, I've read several articles and people say that you're stronger and better than ever, how do you feel about that? 3:25:07:19

FB: Hey, I love that! Cause that's what it takes, a voice, to do what I do. And I try to take care of it.

CA: Lets go back just a bit, I want to talk about your ex-husband Lester Bowie, tell us when you first met him and talk to us about Paris, I know you were welcomed quite warmly in Europe. 3:25:31:19

FB: Lester and I, Lester started playing, we talked him into coming with Oliver, and he started playing trumpet with Oliver. We courted maybe three or four years and then we married and the rest is history, four babies. I have two sons and two daughters. My oldest son is 35 and my youngest daughter is 24.

CA: Tell us a little about what your children are doing. 3:26:21:28

FB: My oldest son, Larry, he's an interpreter, Italian, he lives in Sardinia with his family and two children, my oldest daughter, she's the only one home in St. Louis, she's a clerk down at Boemen's Bank, and her husband works at Lera's, an affiliation of McDonald's and they have two children, a boy and a girl. My youngest son, Bonamus, he plays keyboard, my only musician, he plays for a group called DeFunk and they travel nationally and they have many CD's out and my youngest daughter is an accountant and she works for a high firm, and investment firm in NY, well really New Jersey, and she has a son.

CA: Now you, conceivably, for the majority of the public, dropped out of sight for a while, but you have always kept active. Tell us about what your family meant to you, raising your four children and if in fact you did put music on hold or lessened it because of them. 3:27:26:10

FB: Well, when I realized that I was really raising my family and that's all I was doing, I wasn't participating really in the music, I was doing music and I was still working, every now and then I would take a gig and I would work, you know, but when my kids came home, and they were in high school and they would say to me "Everybody knows you, everybody knows of you," you know, and they were not aware of me. They only knew me as mommy or mother or whatever and that's when I realized I had put my life into raising my kids and so I had to pull away from there . . . (some of me talking under her) I had to learn to separate the family from my music.

CA: Why did you feel that was necessary? 3:28:45:16

FB: I guess I had raised them a little sheltered, like ah, you know when they would see people that would come through the home and they look up the next month and they'd see them on TV and they go "Well that's Uncle Buddy or that's Aunt . . ." you know, not realizing who they were because I wanted to teach them the morals of just life itself without the glamour without the lights without the whole phony thing. So that's one of the reasons.

CA: So lets move up to present day -- end of tape. 3:29:32:25

TAPE FOUR

CA: You singed with Epic Records in 1974 (she says 1978) 3:31:22:24

FB: I was excited, I had made up my mind to seek my career back, I had a lot of the local musicians come around the house, we would rehearse for days, weeks, months, and we did little tapes that I sent out and it was picked up by Epic Records. Some original material that I had done and it was picked up by Epic Records. And they sent for me. One of the local DJ's here, Bernie Hayes, we went to NY and made a deal. And we came back. And Bernie paid for the session but in the end he padded it too.

CA: Well, I want to know I guess -- cause it didn't happen. 3:32:24:26

FB: Well, it wasn't because of the artistry, I think it was because of the business at Epic and the administrative department, they had a turnover of president, VP and so on. And I guess no dollar signs were by my name because I was a new artist there and I only got one release and that's when everything hit the fan at that time. The record was not really boosted.

CA: So tell us about the 80's. What were you doing then? 3:33:02:28

FB: The 80's, I started touring back to Europe, and I continued to go back to Europe, back and forth. And we had a show, Lester and I, From the Root to the Source, which included my mother and my brother, the famous David Peaston. And we did that for years. And I would work locally, every now and then I would take a gig around in the states, just to keep my name alive.

CA: You were divorced from Lester at that time, what was that like, touring with your ex-husband? 3:33:46:04

FB: Well he was my best friend at that time, and he's still my best friend and we still communicate because of the children. He's a father and I'm a mother and we never let the business sort a like, and his personal business get into what I do.

CA: I think that's rare. You have a wonderful relationship. 3:34:07:10

FB: Ya it's rare and many people look at us -- many people today really think we're still together but we're not.

