

Motown's Who's Who

EARLY ACTS 1960-1963

THE CONTOURS Had a 1962 hit with Berry Gordy's 'Do You Love Me (Now That I Can Dance)', a song where Gordy sought the feel of the Isleys, 'Twist and Shout'. The Temptations had failed to cut the song well so it was given to the Contours' Billy Gordon. Dennis Edwards was in the final Contours lineup when they disbanded in 1968. Edwards then joined the Temptations.

EDDIE HOLLAND Recorded for Berry Gordy in 1959. Released an LP (1963) before pursuing a career as a songwriter/producer. Lyricist in HDH team.

MARV JOHNSON Recorded first Berry Gordy production ever (1959). Leased to United Artists. UK Tamla Motown released his only LP, 'I'll Pick a Rose for My Rose'.

THE MARVELETTES 'Please Mr Postman' was Number One in 1969. John Lennon sang the song at the Beatles' Decca audition and later recorded it on the Beatles' second LP. Had two more Top 20 hits in 1962. Didn't return to chart form again until Smokey Robinson's 'Don't Mess With Bill' (1966) and 'Hunter Gets Captured By the Game' (1967). Original lead vocalist, Gladys Horton, left 1968 and the group split in the early 70s.

THE MIRACLES See profile.

JIMMY RUFFIN Older brother of Temptation David Ruffin. A solo artist, 'What Becomes of the Brokenhearted?' (1966) is his most memorable recording.

BARRETT STRONG Performed Berry Gordy's first hit, 'Money', and then worked as a house songwriter.

MARY WELLS Signed to Motown in 1960 when she called on Berry Gordy with a song she considered suitable for Jackie Wilson. Five Top 20 hits followed, including 'My Guy' (1964), the year in which she was special guest on the UK Beatles tour. After leaving Motown in 1964 she recorded with no success. A song written for her then became the Supreme's first hit, 'Where Did Our Love Go'. In 1984 she rerecorded 'My Guy'.

**GOLDEN YEARS
1964-1970**

THE ELGINS One album for Motown's VIP label (1966), including 'Heaven Must Have Sent You' (HDH), later revived by Bonnie Pointer (1978).

EIVETS REDNOW Stevie Wonder (spelt backwards) released an instrumental LP with this pseudonym.

CHUCK JACKSON Soul vocalist with Motown 1967-1970.

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Ex Ric-Tic act, recorded one Soul label LP, 1969.

THE FOUR TOPS See profile.

BRENDA HOLLOWAY Joined Tamla 1962. First hit 'Every Little Bit Hurts' (1964). She wrote 'You've Made Me So Very

Happy' (1967) but song failed, leaving Blood, Sweat and Tears to cover it successfully in 1969.

GLADYS KNIGHT & THE PIPS See profile.

ISLEY BROTHERS See profile.

THE MONITORS Recorded with Motown from 1965 until 1969, when their first LP was released. Richard Street moved from Monitors to Temptations.

THE ORIGINALS With Motown from 1965. One of their few successes was a Marvin Gaye production/composition, the almost doo-wop 'Baby I'm For Real' (1966).

DAVID RUFFIN Joined Temptations 1964 as lead singer. Pursued a solo career from 1968. After eight solo LPs for Motown he joined Warners in 1979.

SPINNERS Came to Motown from Harvey Fuqua's Tri-Phi label in 1964 and left in 1972. Highpoint was Stevie Wonder produced 'It's A Shame'. Their success with Motown was minimal compared with their Tom Bell produced Atlantic hits from 1973 on. These featured new vocalist Phillip Wynne.

EDWIN STARR Joined Motown when the Ric-Tic label was absorbed in 1965. Several of his pre-Motown singles appear on the LP *Soul Master*. Although Starr had fewer hits than he wanted (only '25 Miles' and 'War') he recorded several excellent LPs before leaving in 1974.

THE SUPREMES See profile.

BOBBY TAYLOR AND THE VANCOUVERS Berry Gordy produced their 1968 album. Guitarist for Vancouver was Thomas Chong, later of Cheech and Chong. Bobby Taylor recorded solo LP 1969.

TEMPTATIONS See profile.

