



SUN COUNTRY



WITH A BURGEONING INTEREST IN TELEVISION AND PLANS TO DEVELOP DIANA ROSS INTO A MOVIE STAR, BERRY GORDY NOW DIVIDES HIS TIME BETWEEN DETROIT AND CALIFORNIA. HE OPENS A WEST COAST-BASED LABEL, BUT HIS FREQUENT ABSENCE UNINTENTIONALLY UNDERMINES THE BEDROCK OF HIS COMPANY. A FRUSTRATED BARNEY ALES LEAVES. MARVIN GAYE'S SOCIALLY AWARE *WHAT'S GOING ON* IS CRITICALLY AND COMMERCIALY ACCLAIMED, THOUGH GORDY IS INITIALLY UNIMPRESSED. MOTOWN QUILTS DETROIT FOR LOS ANGELES IN 1972 – A MOVE WITH SEISMIC REPERCUSSIONS.

∞ STEREO ∞



1970.
episode 5

1970.
I Want You Back.
The Corporation.
Los Angeles.
Students Into Master.
Marvin Gaye.
Marvin Gaye, Football Hero.
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California Calling.
Diana Ross.
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1970.



While Motown's official move to **Los Angeles** didn't happen until 1972, for years the company had an outpost manned by **Hal Davis** at 6255 Sunset Boulevard, and **Berry Gordy** had bought a house there in 1968.

In Detroit, **Motown** was largely self-sufficient – but it could not make its own TV shows and movies in the city. The success of prior years dabbling in these visual platforms gave Gordy the confidence that he could succeed with such expansion and diversification. In particular, 1968's ***T.C.B. (Takin' Care of Business)*** television special, starring **Diana Ross & The Supremes** and **The Temptations**, was a ratings hit, and also resulted in two huge-selling albums by the combined groups.

The only way to be competitive in these mediums was to set up shop permanently in **Los Angeles**.

1970 was a crucial moment for the **Motown business model**. Its hitherto high-octane mix of innovation, quality control and in-house talent management in **Detroit** had fuelled its growth and success. There, its songwriters, producers and artists were cordoned off from show business middlemen. Moving west to a disparate city meant that its assets and talent could be compromised – and raided by – a growing record industry increasingly controlled by large, integrated corporations. The music world’s changed landscape had shifted from Damon Runyan-esque operators to corporately synergized companies, aware of the need to expand into black music. Motown’s advantages remained its stars, who were top-ranked attractions in the traditional temples of show business – nightclubs and cabaret venues from coast to coast – and who were frequent guests on television variety shows, as well as starring in their own TV programs. **T.C.B.** was followed in 1969 by two further specials, **The Temptations Show** and **G.I.T. On Broadway**, which reunited Diana Ross & The Supremes with The Temptations. And this popularity of Motown’s stars was proving that, unlike in 1957 for **Nat King Cole**, black was beautiful for advertisers. Furthermore, Berry Gordy was maintaining his golden touch in the record business: in 1970, the company scored **seven No. 1 hits** on the *Billboard* Hot 100 – more than it had ever previously achieved. But there was one important difference: four of those No. 1s were created in Los Angeles, not Detroit, using some of the best California session musicians.



I WANT YOU BACK.





It was ***I Want You Back*** which changed the game.

Michael Jackson and his brothers transformed Motown, music and show business by offering hope and joy to a weary world, becoming the era's first black teen idols in the process. They also got **Berry Gordy** back into directly focusing on the music.

The Jackson 5 had originally begun recording for Motown in Detroit with **Bobby Taylor**, who had played a key role in finding and bringing the group to the company – literally, driving them from their Gary, Indiana hometown to their Motown audition. He started working with them into the Detroit studio, recording covers such as **The Miracles' "Who's Lovin' You"** and **Sly & The Family Stone's "Stand."**

But the magic wasn't there, and Berry Gordy must have known that his focus and determination were needed: he got personally involved in writing and producing the definitive record for a generation of record buyers, ***"I Want You Back."***

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DIANE ROSS

The history of rock & roll was predicated on white performers like **Pat Boone** covering **Little Richard** and **Fats Domino**. In an era of **The Partridge Family** and **The Brady Bunch**, Berry Gordy reverse-engineered bubblegum pop with The **Jackson 5**, leading **The Osmonds** and others to follow.

In addition, the Jackson brothers became in 1971 the first black youngsters to get their own weekly TV cartoon series and their own network TV special, **Goin' Back To Indiana**. Meanwhile, the group became an explosive property on the concert circuit, grossing a remarkable \$180,000 on the opening SRO dates of their **first nationwide tour in 1970**.

THE CORPORATION.

When **Holland/Dozier/Holland** left Motown, there was a significant void which many of the company's songwriters tried to fill. But Gordy wanted to avoid any one particular creative team gaining the stature of H/D/H and becoming susceptible to outside inducement. So the producers of Diana Ross & The Supremes' "Love Child," for instance, were Gordy, **Deke Richards**, **R. Dean Taylor** and **Frank Wilson** - but the Motown founder dubbed them, anonymously, "**The Clan**."

