



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1984

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SUZANNE de PASSE

[[image - Suzanne de Passe]]

When she took over as president of Motown Productions in February, 1981, Suzanne de Passe became responsible for the company's re-entry into filmmaking and production. The task of guiding Motown's new production ventures was assigned to Ms. de Passe by her mentor Berry Gordy, chairman and founder of Motown Industries, the country's largest black owned and operated enterprise.

Since she took over the helm of the company, Ms. de Passe has been responsible for the Emmy Award-winning "Motown 25: Yesterday • Today • Forever," a two-hour NBC-TV variety special, and "Happy Endings," a CBS-TV Movies-of-the-Week starring John Schneider and Catherine Hicks. "Motown 25" garnered nine Emmy nominations and earned Ms. de Passe her first Emmy for outstanding Variety, Music or Comedy Program of the year. "Happy Endings" also received an Emmy nomination.

By the end of the year, Motown will begin production on its latest feature film, a co-production with Highgate Pictures for Tri-Star. Additionally, there are several other feature films, television and stage productions in development.

A native of New York, Ms. de Passe attended the New Lincoln School, Syracuse University and Manhattan Community College. She left the latter to become talent coordinator for the Manhattan disco, Cheetah. It is there that Ms. de Passe's invaluable on-the-job training began.

Her candor and intuitive flair for business promoted her to criticize Motown's mode of operations during a meeting with Gordy in 1968. She was working for a theatre owner at the time and frustrated with the lack of response from Motown with regard to talent bookings. Gordy hired her as his creative assistant shortly thereafter.

During her first year at Motown, Ms. de Passe served as creative consultant for the company's first television special "T.C.B." (Taking Care of Business), which starred Diana Ross & The Supremes and The Temptations. The following year, she held the same post for "G.I.T. On Broadway," another special starring Miss Ross & The Supremes.

Ms. de Passe's subsequent posts at Motown were director of the West Coast creative department, vice president-creative division and then vice president-Motown Industries, before securing her current responsibilities as president of Motown Productions. A firm believer and practitioner of Berry Gordy's motto, "No job too big, no job too small," she has developed a comprehensive understanding of the industry.

In between promotions, Ms. de Passe was a writer for Diana Ross' first television special, "Diana," which aired on ABC-TV in 1970 and head writer for the Jackson 5 Special, "Goin' Back to Indiana."

Among the artists she brought to Motown are Lionel Richie, the Commodores, The Jackson 5, Rick James, Stephanie Mills and Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons.



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Ms. de Passe was also responsible for Motown's first Broadway musical—"Poppa."

In 1972, Ms. de Passe received an Academy Award nomination for her screenplay for "Lady Sings the Blues."

Widely recognized for her accomplishments in the entertainment industry and as a role model for other aspiring women and minorities, Ms. de Passe has received the Urban League Achievement Award (1981), the Blackboard Circle Black Pioneer Award (1982), the TVCA Silver Achievement Award (1983) and the National Coalition of 100 Black Women's Creative Award for Business (1985).

Ms. de Passe is a member of the boards of trustees of the UCLA Foundation and the National Urban League, and is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, ASCAP, American Film Institute-Social Science Council, Committee of 200, State of California Motion Picture Council and the Writers Guild of America, West, Inc.

Ms. de Passe and her actor-husband, Paul Le Mat, reside in Los Angeles.

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[[2 images]]

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