

American MASTERS

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press information



Timeline

AMERICAN MASTERS Marvin Gaye: What's Going On

AMERICAN MASTERS
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Enormously talented and equally complicated, Marvin Gaye created an intimate style - full of honesty, integrity, and vulnerability. *AMERICAN MASTERS Marvin Gaye: What's Going On* which premieres Wednesday, May 7 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings), reveals his autobiography in lyrics and melody - the discord, confusion and depression behind the Motown star who challenged and transformed black music leaving an indelible mark on our cultural landscape. Below is a timeline of selected highlights from his life and career.

- 1939** (April 2) Marvin Pentz Gay Jr. born to Alberta & Marvin Pentz Gay in Washington D.C. at Freedman's Hospital
- o Marvin grows up with his parents, older sister Jeanne, younger brother Frankie, and younger sister Zeola in a segregated, poor, urban area of southwest D.C. The Gay's maintained a strict religious household where many pleasures were banned, such as television, movies, dancing, etc.
 - o Marvin Sr. used both physical and psychological punishment to discipline his children-especially Marvin, who provoked his father in order to get whatever attention he could, pushing him closer to his mother
 - o He accompanied his father to church services and began singing, performing, and playing instruments as early as 3
 - o His mother supported the family through teaching//domestic work
- 1953** Becomes a member of D.C. Tones doo-wop group
- 1956** (October) Marvin drops out of high school and enlists in Air Force
- 1957** (June) Discharged from Air Force, returns to D.C. and joins the Marquees doo-wop group.
- 1958** Meets Harvey Fuqua and the Marquees become part of the Moonglows
- 1959** Move to Chicago for training in professionalism and technical skills
- o Marvin begins experimenting with drugs while on the road with artists
 - o Marvin sings lead on "Mama Loochie"

- more -

1960 Fuqua recognizes Marvin's ability and moves with him to Detroit

Signed by Fuqua to Gwen Gordy's label, Anna Label (a subsidiary of Motown), yet confined to drumming and piano sessions for its artists, most notably The Marvelettes hit record "Please Mr. Postman"

Marvin begins to court Anna Gordy

(December) Meets Berry Gordy at Christmas party and signs with Tamla

- o Changes his name legally to "Gaye" by adding an 'e' to the end of his name during the beginning of his Motown career (this name change was in part to separate from his father's name, end gossip about his sexuality, and be more like his idol Sam Cooke)

1961 (May) First single released on Tamla, "Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide" on A-side & "Never Let You Go (Sha-Lu-Bop)" on B-side

(June) First album released on Tamla, *The Soulful Moods of Marvin Gaye*

1962 (October) First Motown Revue leaves for 2-month tour of US

- o Marvin took very little advice from the artistic development director at Motown, with the exception of not performing with his eyes closed

(December) "Stubborn Kind of Fellow" released, reaches No. 8 on the R&B charts and No. 46 on the pop charts

- o This track was an autobiographical reference about Gaye's personality

"Hitch Hike" released and becomes crossover record, reaching No. 30 on pop charts

"Pride and Joy" reaches No. 10 confirming his commercial status

1963 (July) Becomes Motown's biggest solo artist with "Pride and Joy" and *Stubborn Kind Of Fellow* album

(June) Marries Anna Gordy

Moves his parents into a better area of Washington and gives his mother enough money so that she doesn't have to work from here on out

Marvin Gaye Live On Stage represents his success with two hit records: "Can I Get A Witness", which reaches No. 22 on pop charts, and "You're A Wonderful One", which reaches No. 15 on pop charts

1964 Together album with Mary Wells reached No. 1 on R&B charts

"Once Upon A Time" is Marvin's first international success

- o This partnering makes him the perfect male icon for the Black female record-buying public

Receives top billing in Motown Revue

“How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)” reaches No. 49 in Britain
o “When I’m Alone I Cry” (an attempt to sing ballads) fails

(October) Appears on TAMI Show with Beach Boys, Chuck Berry,
Rolling Stones, etc.