CA: So now let's talk about American Express and "Rescue Me." This will bring us into the 90's. Tell us about what went through your head when you heard that AMX commercial. 3:34:24:21

FB: A prayer being answered. It was. It was a very hard winter for me. This was a winter of just ice all over St. Louis and the home that I live in here now, I needed a new roof, I needed a furnace, I needed a hot water tank, I needed many, many, many things. As a matter of fact, my children came home, my son had a five year full scholarship at Cooper Union and my daughter was going to Hood and my other daughter was going to Hampton down in Northfork, VA. And my son, he was living in NY working with his father Lester. And I was having it very, very hard and they all came home for Christmas. And they said "Mom," (you know, they gave me a pep talk) "you're gonna have to do what you know to do, you've taught us everything that you can teach us, we know, we

understand, now it's time for you to be Fontella again and stop trying to be Mom." That sort of snapped me back into it. And when everybody left, my youngest daughter stayed. And I was so out of it that morning, it was January 1, 1990, and she said "let me make you a cup of tea." And she did, and when she made the tea, we had this little 12 inch black and white TV set up in the kitchen because there was no furnace in the house and we had the gas stove on for heat. And she said "Let's cheer the New Year's in, things could be worse, we have our health, we have our strength . . . " Now she's teaching me all the things I used to tell her, right? And I heard da da da da da and we had our cups in the air and our heads went to the TV like . . . (she turns her head as if to face the TV) so there it was. But I knew things were gonna happen because I had set everything down and spread it over the dining room table do or die and I got letters and letters and letters and I spent about \$200 on stamps and I located a lot of people to make those things happen.

CA: So now, you mentioned that, early on, you didn't fight too much for royalties, perhaps because you were getting paid good at the time and you didn't know what it meant to have your name on those credits but in later years you didn't have any proof.
3:37:19:15

FB: You know I was moving so at that time and I remember coming in the studio and Billy was there and I said, I didn't sign the papers for "Rescue Me" and he said "Oh, don't worry about it," and he was my manager. "Don't worry about it!" It wasn't that I wasn't taking care of business, "don't worry about it, I'll take care of that." So then the record comes out and the name is still not on the record. "Oh we can fix that. It's not on the record but we'll have it on the legal documents," which never did. He never did.

CA: So why is it that today you're credited? What told America that I sang this song?
3:38:32:05

FB: Well, cause I did, I sung the song, I did the song! And that's it. I had a bunch of great musicians that helped make "Rescue Me" a success. Maurice White was on drums with Earth Wind and Fire, Louis Sattersfield, Paul Sarano trumpet, the late Minnie Riperton. You know, I don't want to slight anyone for "Rescue Me" but the business part of "Rescue Me" was totally mine. But I was new in the business, he's my manager, I trusted him, it was on trust. And when somebody mistrusts you it's like a marriage. You find out your husband is trippin' or your wife is trippin' it comes apart and sometimes you can mend those things back together but this is something that can't be mended back. It's something that has been done and hopefully won't be done again, who's to know? You still have to trust people, I still trust people, I'm still honest, I believe in what I do, sometimes it's by fate, what's for you, you're gonna get it.

CA: It's seems you've left all the bitterness behind and you've come out on top.
3:40:05:21

FB: I've learned to have my health and strength is more important than anything in this world. I can always, hopefully, get another "Rescue Me," and that's to try again and if you don't succeed get up and try again. I'm a person that if I slack anything, I believe that if I can lift just one foot forward I believe I can lift the other one. That's the way my life has been, I'm a positive thinker, I always have been.

CA: Tell us about your performance on Shindig. 3:40:44:12

FB: I like to dress, I love clothes. I'm gonna like me, soon. And when I did Shindig, I wanted the high fashions, I wanted to be different. And I shop to be different. And on

Shindig, I came out with my little black and white riders outfit, riders cap and, you know, I started to make hats fashionable.

CA: What was it like performing alongside or being on that same show with those people? 3:41:19:25

FB: Those are the moments, some of those artists like Billy Joe, I haven't seen him since we did Shindig. Billy Preston, I haven't seen him since, but we had fun. Deon Warwick, she always sends her love. When I went to see Luther Vandros he said, "My friend . . ." Once you establish a relationship in the business it's just true. You know, some people you can meet it's like you've known them a lifetime and they were people that you've known for a lifetime. I even worked with Patty LaBelle and the Blue Bells in London, but I haven't seen them since . . . Gladys Knight, we work, all of us.