"I Want You Back" was written in Los Angeles by **Deke Richards**, **Freddie Perren** and **Fonce Mizell**, intending the song for **Gladys Knight & The Pips**. Berry Gordy had a better idea. "He said, 'We just signed these five brothers from Gary, Indiana, and this sounds like a lively young track.' " **Michael Jackson** reminded Gordy of **Frankie Lymon**, an earlier teenage star, and suggested they reshape the song as if it were for Lymon. Once recorded and released, the record carried songwriting/production credits for "**The Corporation**," which comprised Perren, Mizell, Richards and Gordy himself. As with The Clan, this kept the writers' names off the record, ensuring they would remain anonymous. The Corporation became Motown's first West Coast songwriting team to make a big impact, building on the chart-topping impact of **I Want You Back** with two further No. 1s, **ABC** and **The Love You Save**.

"We had rewrites and a lot of verses," said **Freddie Perren**. "Where a song may have had two verses, we may have written eight or ten. We would go to Berry Gordy and he would tell us what to do. Most people think he's just an executive, but he's a great writer."

Berry Gordy also used Los Angeles, not Detroit, as the launch pad for his latest stars, employing **Diana Ross** as the ambassador to introduce the world to The **Jackson 5**, first on television's **The Hollywood Palace**, then with her name on the title of the group's debut album, **Diana Ross Presents The Jackson 5**.



This coming Saturday, October 18th, Diana Ross will host the HOLLYWOOD PALACE on ABC-TV at 9:30 PM (EST). She will be introducing this amazingly talented group of young men (the lead singer, Michael, is 8 years old). And, they'll be performing their newly released single...

"I Want You Back"^{N-115}

Pick up on Diana's discovery and get ready ... Everyone will be picking up this red hot single.



*soul
the sound of
Young America*



"...Work to help others achieve their measure of success, and hope they, in turn, will do likewise. This is the kind of chain reaction that is music to my ears...."

Berry Gordy Jr.
President
Motown Record Corp.



Berry Gordy had a huge responsibility.

Besides Motown being the top **black-owned business**, Gordy was the most successful independent music man in an industry that was increasingly becoming corporatized. Keeping ahead of that corporate music business, Gordy expanded Motown into television, film and Broadway.

The television business, particularly **variety shows**, had relocated over the previous few years to Los Angeles. It was Motown's success in late 1968 and into the following year with the **T.C.B.** television special and companion soundtrack – this reached No. 1 on the **Billboard** charts in February '69 – which opened up a different avenue of promotion for the company, delivering synergies with its artists, their talent management and their music. No longer would Motown artists be seen so much as guests on other shows, they would have shows of their own.

Gordy was now a Los Angeles resident with his kids at local schools, a more convenient commute to go to market with, amongst others, **The Jackson 5**, a solo **Diana Ross** and **The Temptations** – each now with their own established television presence.

