

IT'S A CLASSIC

# Motown: It turned Detroit into 'Hitsville'



HUGH GALLAGHER

It was summer 1964, the gap between my junior and senior years in high school. I flew to New York to visit my brother and his wife, see the World's Fair and drive back with my brother in his cramped but very cool black Volkswagen beetle.

That trip had a theme song. It was the song that came on the radio incessantly as we moved from one Top 40 AM zone to another and was replayed it seemed every fifth song. It was a song that came from the most unlikely entertainment center in the world. It wasn't made in New York, Los Angeles or Liverpool. It was a siren song from home.

Everybody in America was listening to the Supremes singing "Where Did Our Love Go."

Baby, baby it was so neat to be from the hippest place in America.

We stopped in Scranton, Pa., the family homestead. My Aunt Kate, from the Glenn Miller generation, was wear-

ing a deep groove into another Motown record from earlier that year, Mary Wells' "My Guy."

If Motown played second fiddle to the British Invasion in most of America, in Detroit and the Midwest, especially that part reached by CKLW, Motown reigned supreme for most of the '60s. In our school, an all-white school in a city that had a reputation for racial intolerance, Motown set the beat that we gladly followed. It was our music.

It was a music that for one illusory moment brought black and white, young and old together. It had a beat, but it was a light, dance beat. It was music that told old stories of love and loss in new ways. It was rhythm and blues but with a softer, pop sound, less gritty than sister Aretha Franklin or the Muscle Shoals Stax sound.

Young white teenagers adapted the walking suits of the Temptations and the Four Tops. They were awed by the graceful movements of an immaculately thin Marvin Gaye. Black and white teens filled the Fox for Motown revues. They were eager to press close to the stage for a look at the boy genius of the mouth harp, Little Stevie Wonder, not

realizing that he would grow into one of the best song writers of his generation.

The hits just kept coming. Different groups had their champions. Martha and the Vandellas were a great party group, Martha Reeves was a top exponent of the gospel shout style. Diana Ross was more mainstream and the Supremes, Motown's most successful group, were smooth as silk and eerily tied into the mind of the teenage girls they sang about and for. Marvin Gaye was the young blade all of us wished we could be. The Temptations were an explosion of rhythmic, harmonic precision and, oh, those incredible dance moves.

Times changed. Even as the British groups borrowed from Motown (the Beatles did a fine tribute to the Marvelettes "Please Mr. Postman," Motown's first No. 1 hit) so, too, did Motown take note of the British bands and the American folk rock movement. Their music lost its innocence. The Temptations sang about drugs and wayward fathers ("Cloud Nine" and "Papa Was a Rolling Stone"), the Supremes sang plaintively about unwed motherhood ("Love Child"), and Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder made al-

bums that took blistering looks at the Detroit around them ("What's Going On" and "Innervision").

In 1972, Berry Gordy left for Los Angeles. It seemed appropriate, the magic was gone and he had to move on to other things. But he had created a classic sound in popular music.

And, once upon a time, Detroit was the hippest place in the U.S.A., where young blacks and whites were happy to be dancing in the streets, together.

You can relive the Motown story at two new cooperative exhibits. Henry Ford Museum has mounted a multi-media tribute to Motown and its special place in Detroit history on display during regular museum hours. The museum has also provided assistance for the restoration of the original Hitsville U.S.A. building on Grand Boulevard in Detroit where another exhibit traces Berry Gordy's development of the famous company.

Hugh Gallagher is the Observer & Eccentric assistant managing editor for feature sections. He welcomes your comments and ideas for classics. He can be reached at 313-953-2118.

Recapturing the moment: Henry Ford Museum is presenting a multi-media exhibit honoring the Motown story. One of the key factors to Motown success was Diana Ross and the Supremes, the labels best selling act.



## HOUSE OF MAPLE, OAK & PINE

33Wx13Dx71H  
Reg. \$609  
**\$349.95**



33Wx13Dx57H  
Reg. \$525  
**\$299.95**



33Wx13Dx43H  
Reg. \$434.95  
**\$249.95**



### "A CASE FOR THE BOOKS"

Lawyers Beveled Glass and Brass Oak Bookcases  
**SPECIAL ORDER SALE PRICES**  
Medium, Dark

Michigan's Largest Selection of Country, Colonial & Traditional Furniture.

### SIGHT & SOUND MEDIA CENTER

Elegant 58" Oak cabinet holds 32" TV. Features pocket doors, diamond beveled brass glass, pull-out VCR shelf and 2 built-in "pull out" VCR tape storage racks.

Reg. \$1489.00 **\$799**  
58"Wx52"Hx20"D





32098 Plymouth Road - Livonia  
**(313) 421-0700**

Sunday 12-5  
Open Daily 9:30-9  
Wed. & Sat. 10-6