CA: Let's move up to your album, you performed with Hamiet Bluiett. Tell us about his decision in having you work with him on that album. 3:42:37:07

FB: This is Hamiet's home town, as a matter of fact, he'll be here tomorrow morning, he's gonna play with me on the "fest." His mother is my best friend and her name is Deборе, but we call her Deb who's in the hospital at this moment. We've known each other from childhood up and we've worked together with Lester Bowie and From the Root to the Source and many things. And he's always told me like "If there's anything I can do, like would you come up and do a session," and I said I'd love to. Well this was in the 80's when he had asked me about that so ah, when the chance came and he saw the opportunity to bring me along he said "How would you like to come in the studio and do three sets?" Three songs on the CD and I said I'd love to and that's how we got started. He said "OK, I'll get back with you," and that was it. And that's how the Breath of Life came about. (I talk at the very end)

CA: And Bob Herwitz 3:44:00:12

FB: I met Bob and he wanted to know what I was doing, and at that time I was really working because I had went out on the road for the National Council for the Arts. Julie Owen and Joe Wilson who's President of the National Council. We did a thing called Juke, Joints and Jubilee and that's where I really got the exposure of people knowing that Fontella was back and doing gospel. So we did a west coast tour and we did an east coast tour the following year. So a lot of people, you know, I made a little record called "Everlasting Arms" that I sold on the road, on my way back.

CA: And when he approached you then for No Ways Tired, how'd that make you feel? 3:44:53:23

FB: Hey, it's another step. It made me feel good, real good. (Were you ready?) Oh ya, well I was back then I was just really, my problem was finding a good company, a trusting company, a working company, an understanding company. And Nonesuch seemed to be all of those things for me.

CA: Let's talk about that album a little. I know two songs that are considered to be pop tunes. Talk about some of those songs. 3:45:29: 04

FB: Well, Wayne had asked me, Herwick, he's out of Seattle Washington and he was the producer on the session. He said "Fontella, how would you feel about this?" and I said great, they're spirituals. The world do need a lot of love. Lean on me, brother, sister, whoever, if you need a friend, just call me, 666.

CA: Tell us about you mother's friend, Lois Lane, she said that would be your song.
3:46:13:12

FB: I would go out to different programs around St. Louis area and people would find out I was in the house and they would call me up to sing and I would always sing "No Ways Tired" and that was the song that I would always do. But when I first did "No Ways Tired," I was a musician playing piano down at Truvine, Reverend Canava is the pastor. And I would always sing a song every Sunday, so this is like my rehearsal time, I would try new songs and try everything, right? So I was singing in the key of F and I said wow, this is too low so I'm gonna have to transpose so I transposed and I went to the key of G and I said wow, this is still too low so I took it up to A flat and I say wow, this is still too low, so something just snapped and said take it where you can take it, so I took it 5 octaves up and when I opened my eyes the church was in high praise! So they would have me do this song and I thought it was great and I would do it in F, I would start in the low key and go up to the high keys. And that's how the transition in the song came about.

FB: And I can't leave out a dear friend, she may not want me to give her name so I won't -- Love. She read about me in the Dallas paper when I went down to Austin, Texas and she went out and bought my CD and she enjoyed it so much, she played it over 200 times and she sent me over \$5,000. Cashiers check for just being inspired. You know I've heard about these things happening to artists and things like that but that was the first time that's ever happened to me. So that let me know that what I'm doing is not the wrong thing. When someone you can touch down in somebody's life and hit their pocket books, I mean you know, during these days, that's wonderful!

CA: You said once, "I didn't start living until 1990, that's when I came into Christ on the real side and chose him as my savior." So with that in mind, how do you see yourself before 1990? 3:48:59:26

FB: OK, it was just like Ray Charles, Oh baby and Oh God. You know, I knew about God all my life because I've been doing gospel all my life but you know, like they say, you've got to be saved and you've got to be sanctified and feel with the Holy Ghost. And there is a difference in order to reach Heaven.

CA: Soon after the album's release, I know you played at the Fez and Carnegie Hall. Had you ever been to those places before? (No) Tell us about that, what was it like? 3:49:42:19

FB: Oh that was wonderful. I did the Carnegie Hall with the Muslims for Tebit. And I enjoyed doing that because that was refreshing. They did the mass before we did the concert and everything was on a positive note, working with Natalie Merchant and Cortell and all of the great musicians and that was different for me and everything that I do now is different for me, like I'm doing a festival this weekend, it's a Blues Fest. And everybody's gonna be there doing the Blues and I'm gonna be there to spread the word. You run into different things now, whereas before they used to separate gospel and they would separate the Blues, now I think it's possible to sing Gospel anywhere. I'm getting ready to go to Washington DC to do the 25th Anniversary for the Kennedy Center, I think that's wonderful, that's a great opportunity, and then to spread the word among people whom, maybe like yourself, never have heard the gospel with my interpretation of giving it.