(November) Travels to London to appear on Ready, Steady, Go! pop
television show

Co-writes “Dancing in the Streets” with William Stevenson

Wins Detroit Courier's jazz poll and Comb and Clippers contest as top
male vocalist

1965 (January) “How Sweet It Is (To Be Loved By You)” reaches No. 6 on US
charts

Marvin and Anna adopt Marvin Pentz Gaye III

(November) “Ain't That Peculiar” reaches No. 8 on pop charts

Marvin came out with A Tribute To The Great Nat King Cole, but was jealous of the success
of other Motown artists

- o Marvin begins to feel that he should be given more creative freedom as an artist
- o Outside of music Marvin helps to back the Detroit Wheelers and boxer Tommy
Hanna, he discovers fondness for cocaine, and he and Anna have public screaming
disagreements

1966 Paired with Kim Weston to record Take Two, but she leaves Motown soon
after appears on The Ed Sullivan Show

- o During his early career, his hit singles helped to gain him “teen idol” status on
shows such as American Bandstand, Shindig!, Hullabaloo, and The Mike Douglas
Show. He was also one of few Motown artists to perform at the Copacabana

1967

- o Marvin relies on cocaine more than ever before claiming that it gives him a clean
feeling that could not be found elsewhere

“Ain't No Mountain High Enough” reaches No. 19 on pop charts

“Your Precious Love” reaching No. 5 on pop charts, becoming the pair's
first top ten successes in US

(October 14) Tammi Terrell collapses on stage during concert at
Hampden-Sydney College, VA, later diagnosed with a brain tumor

- o Terrell records You're All I Need confined to a wheelchair

1968 “If I Could Build My Whole World Around You” duet with Terrell hits No. 10 on US charts

(May) "Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing" with Terrell reaches No. 8 on US charts

"You're All I Need To Get By" reaches No. 7 on US pop charts and No. 19 in Britain

(October) Sings National Anthem at World Series game between Detroit Tigers and St. Louise Cardinals

(December) Performs at Miami Pop Festival with Chuck Berry, Fleetwood Mac, Junior Walker, etc.

"I Heard It Through The Grapevine" was Gaye's first No.1 pop single, selling almost 4 million copies and remaining No. 1 for 7 weeks

1969 (March) "Grapevine" reaches No. 1 in Great Britain. Gaye becomes international sensation

(June) Performs at Newport '69 festival at San Fernando State College in California.

- o Gaye tries his hand at producing-working with the Originals, producing 3 hit singles (this teaches him a lot about the techniques of working in a studio and overdubbing vocal harmonies)

1970 (March 16) Tammi Terrell passes away and Marvin is devastated, vowing never to do a duet again

- o Marvin does not perform for several years creating rumors of retirement-so Motown released several "Greatest Hits" compilations and claimed that Gaye was in the studio
- o Outside of music Marvin begins training with the Detroit Lions, acquires a more laidback style of dress, and begins to think about deeper issues occurring in the world, such as Vietnam

1971 (January) "What's Going On" released as single, becoming Motown's fastest-selling recording

(March) Begins recording What's Going On album

(May) Releases What's Going On album, breaking existing sales records when half-million copies were sold on first day of release, reaching No. 6 on US charts

Gaye stars in "Chrome and Hot Leather"

Receives NAACP's Image Awards for Producer of the Year, Male Vocalist of the Year, & Album of the Year

Honored by Record World with Record of the Year and Male Vocalist of The Year awards

Time Magazine names What's Going On one of top ten albums of year.

