

MARTHA REEVES & THE VANDELLAS



SIGNATURE
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MARTHA REEVES & THE VANDELLAS WERE ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ACTS AT MOTOWN FROM 1963 TO 1967. THEY RECORDED SOME POWERFUL CLASSIC RECORDINGS THAT HAVE A SPECIAL QUALITY. THESE SONGS ARE STILL HEARD TODAY, AS THEY ARE USED IN MOVIES AND ADVERTISEMENTS AROUND THE WORLD.

The group's story starts in 1957 when Rosalind Ashford, Annette Beard and Gloria Williams formed the Del-Phis. Martha Reeves joined a couple of years later and the group signed to Checker Records in 1960 but a lack of success meant that they soon split. Martha Reeves returned to trying to build a solo career and came to the attention of William "Mickey" Stevenson at Motown, who asked her to come for an audition. She turned up on the wrong day, however, and ended up being employed as Stevenson's secretary! Meanwhile the Del-Phis had re-formed under a new name, The Vels, and began helping out in the Motown studio with backing vocals. One of their first jobs was to back the emerging Marvin Gaye on his first hit single, "A Stubborn Kind Of Fellow". They then caught Berry Gordy's eye and were offered a contract with Gordy Records. At this point Williams decided to leave. The remaining trio soon came up with a new name to launch their Motown career, the Vandellas.

"Come and Get These Memories" was the group's second single, issued on Motown's Gordy Records subsidiary. It became the group's first hit single, reaching number 29 on the Billboard Pop

Singles Chart and number six on the Billboard R&B Sides Singles Chart. From then on the group began to develop a signature sound completely different from the Supremes and the Marvelettes.

Starting on the 14th September 1963, Martha Reeves & the Vandellas stayed at number one on the Billboard Hot R&B Side Singles Chart for 4 weeks and also at number one on the Cashbox R&B Singles Chart week-ending 21st September 1963 (2 weeks) with their single “Heat Wave” (later changed to “(Love Is Like A) Heat Wave” to avoid confusion with Irvine Berlin’s song), the first number one of their career. The song was produced by Motown’s main song-writing and music production team of Holland-Dozier-Holland. The song “Heat Wave” became a phenomenal success for the group and established their international status. This was followed by another single entitled “Quicksand”, which is a dance track similar in delivery to “Heat Wave” but with a harder edge with driving drums, percussion beats and powerful horn swings. The song became another top ten hit for the group.

They were developing into dynamic performers with more than a hint of fashion statement. This was the work of Maxine Powell and her team. She directed the label's Artists Development Department, also known as "Motown's Finishing School". Through it, she taught many artists - including Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, the Jackson Five and the Supremes - how they should carry themselves, treat people and dress. They also received synchronized dance training from choreographer Charles “Cholly” Atkins, who honed their performance skills. Berry Gordy Jr.

SIGNIFICANT SINGLES

- **“Come and Get These Memories”** – Billboard Pop Singles Chart (No.29)
Billboard R&B Side Singles Chart (No.6)
- **“Heat Wave”** – Billboard Hot R&B Side Singles Chart (No.1 - 4 Weeks)
Cash Box R&B Singles Chart (No.1 – 2 weeks)
- **“In My Lonely Room”**- Cash Cash Box R&B Singles Chart (No.6)
Billboard Hot 100 Singles Chart (No.44)
- **“Dancing In The Street”**- Billboard Hot 100 Singles Chart (No.2 – 2 weeks)
- **“Wild One”**- Cash box R&B Singles Chart (No.11)
Billboard Hot 100 Singles Chart (No.33)
- **“Nowhere to Run”**- Billboard Hot Rhythm & Blues Chart (No.5)

had worked out how to create a successful business by building strong teams of musicians and other support staff, whose skills made the Motown artists stand out from the rest.

During this period Holland-Dozier-Holland came up with another top ten R&B and Soul single for Martha Reeves & the Vandellas called “In My Lonely Room”. The song was an up-tempo gospel-style track with a driving beat provided by Benny Benjamin and Richard “Pistol” Allen on drums and powerful performances from the other members of The Funk Brothers. The single peaked at number six on the Cash Box R&B Singles Chart and number forty-four on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles Chart in 1964. It was their fifth top ten hit single written by Holland-Dozier-Holland.

