

Smokey Robinson: A Portrait

Written by Judalon Harris
Sunday, 01 April 2012 18:18



Intro: The chanter was born William Robinson Jr. February 19, 1940, in Detroit, MI. At the age of six, [Smokey Robinson](#) wrote a song, sang it and gave probably one of his first live performances during a school play. After such a performance Smokey's mother must have known he has a gifted voice. She would call family members and have Robinson sing to them on the phone.

Growing up in the hood, (Detroit's North End) must have been very challenging. He played sports as most do to avoid trouble. At the time, he thought being the stupendous international recording artist/entertainer and multi-talented person he is was an impossible dream. Never mind barriers outside, he was 10 when his mom passed away. Reportedly, the day she passed she called for his son and, "told him to be good." He has been *more than* good! He has been stellar and still is. With

The Miracles

he graced the

Top 40

, at least 25 times in a decade. For decades he's living his impossible dream.

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Anytime smoke gets in your eyes/clothes etc., it is difficult to get out or it always impacts you. Smokey soul, gospel, neo-soul, pop, jazzy and Doo-wop singing icon Robinson is no different. He has been in our hearts and souls for decades. *We love* his impactful contributions to music and our lives. Thankfully now he is and has been all over the place. His tour dates are easily found on the web; he's on TV, in movies, on the Internet (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace...), in articles etc.

Smokey Robinson has a fifty plus years on the [music scene](#) as a vocalist, songwriter, pianist, recording executive and producer, a walking musical, a living Motown archive. In addition, he is a public speaker and business man. Last summer, he performed at Hoosier Park in Anderson. He sang an array of his original classics (such as songs from the

Quiet Storm

album considered as one of the most highly acclaimed soul records of the 70s), some award winning hits of the 1980s as well as some of his 2009 CD,

Time Flies When You're Having Fun

. Smokey Robinson's voice is still extra smooth, velvety, soulful, seductive, extraordinary, unique, classical and everlasting.

Robinson hasn't built his career singing sexually explicit songs and he doesn't have to. His voice and lyrics are of blatant emotion, 'shake it off hurt' & heartache, Christianity, activism/socially conscious and otherwise encompassing. His music is about understanding, sharing, loving and so on. Classic, undefiled, awesome songs will be appreciated by the next generations.

A "Quiet Storm" Career

Robinson's recording career began in 1955. As a teen in high school and before *Motown* he cofounded the music group,

The Five Chimes

. They were renamed

The Matadors

, then

The Miracles

by 1957, due to the addition of Smokey's then future wife Claudette Rogers. At the time, the group entertained locally. He also signed and recorded with

Chess

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and
End Records
, (
End Records
later became
Rhino Records
now
Warner Music Group
) prior to
Motown
. He penned over 4000 songs including 70 Top 40 hits.

At the age of 18, he met Berry Gordy and influenced him to start *Motown*. Reportedly, Gordy received an \$800 loan from family and began
Tamla Records
-housed within
Motown Records
. Robinson was a catalyst to
Motown
's beginning thru 1988. Hence, Gordy made him vice-president. Berry Gordy said without
The Miracles
there would be no
Motown
. Both Berry Gordy and Stevie Wonder have said without
The Miracles
they could not have achieved their star studded status.

In 1960, he took only 25 minutes to write *Shop Around*. It became *Motown's* and *The Miracles* first hit song as well as their first million seller. During the next 12 years he penned nearly 30 classic songs. He wrote classics not just for
The Miracles
but crafted chart toppers such as
My Guy, You Beat Me to the Punch
(for Mary Wells),
My Girl, The Way You Do The Things You Do for The Temptations, Don't Mess With Bill
for
The Marvellettes
,
Ain't That Peculiar & I'll Be Doggone
for Marvin Gaye,
Still Water Love
for

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The Four Tops

. He also wrote hits for

Marvin Gaye & Tammy Terrill, Gladys Knight & The Pips, The Jackson Five
and more.

With numerous award winners and other blatant successes created by Smokey's blazing lyrical finger tips, in 1965, *The Miracles* became *Smokey Robinson & The Miracles*. He opted to leave *The Miracles* in

1969, but their hit songs

Baby, Baby Don't Cry

and

Tears of a Clown

were chart toppers. Thus, he toured with the group prolonging his departure until 1972. Stevie Wonder provided tracks/beats, (music) to *Tears of a Clown* and delivered it to Smokey. The latter, in a couple of days wrote the lyrics based on *Pagliacci*, a famous Italian clown. *Pagliacci's* story began as a short opera that debuted in 1892. It is about a jilted husband and this opera is still performed today. Smokey says *Pagliacci* was the highlight of the circus but would cry in his dressing room because he didn't have a romantic love. *Tears of a Clown* had been released in the U.S. without notice in 1967 on the album

Make It Happen

. Later, it was rereleased and renamed

Tears of A Clown

after its success in England where it became number one likewise in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (aka the UK). It was their first number one in Europe and the biggest selling song for *Smokey and The Miracles*

.

The mega CD *Quiet Storm* was released in 1975 and the legendary title track was on the market the next year. Until its release, *quiet storm* was a little used phrase that meant trouble manifesting quietly while you weren't expecting and/or didn't want to hear.

Quiet Storm

single and album gave the phrase a new life, a greater meaning with its soft jazz sound and beautiful soul tempo.

Quiet Storm

has become the name and format of late night, early evening love/romance songs on Black stations across the U.S. since the CD's release and continues today.

Quiet Storm

has its own Wikipedia page as many of Robinson's songs, an entire Internet page at allmusic.com about the radio format conception by Howard University's WHUR radio personnel Cathy Hughes and Melvin Lindsey, spawned artists who titled their releases

Quiet Storm

format CD's or singles.

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The CD was his third solo album; destined from conception to be classic & historic. It contains *The Wedding Song*, written for Jermaine Jackson and his then bride to be, Hazel Gordy, Berry Gordy's daughter as well as the track, *Happy* from the movie *Lady Sings The Blues*. Containing three hits, the title track, *The Agony and the Ecstasy* and *Baby That's Backatcha* established his solo career in mainstream America.

He has 23 studio albums such as *Pure Smokey*, *Timeless Love*, *Intimate*, *Double Good Everything* and *Where There's Smoke* to name a few. *Being with You* and *One Heartbeat* are album titles and single releases. Incorporated into the success of the single, *Being With You* is the B side

Spanish version

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Robinson was born in 1941 in Detroit, Michigan. He was the youngest of four children. He was a member of the Four Tops, a vocal group that was formed in 1955. The group was one of the most successful soul music groups of the 1960s and 1970s. Robinson was also a solo artist, releasing several albums and singles. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990. He died in 2006.

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A man with dark, curly hair, wearing a dark pinstripe suit, a white shirt, and a pink tie, is smiling broadly and raising his right hand in a celebratory gesture. He is wearing a watch on his left wrist. The background is plain white.

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