R. DEAN TAYLOR White Motown songwriter who had two hits 'Gotta See Jane' and 'Indiana Wants Me' (1970).

TAMMI TERRELL Recorded numerous hits with Marvin Gaye (1967 to 1970) but only one solo LP *Irresistible*. She collapsed on stage whilst singing with Gaye in 1969 and died in 1970 from a brain tumour.

MARTHA AND THE VANDELLAS First appeared on record backing Marvin Gaye on 'Some Kind of Wonderful' (1961). Their own hits followed from 1962 and peaked with 'Dancing in the Streets' (William Stevenson, 1964). Recorded successfully throughout the 60s but in the shadow of the Supremes. Despite promising new tracks a 1974 comeback LP consisted largely of leftovers. Martha Reeves left Motown to record solo.

THE VELVEETTES Formed found fame and disappeared all in one year — 1964. One of their hits 'Really Saying Something' was recently revived by Bananarama.

KIM WESTON Recorded several singles and, in 1966, LP *It Takes Two*, with Marvin Gaye and produced by her husband, William Stevenson. Left Motown in 1965.

JUNIOR WALKER See profile.

STEVIE WONDER See profile.

THE SEVENTIES

JERRY BUTLER After late 60s success in Philadelphia, recorded for Motown 1976-78.

G.C. CAMERON Spinners' lead singer from 1967 until 'It's A Shame'. Solo LP in 1976.

COMMODORES See profile.

DYNAMIC SUPERIORS Vocal group who recorded three albums for Motown in 1977. Renowned for having a male lead singer who directed his love songs to males in the audience.

YVONNE FAIR Recorded with James Brown for King Records in 1962. Joined Motown in 1968 but didn't have her first hit until 1975 with 'Funky Music Sho Nuff Turns Me On' from the *The Bitch Is Black* LP.

JACKSON FIVE See profile.

JERMAINE JACKSON Left the Jackson Five for a solo contract with Motown. He married Berry Gordy's daughter. The Stevie Wonder composition 'Let's Get Serious' is the only highlight in his career so far.

THELMA HOUSTON Number One hit in 1976 with a revival of the Philly classic 'Don't Leave Me This Way'.

EDDIE KENDRICKS Left Temptations in 1971. Had success with 'Keep On Truckin'' (1973) and 'Boogie Down' (1974) but failed to find enough material to record strong albums. He left Motown for Arista in 1978 and recorded the excellent *Love Keys* LP for Atlantic in 1981.

BONNIE POINTER Left Pointer Sisters to record two LPs for Motown, 1978 and 1979, consisting largely of discofied, (digital) revivals of old Motown standards. 'Heaven Must Have Sent You' (Elgins) was a hit.

VALERIE SIMPSON Primarily a songwriter (with Nicholas Ashford) but released two solo LPs on Motown, 1970 and 1972.

SYREETA Started in Motown arranging department — a lyricist whose writing/marriage partnership with Stevie Wonder lasted 1972 to 1974. Co-written songs include 'Signed, Sealed, Delivered', 'It's A Shame' (Spinners), 'I'm Going Left'. She has since recorded extensively for Motown including tracks with Billy Preston.

TATA VEGA Vocalist, she recorded several LPs in the late 70s.

THE UNDISPUTED TRUTH Norman Whitfield's ultimate vehicle for his chronic psychedelia. Remained faceless even though their impersonal funk was often remarkable and always over the top, whether on Motown (1971 to 1977) or later for Whitfield Records.

THE EIGHTIES

GARY BYRD Had 1983 rap hit 'The Crown', with music by Stevie Wonder.

DEBARGE A popular young family unit produced by older brothers (from 70s act Switch) Bobby and Tommy Debarge. A saccharine version of the Jacksons' formula.

DAZZ BAND Post-Commodores suburban funk unit that scored once with 'Let It Whip' (1982).

DENNIS EDWARDS Temptations' vocalist, has just recorded a solo LP.

HIGH INERGY Signed by Gwen Gordy Fuqua, this female vocal group enjoyed immediate success with 'You Can't Turn Me Off' (1977). Their 1983 LP *Groove Patrol*, produced by George Tobin, featured two Barbara Mitchell/Smokey Robinson duets, including 'Blame It On Love'.

RICK JAMES See profile.

BETTY LAVETTE First recorded 1962. In 1982 released her first LP in 20 years, *Tell Me A Lie* on Motown, Southern soul at its best. More please.