CA: I have another quote here that you would like to be a producer or a manager because there is so much talent in St. Louis. 3:51:25:26

FB: There really is and I just hate to see it misused you know for people that know they can't do anything for them just leach onto the talent and tie them up and then they're around here for another 4 to 5 years trying to get out of here. Maybe things will change because St. Louis is changing and we're becoming less of a conservative town, maybe we'll get a real nice studio.

CA: Another quote, you said "I never had the opportunity to do what Fontella needs to do." What does Fontella need to do? 3:52:31:10

FB: To be me at all times. I'm doing me now, at all times, I'm happy doing me. You know, when you're caught up in the secular world, sometimes you have to change you to put that over or put that over and I can just be me and do what I know to do now and that's what I like about Fontella the most.

CA: What's most important to you in your life now? 3:53:06:10

FB: What's most important, really my career, being successful again (camera bump) being successful again. I think I'm 100% behind my career, myself, I like myself now. I'm beginning to enjoy myself now. I look back and wonder how I got over. When I look back at my life and see all the things and be able to smile and talk about them and tell folks about them, I mean, that's wonderful. I know artists that couldn't stand the test and left us. I know many musicians that, hearts that were just broken that never came back to the music scene and to be able to do that and have an understanding about what you do, that's wonderful and see that's what God will do and that's what He has done with me. Since He has come into my life, I mean, He has given me more morals, He's given me all the support that I need. If I never get a support from anyone, I know that He's on my side. Cause He's let me know that He's been on my side all the time but I wasn't calling on Him. But now that I've called on Him, great things have been happening for me. And I love that and that's not why I called on Him too. But He did say ask and it shall be given.

CA: When you look back on your life and your career, how would you most like to be remembered? 3:54:48:12

FB: Sweet, honest, trusting and a for real person, that's how I would like to be remembered, always, always. And a real, real, diva!

CA: Is there anything I left out that you would like to say?

FB: Like I said, I'm 100% behind myself and my career now, I know my directions, I know where I want to go, I know what I want to do. I did then in 65' and 60's, I knew where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do so it's just a remake or a remix of Fontella.

JE: Asking about her brother.

FB: David, my bother, is one of my favorite singers, not because he's my brother, but he's my favorite singer. When he came on for the Apollo theater, he won 7 straight times. When he first came on, they was booing him. And my bother is sort of shy like I am and he said he just wanted to turn around and go back . . . (she talks about her brother for a while).

Camera rolls to the end of tape. Some B-roll after the interview.

APPENDIX B

VIDEO SCRIPT

VIDEO SCRIPT

Fade in CU of record player with a roll focus. Title fades in and then goes out just as image comes into focus. "Rescue Me" starts to play, cut to overhead shot of record player. Cut to Shindig footage of Fontella singing the first line of the song, dissolve to Fontella in Ann Arbor singing next line of song.

Dissolve to CU of Fontella talking about "Rescue Me."

FB: The story of my life . . . One vivid, Friday morning, I went into Chess studio's and I went upstairs and Raynard was in one of the rehearsal rooms and he was playing. So he say, come on, come on in, I got this great idea. I said well good, let me hear it and I said well, why don't you do this or why don't you do that, you know, I put my input in and he said, oh ya, well that's great. So we just worked on like a rhythm but the actual melody was not there. In those days, that's the way records were recorded. They would come in and somebody would give you some paper with some lyrics and they would play the rhythm and you could put any melody you wanted over those rhythms and that's how "Rescue Me" was really originated.

Dissolve to Shindig footage of Fontella and back up singers during the "Mmhmhm" part.

FB VO under: . . . overdubbing was illegal at the time that I was doing "Rescue Me," (cut to FB, music fades out) you couldn't go in the studio and really like over dub, everything had to be done live. So when the paper slipped off the stand, you know I wear glasses, and I went Mhmhmhm, Mhmhmhm, you know, reaching. And then Billy said, oh, I like that, so why don't we do another tape and we'll leave that in, and that's how we did it.

Cut to CU of gold record and Grammy nomination certificate and flyer in museum advertising her and the song.

