

Third Man Books Reissues Ben Edmonds' Marvin Gaye: What's Going On And The Last Days Of The Motown Sound

Ben Edmonds
Marvin
Gaye:



What's
Going On?
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Motown Sound

Third Man Books has reissued Ben Edmonds' *Marvin Gaye: What's Going On and the Last Days Of The Motown Sound*. Edmonds' book is a study of Marvin Gaye's landmark album, *What's Going On*, that came out in 1971. Gaye famously fought with Motown founder Berry Gordy Jr. to release the politically conscious album that was a response to the Vietnam War, drug addiction, and poverty. Renaldo "Obie" Benson of the The Four Tops told Edmonds how he witnessed anti-war protesters being attacked at Berkeley's People's Park and how his conversation about it with songwriter Al Cleveland led to the creation of the single, "What's Going On." Benson offered the song to his bandmates, who rejected it on the grounds that it was a protest song. Gaye accepted Benson's suggestion that he sing it and he added his own elements to the song and recorded it with famed Motown musicians The Funk Brothers. Edmonds' book was originally published in 2001 and he explained in his introduction the purpose of revisiting *What's Going On*.

"This is not simply about a singer and a record album. It is the story of an idea, formed out of the mixed ethers of social anger and spiritual longing, that Marvin Gaye articulated with a cast of brilliant accomplices and fought to get recorded and released. From that idea, and with that help, and out of that struggle, something was fashioned that continues to touch souls more profoundly than even its creator could have imagined."

Marvin Gaye: What's Going On and the Last Days Of The Motown Sound is available from [Third Man Books](#) and physical and online booksellers.

Throwback: Marvin Gaye: I Want You



Leon Ware and Diana Ross's brother, Arthur Ross, co-wrote "I Want You" for Marvin Gaye's 13th solo album, also titled *I Want You*. Gaye's sensual showpiece was a serious yearning inspired by his relationship with Janis Hunter that was taking place while he was still married to Anna Gordy. Leon Ware's arrangement of mood-inducing congas, sizzling guitar, horns, strings, and Marvin alternating between desirous wails and soft crooning captured the turbulence and tenderness of his relationships.

Gaye was coming off the success of *Let's Get It On* and a collaboration album with Diana Ross, both released in 1973. *I Want You* was the next step of the sexy image Gaye had established with *Let's Get It On*. His ability to share the urgency of new love with Ware's dreamy disco suite kept Gaye relevant in the '70s and the single became a mainstay of quiet storm radio. "I Want You" did well on the Soul Singles, Disco Singles, and Billboard Hot 100 charts. Ernie Barnes's Sugar Shack painting on the cover was just as iconic as the music and it asserted its place in pop culture by also appearing on the TV show *Good Times*. Ice Cube, Mary J. Blige, Madonna, and most recently, Kendrick Lamar are among those who have sampled and covered "I Want You." A remastered deluxe version of the album was released in 2003 with a booklet, unreleased material, original liner notes, and an essay from David Ritz, who later collaborated with Gaye on his biography, *Divided Soul*.

TAMLA Records Rebooted



Berry Gordy Jr.'s TAMLA Records is being rebooted under the Capitol Music Group. Gordy founded Tamla in 1959 and it was going to be called Tammy in reference to the song sung by Debbie Reynolds for the 1958 film Tammy. The label would be incorporated as Motown by 1960. The new TAMLA will be led by Walter Thomas, SVP of Motown Gospel and TAMLA Records. Capitol's goal is to make the label a place of positive music both Christian and secular. Producer Rodney "Darkchild" Jenkins has also partnered with TAMLA and he had this to say:

"Berry Gordy built TAMLA on the principles of artist development, excellence, and music that moves people. That vision still stands today, and we are proud to continue carrying it forward as we launch this new chapter."

TAMLA's roster includes Dante Bowe, Jordan L'oreal, Childlike CiCi, and Emmanuel The Prophet. It is quite surprising that TAMLA Records is coming back in the 21st century and Berry Gordy Jr. is here to see it. So far he has not commented on the relaunch but seasoned Motown fans are curious to see how things develop. The label has other partnerships with social media platforms and streamers to make sure that artists are receiving appropriate exposure. TAMLA started as an innovative

label and time will tell if the relaunch will honor that legacy.



Throwback: Motown



On January 12, 1959, Berry Gordy Jr. founded Tamla Records in Detroit, Michigan. Gordy had previously owned a music store that exclusively sold jazz records and was a member of a songwriting team for singer Jackie Wilson and others. A meeting with a 17-year-old Smokey Robinson led to Gordy recording the single “Got A Job” by Robinson’s group, The

Miracles. He leased the song to End Records, and this practice of leasing songs to bigger labels outside of Detroit continued with the Marv Johnson song, "Come To Me." Robinson encouraged Gordy to start his own R&B record label, and he borrowed \$800 from his family to release Johnson's song on his Tamla label. In 1959, he started Anna Records, which was named after his sister, and they had the most success with Barrett Strong's "Money (That's What I Want)." In April of 1960, he merged both companies and incorporated Motown Records.

Strong's single was Motown's first hit record in June of 1960, and by that time, Gordy had purchased the building that was the label's headquarters and called it Hitsville U.S.A. Motown eventually took up space in seven additional nearby houses for the company's administrative duties, artist development, management, payroll, sales, and recording. The Miracles' "Bad Girl" was the first official Motown release, but it was their single "Shop Around" that was the first million-seller for the group and label. Gordy's motto was to make music that appealed to both Black and white audiences. Motown became the most successful African-American business and independent record company in America, with 79 songs in the Billboard Top Ten between 1960 and 1969. Motown's influence was critical to the integration of pop music. The label was home to some of the most important artists in the history of music, including The Miracles, Mary Wells, The Temptations, The Supremes, The Jackson 5, and Stevie Wonder. The company also moved into the media world after moving to Los Angeles with television specials and movies. Diana Ross' starring roles in *Mahogany*, *Lady Sings The Blues*, and *The Wiz* opened the way for Whitney Houston's *The Bodyguard* decades later.

Motown stayed independent until 1988, when Gordy sold it to MCA. Universal Music acquired Motown in 1998 when they purchased Polygram. In 2025, Motown is home to Brandy, Erykah Badu, Kem, Migos, Lil Yachty, and The City Girls.