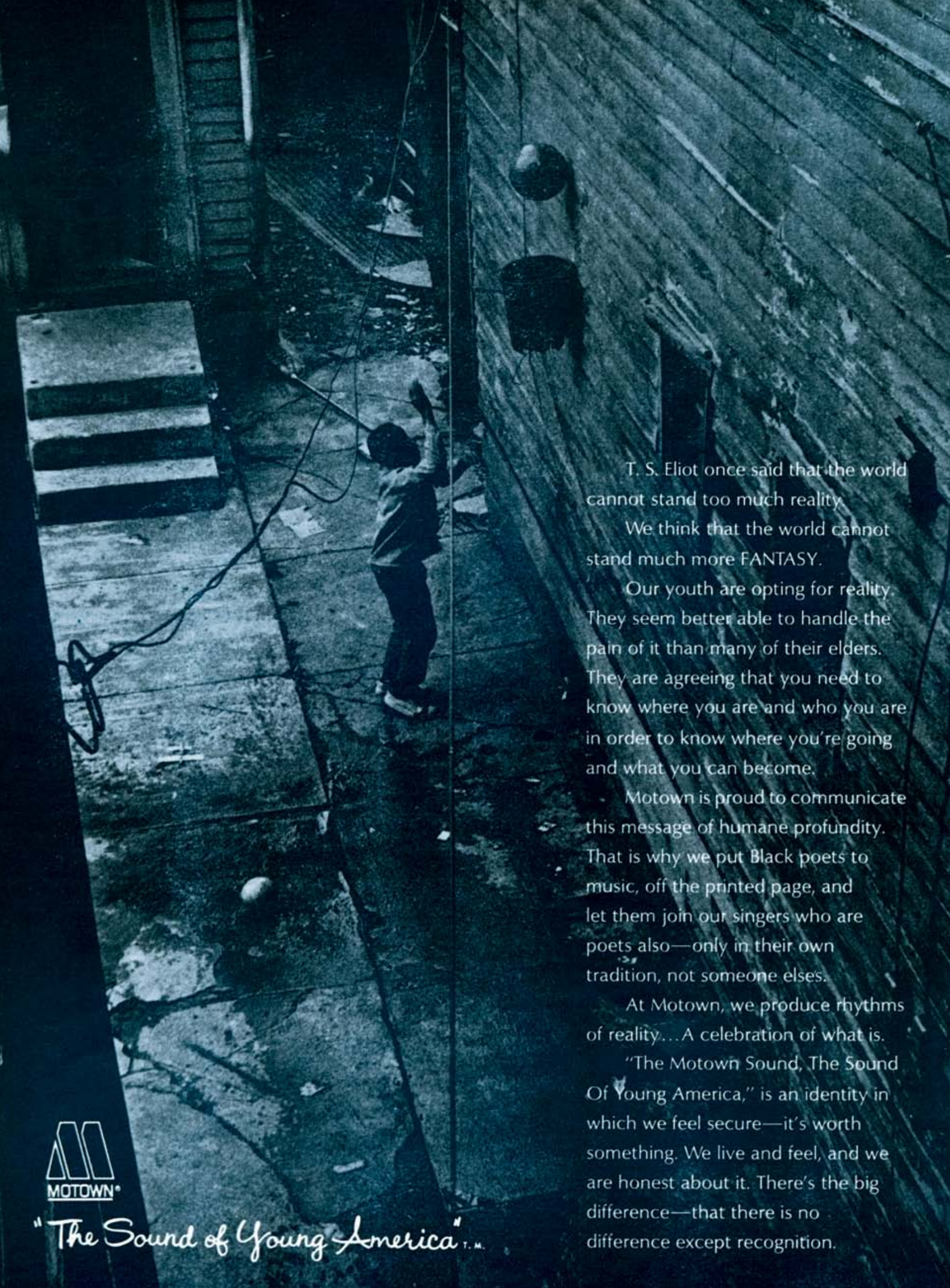


Diana Ross' first TV special, ***Diana!***, aired in April 1971 with The **Jackson 5** among the guests, and with **Michael Jackson** making his first solo performance, singing Frank Sinatra's ***It Was A Very Good Year***. Naturally, there was a cross-promoted **Motown** TV soundtrack album for the show.

Logically, then, it was time for Motown to open its first California-based subsidiary label, **MoWest**, unrestricted by music genre and receptive to the growing number of independent record producers prospering on the **West Coast**. There was no Michigan grit in MoWest's label design, only the inviting blue of the Pacific, before a sunny horizon.

The label started with a flourish, releasing an unusual track by **Tom Clay**, the radio disc jockey who had introduced **Barney Ales** to **Berry Gordy** ten years earlier. Clay compiled a persuasive montage of two popular songs, ***What The World Needs Now Is Love*** and ***Abraham, Martin And John***, with sound fragments from some of the most compelling moments of the '60s, including the killings of the **Kennedy** brothers and **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

The single's release in June 1971 brought MoWest to market. Within weeks, the record was heading for the **Top 10** of the ***Billboard Hot 100***.



T. S. Eliot once said that the world cannot stand too much reality.

We think that the world cannot stand much more FANTASY.

Our youth are opting for reality. They seem better able to handle the pain of it than many of their elders. They are agreeing that you need to know where you are and who you are in order to know where you're going and what you can become.

Motown is proud to communicate this message of humane profundity. That is why we put Black poets to music, off the printed page, and let them join our singers who are poets also—only in their own tradition, not someone else's.

At Motown, we produce rhythms of reality... A celebration of what is.

"The Motown Sound, The Sound Of Young America," is an identity in which we feel secure—it's worth something. We live and feel, and we are honest about it. There's the big difference—that there is no difference except recognition.

In **Detroit, Berry Gordy** was missed. The weekly **Quality Control** meetings he used to chair were no longer held. He was still briefed on his record company's output and release plans, but he was not as involved in the day-to-day operations as before. In charge of those was **Barney Ales**, now Motown's executive VP and general manager. "I knew Berry better than almost anyone at Motown," said Ales. "But he was made to feel **welcome in California**. It was more liberal than anywhere else. Everyone in Hollywood wanted a black person at their parties. He was always charming, but he didn't really like the limelight before then. Hollywood boosted his confidence."



"The Sound of Young America" T. M.

STUDENTS INTO MASTER.

"One day I had the shocking discovery, after working with these people, teaching them to write songs and produce records, and do all the things. It hit me like a ton of bricks, that they were more talented than I was.

Now for a person with my ego, that didn't sit too well, so I didn't tell them for a long time. But sooner or later, they found out that the master was in them. Once you believe that and understand what it is that you do, it is very hard for you not to succeed."

-Berry Gordy



MARVIN GAYE.



"In **1969** or **1970**, I began to re-evaluate my whole concept of what I wanted my music to say ...