Narrator: "Rescue Me" was released in 1965. It hit the R&B charts and went gold in two months, staying in the top 40 for 19 months. The lady behind the famous vocals was no stranger to music. Fontella Bass was born into a music family, (dissolve to picture of her mother) her mother, Martha Bass, toured with the famous Clara Ward singers. (dissolve to baby picture of FB) At the age of 5, her grandmother and uncles started her playing piano in funeral homes. Dissolve to FB

FB: My uncles, all of them were musicians and they played the piano. And one night, my uncle, he didn't want to go, so I was always afraid of, you know, dead folks, so they talked me into going, he told me he would buy me a popsicle, ice cream for the whole week if I would go. So I did and that's how I got started playing for the funeral homes.

Narrator: Fontella would play at various clubs growing up in St. Louis, (carnival footage) and it all started when a carnival came to town.

FB: My girlfriend who is my best friend now, Sophie, and Janice, we went to the carnival. So we ran into the tent and they were having auditions for singers, and they sent my name in without me knowing it. So I'm sitting there in the tent and finally they call me.

Well at the time, you know, I was doing this song by Nina Simone, "I Love You Porgy." And I went up and did it and he hired me! He said, hey, you got it, can you go with us?

Dissolve to pictures of Milton and Sain and their band pictures.

Narrator: She didn't go with the carnival, but two other musicians from the local club circuit would also hear her perform.

FB: They heard me singing at the carnival one night and they said if I didn't leave St. Louis they would just love for me to join up with their group. And I'm going oh, wow! And at the time I'd never heard of Little Milton, Oliver Sain or anyone. Dissolve to another band shot of the three.

FB VO under b-roll: It was a step forward, not as a singer but as a musician and I liked that . . . one night Milton was late for the gig and the crowd was getting restless and Oliver say, you know how to sing, you play the piano don't you? And I said ya. And he said, well, why don't you sing something. And I said, well, you guys can't play what I sing. He said, yes we can. So I called a little jazzy tune out right? Cause it was a blues band and I did it and the people loved it!

Narrator: They recorded with various labels including Technosonic, which Ike Turner produced. (shot of Ike and Tina Turner) But the band would soon break apart and Fontella would go her separate way.

FB: Well, when I broke up with Little Milton, I left with Oliver Sain and I became the featured vocalist along with Bernard Mosley, he was the first. (dissolve to their picture) And then Bobby McClure was the second (dissolve to their picture). Then after I broke up with Oliver, that's when I went to Chess Records.

Narrator: After a couple playful duets with McClure, Bass finally hit it big with "Rescue Me." Like many artists of the day, however, she was never properly credited for a song she co-wrote and sent to the top of the charts.

B-roll of Bass and McClure, CU of gold record with Smith and Miner credited.

FB: And I remember coming in the studio and Billy was there and I said, I didn't sign the papers for "Rescue Me" and he said, oh, don't worry about it, and he was my manager. Don't worry about it! It wasn't that I wasn't taking care of business, don't worry about it, I'll take care of that. So then the record comes out and the name is still not on the record. Oh, we can fix that. It's not on the record but we'll have it on the legal documents, which never did. He never did.

Cut to CG: "Come on baby and rescue me."

FB: Now all the other writers that were on "Rescue Me," like Billy Davis, he was the PR man at Chess Records, I mean, definitely no writer. Carl Smith he wasn't even around when this went down. But all these people, you know, I guess because Billy Davis, at the time was my manager and he had the writers team and he was in control of Raynard and Carl Smith. So his name automatically went on every piece of material that went out.

Cut to CG: "Cause I need you by my side."

FB: Well, in the modern age now, in the 20th century, it make you feel dumb! You know, but it happens even now. You can be aware of things that go on but you still have

to exist, you still have to work, you know, and you still have to make a living for your family, so you gamble.

Narrator: Bass stayed with Chess Records for four years. She still performed occasionally, but raising her four children soon became the center of her life. (b-roll of family pictures)

FB: When my kids came home, and they were in high school and they would say to me, everybody knows you, everybody knows of you, you know, and they were not aware of me. They only knew me as mommy, you know, or mother or whatever and that's when I realized I had put my life into raising my kids.

Narrator: She began to focus on her career again. In the late 70's she signed with Epic Records. The deal, however, never got off the ground. (shot of an old Epic emblem)

Dissolve to shot of her and family in Europe and family photo.

