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Any Other Way: The Jackie Shane Story, Documentary film by Michael Mabbott and Lucah Rosenberg-Lee

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Any Other Way: The Jackie Shane Story. Documentary film, directed by Michael Mabbott and Lucah Rosenberg-Lee. Banger Films and the National Film Board of Canada, 2024. 99 minutes. South by Southwest Film & TV Festival, Austin, Texas, March 8–16, 2024; Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival, Toronto, Ontario, April 25 – May 4, 2024.

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FIGURE 1 *Jackie Shane.* Source: Banger Films and the National Film Board of Canada.

Tell her that I'm happy / Tell her that I'm gay /
Tell her that I wouldn't have it any other way.
– Jackie Shane, “Any Other Way”

In the 2024 documentary film *Any Other Way: The Jackie Shane Story*, the life of R&B soul singer Jackie Shane is investigated through her personal archive, creative reenactments, and archival materials. The documentary was written and directed by Michael Mabbott and Lucah Rosenberg-Lee alongside co-writer Alison Duke and was produced by Elliot Page's new production company PageBoy Productions. The film had its world premiere at the South by Southwest (SXSW) Film & TV Festival before opening in Canada.

During the 1960s, Jackie Shane was the toast of Toronto, helping to create the Toronto sound that was so popular at the time. Her albums sold out all over Toronto, but in 1971, she disappeared and was never heard from again.

The documentary relies on Jackie's own collection to tell the story, through archival footage and photographs sourced by the film's archives producer, Emma Kehayas. In 1965, Jackie Shane was on *Night Train*, an all-Black R&B television series, singing “Walking the Dog.” This performance, the only known archival footage of her, is shown in the documentary in stark contrast to the sound of her live album, *Jackie Shane Live!*, released in 1967, which is used throughout the film. The documentary's use of the live album gives us a glimpse of how her sound shook audiences as she performed at Toronto's Sapphire Tavern.

Jackie's life was pulled back into the spotlight in 2010, when Elaine Banks wrote and produced an audio documentary for CBC's *Inside the Music* called “I Got Mine: The Story of Jackie Shane.”¹ The audio story focused on Jackie's role as a musician in Toronto, featuring contemporary artists who played with her in the 1950s and 1960s. “I Got Mine” was made before the world knew what had happened to Jackie Shane, with many of the people being interviewed believing that she was dead.

An anthology album released in 2017 was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Historical Album in 2019. Grammy-winning music journalist Rob Bowman was the first to interview Jackie by phone for the liner notes, and his work

1 “I Got Mine: The Story of Jackie Shane,” *Inside the Music*, episode written and produced by Elaine Banks, 2010, CBC Radio, 54:33, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/audio/1.1745374>.

represents the first written biography about Jackie. Bowman's writing, specifically, sheds light on her career and life as a musician.² *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer*, named after Jackie's hit song and with an opening chapter by Steven Maynard called "A New Way of Lovin': Queer Toronto Gets Schooled by Jackie Shane," was also published in 2017. By this time, co-directors Mabbott and Rosenberg-Lee were already in touch with Jackie, talking to her over the phone.

The directors recorded the audio from their phone conversations, which took place during the final years of her life. These recordings detail how Jackie went from living as a complete recluse to getting ready to return to touring. Her untimely death in February 2019 meant that the filmmakers were unable to make the film with her; instead, they relied on reenactments (with Jackie played by American actress Sandra Caldwell in the phone conversations and by Makayla Walker on stage) and used rotoscope animation to punch colour and vibrancy into the documentary.

Any Other Way presents Jackie Shane as her own archivist, who understood that self-documentation was a means of self-preservation. Jackie's nieces, who inherited Jackie's records, shared how they found Jackie's autobiography, "Let 'God' Be My Judge, by Miss Jackie Shane," dated July 30, 1974. Interviewees such as Sandra Caldwell and Makayla Walker read from and commented on Jackie's autobiography throughout the film, and Shane's nieces and other interviewees express their belief that Jackie knew that documenting her life and sharing her story would be important in the future. Even though interviewees had access to the autobiography, their interpretations of this archival record were based on their own positionalities and relationships with Jackie. Some had never met Jackie or even known her personally.