I was very much affected by letters my brother was sending me from Vietnam, as well as the social situation here at home.

I realized that I had to put my own fantasies behind me if I wanted to write songs that would reach the souls of people. I wanted them to take a look at **what was happening in the world.**"

Marvin Gaye



1971 was the year when **Marvin Gaye** transformed himself from an interpreter into a creator, self-producing an album which was to define his art for decades to come. And it was the year when **Stevie Wonder** came of age, recasting his relationship with the company which had made him a worldwide star, and taking command of his career, creatively, directionally, innovatively.

In both cases, the “**master in them**” emerged in 1971.



Tammi Terrell had replaced **Kim Weston** as Gaye's recording partner in **1967**. The duo's creative chemistry – her sensual, fluttery vocals and his soulful, embracing delivery – was evident from the beginning, spawning romantic rumors that both denied. Together, they produced timeless odes such as ***Ain't No Mountain High Enough***, ***Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing*** and ***You're All I Need To Get By***.

Gaye and Terrell recorded enough material for three albums from 1967-69 before their partnership ended tragically. Terrell had battled migraines since childhood. On October 14, 1967, she collapsed in Gaye's arms while performing at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia.

The medical diagnosis revealed a brain tumor. As Terrell slowly withered away, a large piece of Gaye's soul did, too.

"In my heart, I could no longer pretend to sing love songs for people. I couldn't perform," Gaye told a friend. "When Tammi became ill, I refused to sing in public."

Confined to a wheelchair, blind and suffering from hair loss, **Tammi Terrell** died on March 16, 1970, 45 days shy of her 25th birthday.



MARVIN GAYE, FOOTBALL HERO.

After Terrell's passing, **Detroit Lions'** football great **Mel Farr** later recalled, his friend Marvin Gaye stopped singing and recording. "Marvin was in sort of a funk at that time," he said.

So was America.

"My phone would ring and it'd be Motown wanting me to start working, and I'd say, 'Have you seen the paper today? Have you read about these kids who were killed at Kent State?'," Gaye told David Ritz in ***Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye***.

"I couldn't sleep, couldn't stop crying. The notion of singing three-minute songs about the moon and June didn't interest me."

In 1969, **The Four Tops' Renaldo "Obie" Benson** and Motown songwriter **Al Cleveland** constructed the framework of what eventually became ***What's Going On***. Its lyric was partly inspired by what Benson had witnessed in San Francisco one day, when protesting students were attacked by police. Yet the song was considered too radical for Motown, including the Four Tops themselves, and in 1970, Benson and Cleveland took the idea to Gaye.

Gaye told Farr about the song after a round of golf, saying he wanted it to be given to **The Originals**, a group he had taken under his wing. The singer had continued to stay away from the recording studio for himself, obliging Motown to release material made more than a year earlier. One such single, "**The End Of Our Road**," barely troubled the Top 40.

But Gaye's interest in writing for others was strong, nourished by the success in late '69 of the Originals' ***Baby I'm For Real***, which he also co-produced. This became a major hit for the group - their first - and was followed by ***The Bells***, another number Gaye co-wrote and produced. "Our rehearsals were more like social events," said the group's Walter Gaines. "We'd go over to his house with our wives and girlfriends, and he'd have it set up like a party. While they ate and drank, we'd be in another room working on a song."

Three months after **Tammi Terrell's** passing, Gaye returned to the studio to work on the song he thought suitable for the Originals - but by July 1970, ***What's Going On*** was shaping up as something he would record himself. He was encouraged in this by Mel Farr.

"I said, 'No, Marvin. That's you, man! You got to sing this!' "

By this account, Gaye recorded ***What's Going On*** under one condition: that **Farr** and Lions' teammate **Lem Barney** would perform background vocals. "He says, 'Lem, you take this part, Mel, you take this part,' " Barney recalled, the excitement in his voice rising as he recounted the recording session. "The next time you listen to it, in the beginning when it says, 'Hey, brother, what's happening?! Solid! Right on! Mother, mother...' We backgrounded him on the whole song, man!"

While working on ***What's Going On***, Gaye voiced an unexpected ambition: he wanted to play for the **Lions**.

He committed himself to running 4-5 miles per day and transformed portions of his house into a gym, and bulked up nearly 30 pounds during the training. Gaye wanted his NFL dream to be taken seriously. For that to happen, he had to take the process seriously.

He trained with Farr, Barney and future Hall of Fame receiver **Charlie Sanders** at parks and local high schools – anywhere a productive workout could take place. Shortly before the Lions' training camp, Coach **Joe Schmidt** held a **three-day workout** at the **University of Michigan**. Marvin tried out at several positions, including **running back, tight end, wide receiver** and **full back**. Before beginning his tryout, in front of about 20 people on the field and in the bleachers, Gaye said a prayer with Barney and Farr. Whatever happened, he could accept the outcome. Gaye had set a goal and achieved it: he'd got a shot at playing in the **NFL** alongside two of his closest friends.