FB VO under: The 80's, I started touring back to Europe . . . and we had a show, Lester and I, From the Root to the Source which included my mother and my brother, David Peaston. (Cut to FB) And we did that for years. And I would work locally, every now and then, I would take a gig around in the states, just to keep my name alive.

Narrator: Although divorced, Bass and her ex-husband, well known trumpeter Lester Bowie, often worked together.

FB VO under: Well he was my best friend at that time, and he's still my best friend and we still communicate because of the children. He's a father and I'm a mother. Many people today really think we're still together, but we're not.

Narrator: It wasn't always easy for Fontella. But hard times paid off. In 1990 she finally began receiving royalties for her 1965 hit song. (Cut to Bass holding her gold record)

FB VO under: It was a very hard winter for me. This was a winter of just ice all over St. Louis and the house that I live in here now, I needed a new roof, I needed a furnace, I needed a hot water tank, I needed many, many, many things. I was having it very, very hard and my children came home for Christmas. And they said, Mom -- you know, they gave me a pep talk -- you're gonna have to do what you know to do, you've taught us everything that you can teach us, we know, we understand, now it's time for you to be Fontella again and stop trying to be Mom. That sort of snapped me back into it. And when everybody left, my youngest daughter stayed. And I was so out of it that morning, it was January 1, 1990 and she said let me make you a cup of tea. We had this little 12-inch black and white TV set up in the kitchen because there was no furnace in the house and we had the gas stove on for heat. And she said, let's cheer the New Year's in, things could be worse, we have our health, we have our strength, now she's teaching me all the things I used to tell her, right? And I heard da da da da, etc. and we had our cups in the air and our heads went to the TV like . . .

Narrator: American Express was playing her song, violating previously arranged agreements. So she fought back, got back her royalties and now has control over her song.

FB: It's something that has been done and hopefully won't be done again, who's to know? You still have to trust people, I still trust people, I'm still honest, I believe in what I do, sometimes it's by fate, what's for you, you're gonna get it.

Narrator: Remakes of the song continue to surface, and her long deserved royalties are hers to keep. The whole experience has left her far from bitter. She is aware now, more than ever, of her God-given talent.

B-roll of the movies Air America and Sister Act.

FB: You know, you read a lot and you hear about records through history that sustain themselves, I think "Rescue Me" was ahead of its time. I think a lot of things that I did at that time was ahead of its time because it's still acceptable now. And I think that's one of the feelings of raw talent, real talent, lasting talent, to be able to do that. To have an effect on millions of people for a lifetime. So how else can you feel but great!

Narrator: And does it bother her that younger generations, having heard only the remakes of her famous song, don't know it's her singing?

FB: Sometimes, sometimes. But ah, I'm still here and I know for sure, they will hear of me, one way or the other. And I hope so through gospel. Since I've left the secular world for working I've chose gospel and God as head of my life, those things don't bother me anymore, because I have turned it over. (fade music "The Light of the World" under) And once you turn things over in your life, into the master's hand, those secular things that you once had in your life, they're no problems to you no more. It's just like the song I have on the CD, "All Of My Burdens," like if I pray, you know, for salvation and to be saved and I go to the alter and I pray my prayer for forgiveness or understanding, and then when I get up off my knees I bring the faith and everything back with me, (dissolve to FB in church socializing and getting ready to sing in church) there's no sense in bringing it to the alter. So what I've done is put my whole life on the alter and I have left it there and I think that's good news in my life, (cut to Fontella hugging her Reverend) that's the best thing that could ever happen to me.

Narrator: Turn her life over to God she did, and she has been soaring in this rediscovered inspiration ever since.

FB: You know, I knew about God all my life because I've been doing Gospel all my life but you know, (cut to FB praying in church) like they say, you've got to be saved and you've got to be sanctified and feel with the Holy Ghost.

Dissolve to FB singing her song in church with her No Ways Tired band from NY, lots of b-roll of people singing along.

FB VO under: I'm doing me now, at all times, I'm happy doing me. You know, when you're caught up in the secular world, sometimes you have to change and I can just be me and do what I know to do now and that's what I like about Fontella most.

Narrator: In 1994 she recorded three songs with an old friend, Hamlet Bluiett, and member of one of the great free jazz bands, the World Saxophone Quartet, for their new album, Breath of Life. (show cover of CD)

FB: We've known each other from childhood up and he's always told me like if there's anything I can do, like would you come up and do a session and I said I'd love to. When the chance came and he saw the opportunity to bring me along he said how would you like

to come in the studio and do three songs on the CD and I said I'd love to and that's how we got started.

