

Throwback: Berry Gordy Jr.

Berry Gordy Jr. was a high school dropout, Army veteran , retired boxer and former record-store owner when he co-wrote Jackie Wilson's 1957 hit "Reet Petite" with his sister Gwen Gordy Fuqua and Wilson's cousin Billy Davis. This early success as a songwriter gave Gordy the finances to transition into becoming a producer. Two years later he borrowed \$800 from his family and launched Tamla Records in January of 1959. Marv Johnson and Barrett Strong released music on the Tamla and Anna Records. Strong's "Money (That's What I Want)" was written by Gordy and Janie Bradford and was the first hit for Tamla. The song was a number two hit and would be famously covered by The Beatles in 1963. Tamla and Motown Records merged in April of 1960. The Miracles had recorded Motown's first single "Bad Girl" in 1959 but it was "Shop Around" that became the label's first song to sell one million copies. Smokey Robinson and Berry Gordy wrote "Shop Around" which went to number one on the R&B charts and number two on the Billboard pop chart. This moment was the beginning of Motown's movement that would include The Temptations, Gladys Knight & The Pips, The Jackson 5, Stevie Wonder, The Supremes, Martha Reeves & The Vandellas, The Four Tops, Marvin Gaye over the next decade. Gordy would end up writing and co-writing 240 of Motown's 15,000 songs.

Motown had more than 100 Top Ten hits between 1961 and 1971. Gordy's interest in creating a style of Black music amenable to the masses was achieved and his artists broke racial barriers. Their tours of the south were challenging because of the segregation in the country during the '60s despite it being officially outlawed in 1964. Motown artists were able to unite many of their audiences who started the concert sitting in their racially designated section but by the end of the show all would be dancing together. The label was also able to produce television specials for their artists like The

Temptations and The Supremes which was something non-existent for most Black artists.Â

Berry Gordy moved all of Motown's operations to Los Angeles in 1972 and Motown's film division was born. Diana Ross's *Lady Sing The Blues* and *Mahogany* features were critically-acclaimed and she received an Oscar nomination for her portrayal of Billie Holiday. Motown Productions later released *The Wiz*, *Scott Joplin*, *Thank God It's Friday* and *The Last Dragon*. Motown Records had a second run of major hits in the '80s thanks to Rick James, Teena Marie and The Dazz Band. By the late '80s the label lost its steam and Gordy sold it to MCA Records in 1988. He sold Motown Productions to Motown executive Suzanne de Passe in 1989.Â

In 1988 Berry Gordy was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 1994 he released his memoir *To Be Loved*. He became the first living person to receive the Songwriters Hall Of Fame Pioneer in 2013. Former President Barack Obama gave Gordy the National Medal Of Arts in 2016.Â

Gordy developed *Motown: The Musical* in 2011 and it ran until 2015. *Ain't Too Proud The Life And Times Of The Temptations* is currently playing on [Broadway](#). I'll Be There, the musical about The Four Tops will be presented by lone surviving member Duke Fakir Fall of 2022 in Detroit. Berry Gordy is a 2021 Kennedy Center honoree for his contribution to the arts. The Honors Gala will air on CBS December 22nd.Â

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