Gaye didn't receive **a training camp invite**. His tryout was the end of the fantasy. He went back to the recording studio, and on Sundays watched Farr and Barney ply their trade.



WHAT'S GOING ON.



Concentrating once again on his new music, Gaye found that the lyrics written by **Obie Benson** and **Al Cleveland** struck a chord, magnified by his brother **Frankie's** travails in Vietnam and the growing social unrest at home because of the war. "My blood started to boil," said Gaye. "I knew I had something - an anger, an energy, an artistic point of view." He also had help, from Motown arranger **David Van DePitte**. "Marvin couldn't read or write music per se," said Van DePitte. "He needed not only a musical secretary, but also somebody who knew how to organize the stuff and get it down on tape in an appropriate style." The singer had "an elaborate set-up in his living room, where he could sit down at the piano anytime he wanted, throw a couple of switches and record everything he did."

"What's Going On" was my first production ever," Gaye subsequently told *Rolling Stone* (actually, the Originals were his first). "I conceived every bit of the music. I hate to *brag* and everything like this, but I had no musical knowledge, I can't write music, can't read music. But I was able to transmit my thoughts to another person, and David Van DePitte, through the graces of God, had enough talent to be able to receive it and put it on paper for me."

The musicians on the session were an unusual blend. They included members of Motown bandleader **Earl Van Dyke**'s regular cadre, such as guitarists **Joe Messina** and **Robert White**, bassist **James Jamerson**, and percussionists **Jack Ashford** and **Jack Brokensha**, together with a number of players recruited by Van DePitte. Among these were **Chet Forest** on drums and saxmen **Eli Fontaine** and **Bill Moore**. Gaye himself played piano.

"Marvin wanted someone other than the normal drummers who worked at Motown," said Van DePitte. "Chet was coming from a little different place. He was a white guy, and he had done a great deal of studying in the classical vein. He was also one of the best jazz drummers I ever worked with. When this guy locked into a groove, you couldn't shift him."

Gaye's **trademark multi-layering** vocal approach came off initially as an accident by engineers **Ken Sands** and **Steve Smith**. Sands later explained that the singer had wanted him to bring the two lead vocal takes for ***What's Going On*** for advice on which one should be used for the final song. Smith and Sands accidentally mixed the two lead vocal takes together. Gaye loved the sound and decided to keep it.



What's going on MARVIN GAYE

SIDE 1

WHAT'S GOING ON 4:00

WHAT'S HAPPENING BROTHER 2:57

FLYIN' HIGH (IN THE
FRIENDLY SKY) 3:40

SAVE THE CHILDREN 4:06

GOD IS LOVE 1:44

MERCY MERCY ME
(THE ECOLOGY) 3:03

SIDE 2

RIGHT ON 7:15

WHOLY HOLY 3:06

INNER CITY BLUES (MAKE
ME WANNA HOLLER) 5:30

* All tunes published by Jobete Music Co., Inc. (BMI)



Produced by: MARVIN GAYE



By September, with everything finished, Gaye approached Gordy with ***What's Going On***— but the boss took a profound dislike to the song, and refused to release it. He also felt that the star would spoil his image as a ladies' man by turning to social commentary. Motown A&R executive **Harry Balk** later recalled that he, too, had tried to get the song released, but Gordy told him, "That **Dizzy Gillespie** stuff in the middle, that scatting, it's old." There was further internal criticism to the effect that the lead vocal sounded like two radio stations playing simultaneously. To complicate the situation, Gaye had been upset by Motown's September release of a compilation of his previous chartbusters, entitled ***Super Hits*** – or, more accurately, he was upset by the front cover artwork. In a cartoon illustration by **Carl Owens**, this depicted the star as a superhero, his cape emblazoned with a manly "M" as he hovered above fictional radio station **W-HIT**, rescuing a damsel in distress amid a collapsing radio mast. The image was at odds with the seriousness of the singer's mindset. He no longer wanted to take marching – or marketing – orders from the record company. If it wasn't prepared to release ***What's Going On***, he wasn't willing to record anything else for Motown.



David Van DePitte was equally disappointed by the in-house reaction, “after all the work that went into it and the money spent on it,” he said. “Motown thought Marvin was absolutely insane, and that I had lost my marbles, too. This was going to be the biggest fiasco that ever happened. Nobody believed in it at all.”

Yet as 1970 turned into '71, Motown's need for new “product” from Marvin took priority, and ***What's Going On*** was put onto the singles release schedule. “So we listened to it again,” remembered **Phil Jones**, one of the company's senior marketing executives, “and I said, ‘We're going to release the damn thing like it is.’ I set it up for my birthday – January 20 – and we shipped the record. Within a day, distributors were calling me back. It was a monster.”

At first, the boss was not happy. “Berry called me in,” said **Barney Ales**, “and said, ‘How could you release that? It's the worst record I've ever heard.’ He had me on the coals.”