Narrator: Her favor for an old friend led to her new album. The general manager at Nonesuch Records was so impressed by Bass' performance on Breath of Life, her offered her her own recording contract.

FB: Hey! It's another step. It made me feel good, real good . . . I was back then I was just really, my problem was finding a good company, a trusting company, a working company, an understanding company. And Nonesuch seemed to be all of those things for me.

Narrator: The album consists of nine spiritual songs and two secular songs, one of which is the well known Bill Withers, "Lean On Me."

FB: Well, Wayne had asked me, Herwick, he's out of Seattle Washington and he was the producer on the session. He said, Fontella, how would you feel about this, and I said great! They're spirituals. The world do need a lot of love. Lean on me brother, sister, whoever, if you need a friend, just call me, 666!

Dissolve to Ann Arbor festival footage for excerpts of FB singing "Lean On Me."

Narrator: The title track, however, is the song that seems to say the most about Fontella's life.

FB: I would always sing a song every Sunday, so this is like my rehearsal time. So I was singing in the key of F and I said, wow, this is too low so I'm gonna have to transpose. So I transposed and I went to the key of G and I said, wow, this is still too low so I took it up to A flat and I say wow, this is still too low, so something just snapped and said take it where you can take it, so I took it 5 octaves up and when I opened my eyes, the church was in high praise!

Dissolve to Ann Arbor festival footage of this song, scene last 3-4 minutes.

FB VO under: I think I'm 100% behind my career, myself, I like myself now. I'm beginning to enjoy myself now. When I look back on at my life and see all the things and be able to smile and talk about them and tell folks about them, I mean, that's wonderful. And to be able to do that and have an understanding about what you do, that's wonderful and see that's what God will do and that's what He has done with me. Since He has come into my life, He's given me all the support that I need. He's been on my side all the time but I wasn't calling on Him. (Dissolve to b-roll pictures of her in church, singing, talking with friends, etc.) But now that I've called on Him, great things have been happening for me.

Narrator: Although she will be remembered most as the voice behind "Rescue Me," she doesn't want to be forgotten as the person after "Rescue Me."

FB: Sweet, honest, trusting, and a for real person, that's how I would like to be remembered, always, always. And a real, real, diva!

Dissolve to interview and festival footage in slow motion.

FB VO under: I've learned to have my health and strength is more important than anything in this world. I can always, hopefully, get another "Rescue Me," and that's to try

again and if you don't succeed get up and try again. I believe that if I can lift just one foot forward, I believe I can lift the other one.

Credits roll over the last shot which is frozen and then slowly fades to black. Credits continue to roll over black until finished.

APPENDIX C

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Fontella Bass
Coming Full Circle

Program Questionnaire

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to view the video, Fontella Bass: Coming Full Circle. After viewing, please answer each of the following questions based on your perceptions from viewing this program. This questionnaire will be used in the evaluation process of this thesis. Your time is greatly appreciated.

1. Were you aware of who Fontella Bass was prior to watching this program?

_____Yes _____No _____Name was familiar

2. Was it clear at the start of the program who Fontella Bass was and what she was known for?

_____Yes _____No

3. Please rank your general attentiveness while watching this program.
(Circle one)

High Above Average Average Below Average Low

4. Did the story flow smoothly throughout the program?

Always Most of the time Some of the time Never

Additional comments: _____

Andy Payne

- ✓ 5. Did the program convey a complete story, taking into consideration the program length? Please explain.

6. Although budget constraints limited additional interviews to be included in this program, they were considered. What other interviews, if any, would you have included in this program?

7. What one thing could have been improved in this program?

8. Please comment on the overall content of the video. _____

9. Did this program leave you with any questions regarding Fontella Bass' life after viewing it?

Yes No If yes, please explain _____

- ✓ 10. Which of the following categories best describes your general enjoyment of this program.

High Above Average Average Below Average Low

11. Please comment on the following production elements.

a. Overall interview with Fontella Bass _____

b. Pacing _____

c. Quality of image _____

d. Lighting _____

e. Quality of sound _____

f. Continuity (smooth transitions between shots)_____

g. B-roll used_____

h. Music used throughout_____

12. Please describe your overall reaction to this program in your own words.
Thank you again for your time.

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