“Mercy Mercy Me” and “Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)”
released as singles and reach No. 4 and No. 9 on US charts

- o Marvin helped fight for new artistic freedom quoted as saying: “The artists' time has arrived” (the rise of the singer/songwriter resulted in the decline of production teams like those existing at Motown)
- o What's Going On changed his image into that of a serious artist and depicts the fusion of his newly honed vocal layering skills and his spiritual conviction, allowing him to rediscover God that he felt he had lost in secular music
- o WGO helps to promote “concept album” and is described by Smokey Robinson as “Marvin Gaye's greatest masterpiece, the greatest album, in my opinion, ever made by anyone”

1972 (May) Marvin Gaye Day celebration in D.C., presented with the key to the city

Honored by Billboard Magazine with Trendsetter Award

Composes score for film Trouble Man.

1973 (January) Benefit concert in Jamaica for Boys Club of Trench Town, where he receives key to the city of Kingston by Prime Minister

(March) Meets Janice Hunter at recording session in Hollywood

“Lets Get It On” becomes a No.1 single, selling more copies than “Grapevine” and the album reaches No. 2 on US pop charts

Moves into the a secluded house in the hills with Janice

- o Records Diana & Marvin, but it lacked the intimacy of his work with Terrell, partially because they recorded separately because Marvin refused not to smoke marijuana in the studio, even though Ross was pregnant
- o Marvin buys a house for his mother in LA (he fights for musical independence, but never tries to break free from the security of his reliance on his mother)

1974 (January) Performs in concert for the first time in 4 years in Oakland, CA (source for Marvin Gaye Live! album released in August 1974)

- o He is reportedly so nervous that he sends his brother on stage before him to make sure the audience would react positively
- o The set includes a new song “Jan” which was not recorded for any studio album

(September 4) Nona Gaye is born

(October) Honored at Marvin Gaye Days in Oklahoma City
Named Honorary Citizen of Omaha, NB

Moves back to Hollywood and (August) sets off on a 20-date tour of the US

- o Tour is a sell out, but exhausting in addition to increased drug usage necessary to calm his nerves

1975 (March) Receives commendation from city of Los Angeles, signed by May Tom Bradley

Anna Gaye begins divorce process

- o Marvin has a recording studio built on Sunset Boulevard and continues to finance boxers

Janice becomes pregnant again and they move to San Fernando Valley

(November 16) Son Frankie is born

- o Marvin performs at a benefit concert with his head shaven in an act of protest against the imprisonment for murder of boxer Ruben Carter
- o Marvin now believes that as far as recording schedules go, it is for the artist to decide, not the record company

1976 Marvin is running out of money due to an extravagant lifestyle, failed sporting/business ventures, expensive drug habits, surrounded himself with people who were using him

(May) Honored at United Nations Headquarters for his contribution to US National Commission for UNESCO after his benefit concert at Radio City Music Hall (proceeds of concert went to Emergency Relief Fund for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)

(September) Named by US Department of State as “Ambassador of Good Will” on behalf of his work for children around the world

(September) Flies to London for first time in 10 years for European tour

1977 (March) Marriage to Anna Gordy is legally ended

“Got To Give It Up” reaches No. 1 on US pop, R&B and dance singles charts simultaneously and No. 7 in Britain

(October) Marries Janice Hunter in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

1978 The IRS closes down his studio and he is forced to file for voluntary-bankruptcy

(September) Signs 7-year contract with Motown

(December) Here My Dear reaches 26 on album charts

- o This album chronicles Marvin's marriage with Anna, ending a song describing the new love he found. Marvin described the album by stating: “I just sang and sang until I'd drained myself of everything I'd lived through”.
- o By this time Marvin's jealous tendencies surface through paranoia and he tries to force her to have affairs as though he wanted a failed marriage