The sales and chart impact of ***What's Going On*** changed everything. The 45 spent more than three months on the ***Billboard*** Hot 100, including three weeks at No. 2 (hits by **The Temptations** and **Three Dog Night** kept it from the peak) and five weeks at No. 1 on the R&B countdown.

And so, of course, **Motown wanted more**. “There was no way we wouldn't cash in,” said Ales, “and put the album out as soon as possible.”

Stunned by the success of ***What's Going On***, **Berry Gordy** drove to Gaye's home in Detroit to discuss him making a complete album, stating that he could do what he wanted with his music if he finished the record within 30 days, before the end of March – thus effectively giving Gaye the right to produce his own album. The newly-energized star set to work, tapping the talent of **David Van DePitte** once more. At first, the arranger was persuaded that Gaye had written all the songs, that everything was completed, and that the singer had the overall album concept. “Then as we sat down and started working on these tunes, not only did he not have a concept, but I thought it bizarre that all this material was finished but he didn't have lyrics for all of it.”

In the event, Gaye turned again to **Al Cleveland** and **Obie Benson** to help write ***Save The Children*** and ***Wholy Holy***; to **James Nyx** for ***What's Happening Brother*** and ***Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)***; and to Nyx, **Elgie Stover** and his spouse, **Anna Gordy Gaye**, for ***God Is Love***. The album's rhythm tracks and sound overdubs were recorded at **Hitsville's Studio A**, while the strings, horns, lead and background vocals were recorded at **Golden World**, otherwise known as **Studio B**.

Van DePitte found a common thread in the results. “The way the tunes were laying, they were little stories, and it just kind of felt that one should flow into the next.” Consequently, the arranger suggested the use of musical bridges between the tunes, to hang them together.”

On May 21, 1971, Motown released **Gaye's album masterwork**, and record buyers responded as positively as they had to the single. The album surged up the **Billboard** charts, competing in the Top 10 with the likes of **Carole King's *Tapestry*** and **The Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers***, and presaging the popularity of the year's other triumphs by black artists, **Isaac Hayes' *Shaft*** and **Sly & The Family Stone's *There's A Riot Goin' On***.

“There are,” wrote reviewer **Vince Aletti** in ***Rolling Stone*** that summer, “very few performers who could carry a project like this off. I've always admired **Marvin Gaye**, but I didn't expect he would be one of them. Guess I seriously underestimated him. It won't happen again.”

CALIFORNIA CALLING.



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE Stevie Wonder recording at Electric Lady, New York, in 1972. The previous year, he was introduced to Malcolm Cecil and Bob Margouleff at another New York studio, Media Sound. The pair's experience and skill at synthesizer programming and audio engineering made them his perfect associates as he explored music and technology in the studio. Margouleff was also a photographer, credited for images used on the *Talking Book* sleeve.

The ***What's Going On*** album was among the last Motown milestones recorded in Detroit. Although **Marvin Gaye** cut some further, disparate tracks there, his next album, the ***Trouble Man*** soundtrack, was a product of Los Angeles, as was his duet album with **Diana Ross** and then the libidinous ***Let's Get It On***, both released in 1973.