By October that year the Supremes had another monster hit with “Baby Love” on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles Chart week-ending 31st October 1964 (4 weeks), whilst that very same week Martha & the Vandellas were at number five with “Dancing in the Street”. Two weeks before The Supremes peaked at number one, “Dancing in the Street” was at number two week-ending 17th October 1964 (2 weeks). The song was produced by William “Mickey” Stevenson and co-written by Marvin Gaye, Ivory Jo Hunter and Stevenson. It is another driving dance track that has an infectious swinging beat. The song has become a classic, instantly recognisable and a real foot-tapper.

Hunter was classically-trained as a musician, a master at both the keyboards and trumpet, who

would play a significant role in the overall sound of the label. He played session work briefly with The Funk Brothers before he started to collaborate with William “Mickey” Stevenson on several recordings during the first ten years of the label’s operation. “Dancing in the Street” became one of Motown’s signature songs of that era. It was one of the first major hits to feature Marvin Gaye as a credited song-writer.

The group’s follow-up was “Wild One”, another top twenty R&B hit. The song reached number eleven on the Cash Box R&B Singles Chart and number thirty-three on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles Chart. It was co-written and co-produced by William “Mickey” Stevenson and Ivory Jo Hunter. Hunter also accompanied The Funk Brothers, working together with Jack Ashford on percussion.

Martha Reeves & the Vandellas went on to have another big hit in 1965 with the song “Nowhere to Run.” The song’s hard-driving signature instrumental “Motown Sound”, similar to their hit classic gold-certified single “Dancing In The Street”, incorporated snow chains used as percussion, running alongside Jack Ashford’s tambourine performance and the explosive drum beats from Benny Benjamin. The song peaked at number five on the Billboard Hot Rhythm and Blues Singles Chart.

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT DIANA ROSS AND THE SUPREMES, THEIR CREATIVE MASTERPIECE RECORDINGS AND THEIR PROLIFIC CAREER, CHECK THE E-BOOK WRITTEN BY MUSIC HISTORIAN KEVIN TOMLIN ABOUT HOLLAND-DOZIER-HOLLAND'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUCCESS OF DIANA ROSS AND THE SUPREMES AND THE DIANA ROSS E-BOOK, AVAILABLE FROM THE WEBSITE:

WWW.SIGNATURESOUNDSONLINE.COM



There are currently six e books in the collection, with more to come, all written by music historian Kevin Tomlin:

MOTOWN E-BOOK 1: HOLLAND-DOZIER-HOLLAND
MOTOWN E-BOOK 2: NORMAN WHITFIELD
MOTOWN E-BOOK 3: SMOKEY ROBINSON
MOTOWN E-BOOK 4: MARVIN GAYE
MOTOWN E-BOOK 5: STEVIE WONDER
MOTOWN E-BOOK 6: DIANA ROSS

Also available is Kevin Tomlin's new book about Motown Records:

"THE SIGNATURE SOUND OF MOTOWN"

Published by Filament Press.

You will also enjoy exploring this YouTube link:
<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheSignaturesounds/about>

ABOUT MUSIC HISTORIAN KEVIN TOMLIN



Kevin Tomlin has been studying music with a signature sound for the last thirty plus years based around Soul and R&B music originated from America, especially music from America's inter-cities and urban areas such as New Orleans, Chicago, Memphis, Muscle Shoals, Detroit and Philadelphia.

Kevin started his journey from personal experiences living in Jamaica from the early 1970s until 1979 when Disco ruled the charts. He was listening to music coming out of America via radio and seeing performances on television and at live concerts at the music theatre at college and at other live venues by many great legends,

during a time when black music made inroads into popular culture globally.

While he was living in America, he began teaching music history. During this period Kevin was involved in the creation of special training programmes and workshops for music teachers in South Florida schools, using music history as the foundation, to build exciting programmes of study and support for education professional.

Kevin provides consultancy services for multi-media organisations, schools, recording artists, cultural and faith-based groups, and entertainment professionals all within the framework of "arts and cultural history". His breadth and depth of knowledge is part of the reason his writings are sought after and particularly favoured by music students of all types, and those *who really want to know real music gold nuggets*.

In recognition of his work as a music historian Kevin was appointed in 2015 onto the Executive Board of the UK based GMIA (Gospel Music Industry Alliance), serving and representing British Gospel Music in its relationship to Gospel Music sectors in other territories across the world.