- 1979** Marvin seeks to become competitive with all of the young acts coming to Motown, including Michael Jackson and Rick James
- Marvin begins a tour, but collapses midway due to physical exhaustion and drug abuse
- Janice moves the children to her mother's house and Marvin moved back in with his mother
- Marvin's records an album entitled Love Man, but it is rejected by Motown
- Marvin loses a great deal of money backing Andy Price in a fight for the Welterweight Title against Sugar Ray Leonard (Price didn't make it through 1st round)
- Jan runs off with Teddy Pendergrass
- (January) Ranked by Billboard Magazine among its Top Ten Performers of all time
- (February) Record "Pops We Love You" with Diana Ross, Stevie Wonder, and Smokey Robinson for Berry Gordy's father's 90th birthday
- (November) Self-imposed exile in Hawaii after tour in Japan, where he meets Janice and the children, but they end up fighting and she leaves him with Bubby
- 1980** (April) Marvin and his son live in a bread van, broke and drug-addicted
- (June) Leave Hawaii for tour in Great Britain, Netherlands, and Switzerland
- o Drugs and women become a daily part of his life again
- (July 8) Tours ends when he arrives late for the Royal Gala Charity Show held at Lakeside Country Club in Surrey resulting in a public insult to British royalty
- (September) Marvin performs with Diana Ross at a Stevie Wonder concert
- 1981** (January) Motown releases what Marvin claims to be unfinished work with the In Our Lifetime album. As a result, he disassociated himself with the album and vows not to work with Motown again
- o Marvin returns to drugs and depression
- (February) Leaves England for Belgium with son Buddy and Freddy Cousaert
- (February) Marvin and Janice divorce
- (June) Janice comes to Belgium to try and work things out, but in the end she ends up taking her son back with her to the US
- 1982** Columbia buys Gaye out of his Motown contract (after 20 years) and becomes a CBS artist
- David Ritz comes to Belgium to work on Gaye's autobiography and ends up helping write "Sexual Healing"

Records Midnight Love album at Studio Katy in Ohaine, Belgium

Marvin becomes involved with Lady Edith Foxwell

(October) Arrives in US after 3-year absence

(November) Sexual Healing reaches No. 3 on US pop charts, selling more than 2 million copies and No. 10 in Britain (the single reaching No. 3 in the US and No. 10 in Britain)

1983 (February) Sings National Anthem at NBA All-Star Game in Los Angeles

Receives “Best Male Vocalist” and “Best Instrumental Performance in R&B” for “Sexual Healing” at The Grammy Awards in Los Angeles

- o By now he has been in the music business for over 2 decades, with 26 albums and 40 hits

(March) Joins Motown artists for the taping of the 25th Anniversary Special in Pasadena, CA where he performs “What's Going On”

Mrs. Gay undergoes a kidney operation

(April) Opens four-month-long tour in San Diego, CA

- o Drug intake increased automatically on the road, but his mental stability was deteriorating and his paranoia was at an all-time high so that he felt someone was out to kill him and he had several employees carrying guns. He was hospitalized for a week mid-tour

(August) Gives final performance at Greek Theater in Los Angeles

- o Marvin moves back into his mother's house where he lets himself go, rarely getting dressed, threatening to commit suicide, claiming that someone is going to assassinate him and reportedly having some violent incidents with women

1984 (April 1) Shot and killed by his father one day before 45th birthday

- o After witnessing and argument between his parents over a missing insurance document, Marvin physically attacks his father, who returns with the .38 caliber revolver which Marvin had given him due to his paranoia over assassination. Marvin Sr. shot his son twice at close range and then walked outside the house
- o After the arrival of an ambulance, there was a half-hour delay because the paramedics would not enter the house before the weapon had been recovered-a delay that could have decreased Marvin Gaye's chances at survival due to increased blood loss
- o “And Marvin died in his [Frankie] arms... 'He looked up at me and said “I just wanted to be loved””

(April 4) 10,000 people, including family, friends, and fans gather at Forrest Lawn Memorial Park in Los Angeles for public viewing of his open coffin

(April 5) Private funeral held for Marvin Gaye

(April 6) His ashes are scattered at sea

1987 (January) Marvin Gaye is inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

1990 Marvin Gaye is given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame

1995 (November) Inducted into Soul Train Hall of Fame

1996 Honored with a lifetime achievement award at during 38th annual Grammy awards

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