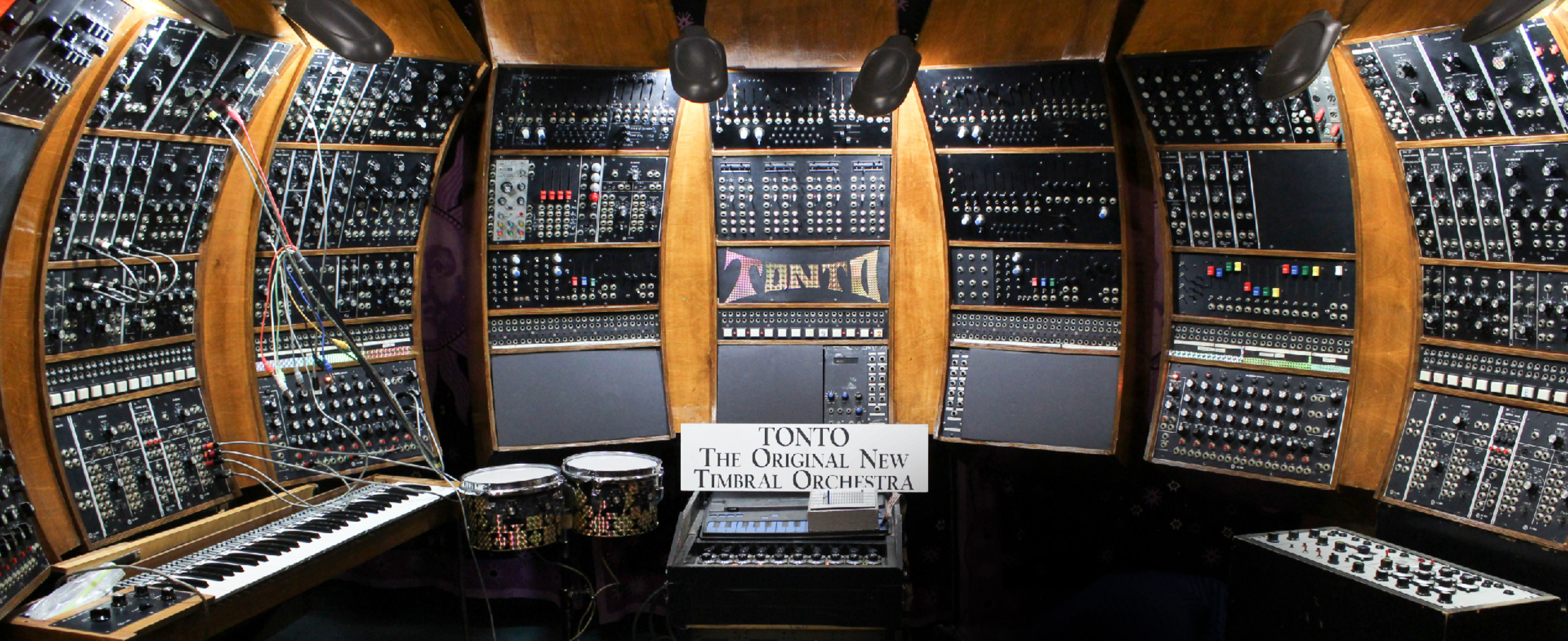
Producer **Norman Whitfield** was still loyal to the Motor City, laying down his early '70s triumphs with **The Temptations**, and the **Funk Brothers**, there. His productions blossomed sonically, far beyond the progressive R&B he had shaped – under the influence of **Sly & The Family Stone** – with 1968's ***Cloud Nine*** and 1969's ***Run Away Child, Running Wild***. By 1972, ***Papa Was A Rolling Stone*** was almost cinematic in its ambition, conjuring up the widescreen horizon of the Pacific Ocean. But it was the last No. 1 on the **Billboard** Hot 100 made by **Motown in Detroit**.



In **Detroit**, Motown bore the strain of its founder's absence. **Barney Ales** had executive authority, but now the company was cursed with two centres of gravity. "While Berry was going between Detroit and California," said Ales, "he would still listen to the records we planned on releasing, but we didn't have those weekly **Quality Control** meetings anymore."

When the **MoWest** label was introduced in **1971**, it split the company's creative hub, fuelling competition not only in signing and developing artists, but also in promotion and marketing. "Barney was back and forth to Los Angeles, trying to save our Detroit family," recalled **Miller London**, who in 1969 was hired as Motown's **first black salesman**, "and they were growing another company out on the West Coast. It was a big struggle."





The other great Motown star who found “the master in him,” **Stevie Wonder**, left Detroit as soon as he turned 21 in May 1971. Influenced by **Marvin Gaye**’s self-determination, he moved to **New York City**- noticeably **not Detroit** AND **not Los Angeles**- and with ace musicians/technologists **Malcolm Cecil** and **Bob Margouleff**. created a new sound that was neither Motown in Detroit or Motown in Los Angeles:
It was wholly the sound of Stevie Wonder.

With Gaye and Wonder increasingly charting their own musical paths, and with Gordy's primary focus on **Diana Ross'** movie career, the decision to finally move his entire business to Los Angeles was inevitable. The announcement was made in June 1972. From a high of 300 Motown employees, fewer than 100 held their jobs in Detroit by that fall. Thereafter, the numbers dwindled even further.

Motown's new home in Los Angeles glistened on three floors of **6464 Sunset Boulevard**, a ten-storey tower. Barney Ales elected not to move west, but other key employees from Detroit made the transition. "Our cars went by train," remembered sales executive **Gordon Prince**, who was on the same Los Angeles-bound flight with **Miller London**, A&R chief **Harry Balk** and **Norman Whitfield**. "We were all put in the same apartment motel, the Park Sunset. Everything was done well."



DIANA ROSS.



Diana Ross and **Berry Gordy** complimented each other's ambitions as **Motown** came to **Los Angeles**.

The May 1, 1971 television special ***Diana!*** had, like the ***T.C.B.*** special from 1968, a companion record and featured the first solo performance of **Michael Jackson**.

Gordy and Ross and Los Angeles were a powerful combination. Having created enviable synergy of records and television, Gordy and Ross came together on a major studio film of **Billie Holiday's** autobiography ***Lady Sings The Blues***. The script, written by Gordy's protégées **Suzanne DePasse** and **Christine Clark** (once recording artist Chris Clark) gave Holiday's story the feel of the story of Motown's rise- with a strong, suave **Billy Dee Williams** (managed by ex-ITMI manager **Shelly Berger**) trying to tame the headstone energy and ambition of Ross/Holiday.

Ross received an **Academy Award Nomination for Best Actress** as did DePasse and Clark for their screenplay and Diana Ross was transformed within a short time from lead singer of **the Supremes** to the prima diva of the film/television/film/fashion/music world.