The film traces Jackie's life from childhood through her introduction to music to her last moments. Jackie narrates stories about her mother, her Aunt Jesse (who raised her as her own), and her grandmother (who she called "Grandmama"), while her family photographs are shown to the audience. Jackie speaks of joining a choir and eventually becoming a musician. Her collection is not just shown as digitized images: once removed from the storage unit, Jackie's belongings are perfectly laid out on white tables in a white room, giving the

2 David Friend, "Grammy-Nominated Rob Bowman on the 'Extraordinary Life' of Transgender Soul Pioneer," *Toronto Star*, February 7, 2019, https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/grammy-nominated-rob-bowman-on-the-extraordinary-life-of-transgender-soul-pioneer/article_e9aff1dc-69d5-5563-884d-211072dc1fd7.html.



FIGURE 2 *Jackie Shane performing with Frank Motley in Toronto. Source: Banger Films and the National Film Board of Canada.*

collection an impersonal, clinical, and sterile feel. This feels out of place – a sharp contrast to her vibrancy. Jackie’s self-portraits are placed on stands, her jackets on mannequins, and her stylish clothing and jewellery is shown in a montage. Her personal collection also included unreleased audio recordings, which are shared with the audience as part of the film.

Jackie’s collection is not arranged and described or deposited at an archival institution, leaving questions around its continued care and preservation. However, in an interview with CBC Q’s Tom Power, director Michael Mabbott shared his first impressions of the storage unit.³ He describes how Jackie had labelled her stage outfits with locations, indicating where she wore them and when she played; however, the film does not include details of how Jackie organized or described her belongings, a detail that archivists and other heritage professionals might be curious about. The film brings together family and docu-

3 “Michael Mabbott and Lucah Rosenberg-Lee: Jackie Shane’s Fascinating Story,” *Q with Tom Power*, August 16, 2024, CBC Listen, 20:55, <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-50-q/clip/16058737-michael-mabbott-lucah-rosenberg-lee-jackie-shanes-fascinating-story>.



FIGURE 3 Jackie's personal collection on display. Source: Banger Films and the National Film Board of Canada.

mentary participants to view the records and artifacts and shows them browsing the materials. These scenes invoke feelings of familial discovery, as the family tries to understand the legacy of Jackie Shane.

Jackie valued her authenticity and independence and wanted to make it in her own way, and the stories she told highlighted these intentions. In one phone interview, she talked about coming to Montreal for the first time and being kidnapped by men who offered her a way to be famous but said they would own her in return. Jackie warned them that she was still underage, and she refused to be owned by anyone. She was invited to perform on *The Ed Sullivan Show* – the biggest variety show in North America at the time, which had hosted breakout performances by icons like Elvis Presley and the Beatles. However, the show did not want Jackie to present herself with her makeup and hair done. She knew this was not a requirement for other invited artists and refused the invitation based on her unwillingness to change for them. She also refused to perform on *American Bandstand*, an American music-performance and dance show that was racist and anti-Black and that implemented racial segregation, allowing Black artists to perform but not allowing Black audiences in the studio. As one of the

interviewees, Rodney Diverlus, expressed, “She saw right through the effort to tokenize her.” Although these were opportunities for Jackie’s career, she stood firm in her convictions and did not betray herself. Jackie was selective about where she played because she understood the intimate connection between artist and audience.

The film deals very little with Toronto, especially for a film about someone who helped define its sound so profoundly. In one of the interviews with the directors, Jackie talks about Toronto feeling like home and says she did not want to leave. In the end, Jackie left for Nashville in 1971 to care for her mother, putting her family before her career. Perhaps it is fitting, then, that the documentary’s story focuses on her family in Nashville – most of whom had not known that she existed before her death. This is a documentary about Shane’s family discovering who she was through her archival and physical collections, not one that focuses on her place in queer and trans communities or on her life in Toronto. This feels like a gap in her story and her legacy in the Toronto music scene, but it is possible that this was an artistic choice to accommodate the absence of archival footage of her performing. The absence of professional contemporaries or personal connections from her Toronto period, in contrast to the interviews of those who are discovering her for the first time, feels like an imbalance of perspectives.

In the film, the family attests to their desire to continue to preserve the legacy of Jackie Shane but gives no indication as to what will happen to her belongings, including whether they will be donated or deposited at a heritage institution. In the meantime, in Toronto, a portrait of Jackie Shane looks over Yonge Street as part of a huge 22-storey mural, where she is depicted along with legends such as Ronnie Hawkins, Glenn Gould, Dianne Brooks, Muddy Waters, Shirley Matthews, B.B. King, Gordon Lightfoot, and Oscar Peterson.