TEENA MARIE Young, white soul-styled singer produced



Stevie Wonder, Gary Byrd.

initially by Rick James. Her albums are a curious mix of funk and melodrama. Left Motown 1983.

BOBBY NUNN Post-Prince party-party funkster. Produced promising album *Private Party* last year.

LIONEL RITCHIE Lead singer with the Commodores until 1983. He already has two hit solo albums behind him.

ROCKWELL New signing. A mate of Michael Jackson's who has attempted a blend of dance music and rock more akin to Prince. His new single 'Somebody's Watching Me' is a hit.

SONGWRITERS & PRODUCERS

ASHFORD & SIMPSON Songwriting team Nicholas Ashford and Valerie Simpson — husband and wife. With Motown 1963-1973. Wrote Gaye/Terrell's 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough' (1967) and 'Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing' (1968), etc. Since 1974 recorded on Warner Bros.

JOHNNY BRISTOL At Tri Phi he recorded later Motown hits 'Do You See My Love For You Growing' (Junior Walker) and 'Someday We'll Be Together' (Supremes). At Motown wrote with Harvey Fuqua for Junior Walker and others. Left 1973.

Own hit 'Hang On In There Baby' (MGM, 1974).

JAMES CARMICHAEL Commodores and Lionel Ritchie producer.

THE CLAN Committee formed to write for the Supremes when Holland-Dozier-Holland team left. 'Love Child' was the result. Included Berry Gordy, R. Dean Taylor, Hank Cosby.

THE CORPORATION Heavy-weight team to oversee Jackson Five's career. Included Berry Gordy, Freddie Perren.

HAL DAVIS Los Angeles-based producer. Motown's LA man from 1962. Produced Jackson Five after 'ABC'.

LAMONT DOZIER Third of legendary Holland-Dozier-Holland team who wrote the Supremes and Four Tops hits 1963-1968. Then the team left Motown to form their own label, Invictus. Has since worked as a producer and released numerous solo LPs.

HARVEY FUQUA Singer/songwriter with Chess Records act the Moonglows in the 50s. Along with wife Gwen Gordy (Berry Gordy's sister) set up Tri-Phi Records. When the label was absorbed into Motown late 1963, Fuqua became head of Artist Development Dept. A significant writer (with Johnny Bristol) and producer. When he left Motown produced Sylvester (Fantasy) and was "adviser" for Marvin Gaye's 1983 *Midnight Love* LP.

BERRY GORDY Motown's founder. Songwriting credits include first Motown hits 'Money' (Barrett Strong, Beatles) and 'Do You Love Me' (Contours). Despite Motown's growth, still writes and produces on occasions. He worked on

recent Temptations albums, *Reunion* and *Back to Basics*.

BRIAN HOLLAND Brother of Eddie. Prior to HDH team he wrote and produced early Marvelettes. Left 1968.

EDDIE HOLLAND Vocalist who demoed Gordy's compositions for Jackie Wilson. Recorded from 1959, LP released 1963, but writing took over with success of HDH team. Left 1968.

WILLIE HUTCH Producer/songwriter/recording artist. Credits include Jacksons' 'I'll Be There'. Recorded for Motown and Whitfield labels. Producer on new Four Tops LP.

FREDDIE PERREN Produced Miracles after Smokey left. Success since Motown with Gloria Gaynor.

SMOKEY ROBINSON The key Motown songwriter in the early years. Motown's greatest one man team. Wrote hits for Mary Wells, Miracles, Temptations and others. Bob Dylan once described him as "America's greatest living poet."

WILLIAM STEVENSON Prolific early Motown producer whose genius was overshadowed by HDH team. He wrote/produced 'Dancing in the Streets', 'Uptight', 'Beachwood 45789' and early Marvin Gaye.

BARRETT STRONG Recorded Gordy's first hit single 'Money' but no LP. Pursued a songwriting career as lyricist for Norman Whitfield. They wrote Temptations hits from 'Ain't Too Proud to Beg' (1966) to 'Papa Was A Rolling Stone' (1972). They wrote 'I Heard It Through the Grapevine'.

FRANK WILSON Worked with Four Tops and Supremes after HDH team departed. Recently left music business. Now an LA church minister.