LADY SINGS THE BLUES.



THE MOTOWN SOUND, IN LOS ANGELES.

As the exodus continued, there was the reality of who else would go west. Many of the original **Funk Brothers** had been rotated out and replaced by younger players.

Ray Parker, Jr. was a hot young guitarist from Detroit who started working at 16, and was soon with Stevie Wonder's band. **Wah Wah Watson**, originally **Melvin Ragin**, was playing guitar in his hometown of Virginia when **Bobby Taylor** encouraged him in 1968 to join the Motown crew. Watson got on Taylor's bus back to Detroit and soon he was a fixture next to **Dennis Coffey** in the Snakepit. These young men went west with Motown, as did bass king **James Jamerson**, arranger **Paul Riser** and engineer **Russ Terrana**.

The **Motown West Hitsville** facility was a significant upgrade to Detroit. A more spacious control room and studio, along with advances in technology, gave Motown recordings a new sound – familiar for its fundamentals, but different. The sound of the original **Studio A** in Detroit allowed listeners to feel the intimacy of its environs, but the “bleed through” of instruments, and the limits of the installed technology, made isolation impossible.



In Los Angeles, the state-of-the-art facilities allowed for a perfection that, while technically an upgrade, was a metaphor both of the spread-out topology that was Los Angeles, and the lack of togetherness that isolation of tracks and retracking seemed to encourage. It was a **Snakepit** no longer.

California was also home to the “**Wrecking Crew**,” a group of on-tap seasoned musicians who were to Los Angeles what the Funk Brothers had been to Detroit. There were younger players there, too, such as **James Gadson**, **David T. Walker** and **Wilton Felder**. Some from Detroit joined them, including **Ray Parker, Jr.** and **Wah Wah Watson**, but many – including **Earl Van Dyke** and **Dennis Coffey** – did not.

Motown West Hitsville created a 24-track new sound, but geographically, Los Angeles did not offer the same intimacy that the Motown family had enjoyed in Detroit. Motown had grown, the industry and the players had changed and Hitsville was now a studio – **no longer a factory**.



STEVIE WONDER TURNS 21.

MOTOWN
is the place for me!
Stevie Wonder

Advertisement in Cash Box, July 17, 1971



Upon turning **21**, **Stevie Wonder** left his home in **Detroit** to move to **New York City**, served notice to **Berry Gordy**, and became contractually free and clear of **Motown**.

IN New York, Wonder met **Malcolm Cecil** and **Bob Margouleff** after being captivated by the eclectic instrumental album the pair conjured up as **TONTO's Expanding Headband**, featuring a synthesizer built by Cecil.

Wonder, bursting with ideas and the desire to channel them, enlisted Cecil and Margouleff in a creative partnership. The three began working together on **Memorial Day, 1971** - a partnership that would span three years and four landmark albums: ***Music Of My Mind***, ***Talking Book***, ***Innervisions*** and ***Fulfillingness' First Finale***.

Wonder was entirely focused on his music and was in no rush to sign new pacts with anyone, and that he took his own sweet time to weigh options, including an impressive offer from **CBS Records**.

Certainly, some of ***Music Of My Mind*** was made while the star was out of contract, but, in fact, he decided to renew with Motown. A new, three-year agreement for Wonder's services as a recording artist and producer took effect from **July 1, 1971**, although his attorney, Johanan Vigoda -- who Wonder had met through Cecil and Margouleff -- continued to negotiate some points.

The musician's royalty rate increased to **14%** and he received an advance payment of more than **\$900,000**, plus substantial annual guarantees. A new **Jobete publishing deal** was agreed, and Motown also gave Wonder the option to buy shares if the firm went public (it never did).

Berry Gordy had not previously consented to a package so rich and full of autonomy, but Wonder's short, out-of-contract spell implied that he wanted to stay put anyway.

The renewal also blessed Motown with continuity. (So had **Marvin Gaye**, renewing with Motown a year earlier, before the release of ***What's Going On.***)

Wonder's recommitment was a commercial coup for Motown, his quartet of albums released from 1972-74 a creative crescendo.

Two of them netted a total of ten Grammy awards.

In the U.S., ***Music Of My Mind*** sold **500,000** copies during its initial run, followed by ***Talking Book*** at **1.6 million**, ***Innervisions*** at **2.1 million**, and ***Fulfillingness' First Finale*** at **1.5 million**.

"It wasn't just a question of him selling more than other people," said **Vigoda**, "it was that he was in a bigger league - he had the potential, musically, to be the heavyweight champion of the world."

Much as **the Beatles** had introduced Motown to millions of music fans years earlier, Wonder's tie-up with **the Rolling Stones** was net positive. Vigoda thought that by joining the band's **1972 North American tour**, he could broaden his audience. A connection to **Mick Jagger** was made through **Malcolm Cecil**, and a concert deal consummated.

Wonder played almost **50 summer shows** with the Stones, and his record sales levitated.