NORMAN WHITFIELD With Motown from the beginning but first important songs when teamed with Barrett Strong — 'Ain't Too Proud to Beg' (1966) 'I Heard It Through the Grapevine' (1967). When David Ruffin left the Temptations, Whitfield masterminded the Sly Stone-influenced psychedelic sound of 'Cloud Nine', etc. He brought the style to its peak with 1972's 'Papa Was A Rolling Stone'. In 1974, left Motown to form Whitfield Records, where his significant success was 1976 disco soundtrack *Car Wash* featuring Rose Royce. In 1983 he once again worked for Motown producing the Temptations assisted by engineer Norman Anthony Whitfield.

When *RIU* asked for a phone interview we were told: "He's off the wall — he doesn't have a phone."

THE MUSICIANS

As the musicians were not credited on album covers in the 60s few names of Motown players are known.

Two bands consisting of session musicians recorded albums on Motown:

EARL VAN DYKE AND THE SOUL BROTHERS: Van Dyke, a pianist, was the leader of the original session band and on occasion was band leader on a touring Motown revue. The band released *That Motown Sound* (1965), an album of backing tracks, and Van Dyke also released *Earl of Funk* LP (1970). Van Dyke remained in Detroit when Motown moved to California. Plays on 1983 Temptations LP.

CHOKER CAMPBELL with a 16-piece houseband/roadband recorded *Hits of the Sixties* (1965).

On the sleeve notes of the recent Motown Story boxed set, Earl Van Dyke names his original session musicians:

BENNY BENJAMIN Drums. Died 1969.

JAMES JAMERSON Bass. Died 1983. Label's main man until mid 70s. Marvin Gaye, once a drummer, said:

"Jamerson was a genius. The little group that they had there was the Motown Sound and half the credit for the productions should go to the musicians — who were not only great musicians but great producers and arrangers as well."

American writer Greil Marcus described a Motown compilation as "James Jamerson's greatest hits."

Jamerson told writer Nelson George (*Billboard*):

"The Hollands and Dozier used to give me a chord sheet, but couldn't write for me. When they did it didn't sound right. They'd let me go on and ad lib. They'd say, 'Play what you feel' and occasionally give me some bass lines to play, or rather ideas for bass lines."

"I created, man. When they gave me that chord sheet I'd look at it, but then start doing what I felt and what would fit. All of them (the musicians) did it. All of them made hits."

The bassist on the 1983 Four Tops and Temptations LPs is James Jamerson Jr.

EDDIE WILLIS Guitar. Still active, played on LA-recorded Undisputed Truth LP (1975) and 1983 Four Tops LP.

ROBERT WHITE Guitar.

JOE MESSINA Guitar.

JOHNNY GRIFFITHS Second keyboards. Still playing on Gaye's *What's Going On* (1971).

JACK ASHFORD "Percussionist when needed." Who played Supremes' tambourine? Ashford gets "tambourine" credit on both Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* (1971) and 'Got to Give It Up' 11 min 48 dance single (1977).

Other significant names:

EURIEL JONES Detroit drummer (60s).

JAMES GITTON Vibes player.

EDDIE "BONGO" BROWN Congas, bongos. Player since Detroit Whitfield days and still present for 1983 25th Anniversary TV special.

CAROL KAYE LA woman bass player. 60s.

EARL PALMER LA drummer (60s).

ED GREENE White 70s drummer. If not with James Jamerson, often played with bassist Scott Edwards. Key live gigs include Gaye's 1974 live LP and 1983 25th Anniversary TV special.

NATHAN WATTS Stevie Wonder's bassist/leader of Wonderlove. Does sessions also.

DENNIS DAVIS Wonderlove drummer. Played on David Bowie's 1978 world tour.

MELVIN "WAH-WAH" RAGIN Busy 70s session guitarist.

MARVIN TARPLIN Smokey Robinson's guitarist since Miracles days.

Ironically, once Motown started acknowledging the musicians on an album, vocalists in a vocal group are not acknowledged. Though we know who played on the mid-70s Supremes LPs, the identity of the lead vocalist is not stated. Likewise on the 1983 Temptations LP.

Thanks to Roger Polhill for assistance with research and illustrations.

ROCKWELL

Somebody's Watching Me*

Single, 12" Mix, LP
COMING SOON

*features Michael Jackson

