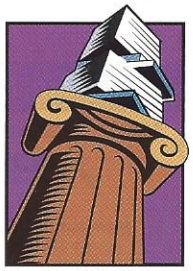
Daniel Durchholz



Stevie Wonder

In many ways, he is our most inscrutable pop star. Seldom interviewed, rarely out in public unless it is to champion a humanitarian cause or collect an award, Stevie Wonder seems content to keep his own counsel, or at least that of the entourage that has surrounded him for years, taking care of quotidian details so Wonder can do what he does best—which is be a music machine 24/7, letting the inspiration flow from his brain to his (you'll pardon the expression) fingertips.

That sort of dedication has produced one of the most remarkable careers in contemporary music. But Wonder's inexorable rise to the top has not been without its phases and stages, or its share of mystery. Even at this late date there are conflicting reports about the simple facts of his life. He was born in Saginaw, Michigan on May 13, 1950, and named Steveland Morris (or Judkins, which was his father's name, though his birth certificate reads "Morris"), and was blind from birth (or perhaps from infancy—he has said that botched hospital care resulted in his loss of sight). Other than plain details, announcing his marriage of a year and a half to Syreeta Wright at the turn of the '70s, or the birth of his three children—two with Yolanda Simmons, another with vocalist Melody McCulley—his family life has been absent from the press.

So have the inner workings of his professional life. Since he gained his artistic independence from Motown Records in 1971, Wonder has acted almost exclusively as a self-contained recording unit—writer, producer, musician, vocalist—and thus is solely responsible for the ebb and flow of his material.

Wonder is, of course, one of the most beloved figures in the music business, in part because of the positiveness that radiates from his blissful pronouncements on peace, love, and global harmony. Those sorts of sentiments may tag him as a flake or a sucker in some corners, but that hasn't stopped dozens of performers from covering or, importantly (in the digital age), sampling his work.

Speaking of the digital age, perhaps the most curious fact about Wonder's long and storied career is the shoddy way his material has been handled in what, for virtually every other artist of note, has been the golden age of reissues. Much of Wonder's early material remains unavailable—no loss, in some cases, but certainly frustrating to completists who, justifiably, want to examine every stage of the singer-songwriter's evolution from boy wonder to adult genius. What has been reissued has not been remastered—damn near a crime, considering the importance of his '70s material, and how much can be done to improve old recordings these days. The accompanying booklets (if the dull little slips of paper can even be called that) are shoddy, with scant information and next to no artwork. There are rumors that Motown would like to improve and reissue Wonder's catalog, but that Wonder, as he has done several times throughout his career, is holding up the company for a huge payday. I'd say give it to him—signed, sealed, delivered. His catalog deserves better than it's gotten.

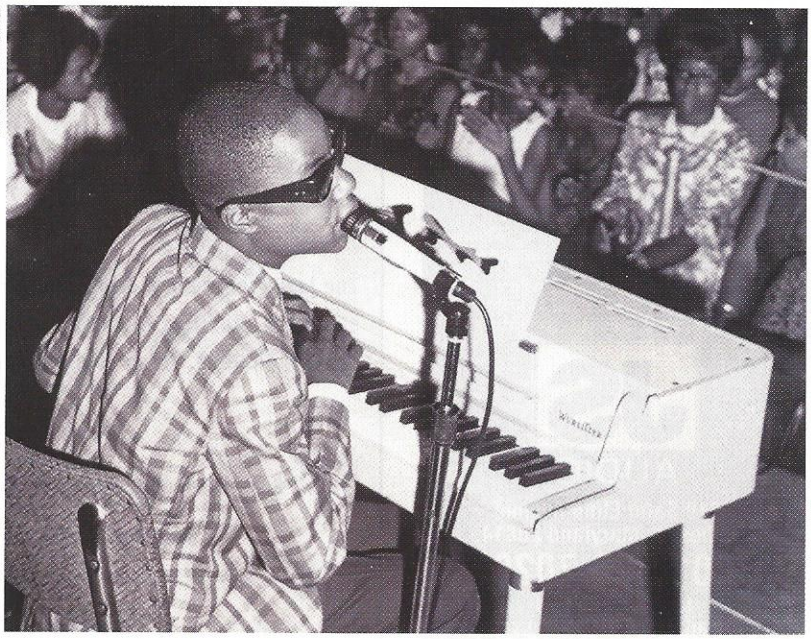
Furthermore, Wonder has never been properly anthologized. There have been greatest-hits collections, of course, but Wonder is perhaps the only artist of his stature never to be given the full boxed-set treatment. Again, Wonder himself may be as much a hindrance to the process as anyone at Motown—it has long been rumored that he'll allow no one to hear his unfinished work, and that he has ordered all of it destroyed upon his death so as to encourage no Hendrix-style musical grave robbing.

Well, so be it. We're left with the music he has chosen to give us, and that is plenty indeed. His is a brilliant career, and though it has flagged at times, especially in recent years, there is probably still more to come from Steveland Morris—or Judkins, or Wonder, or whatever.

Little Stevie

In retrospect, it's easy to imagine that Little Stevie Wonder arrived fully formed, a 12-year-old genius who could play piano, organ, drums, and harmonica. In truth, he was something of a novelty act, and Berry Gordy scarcely could have missed the showbiz appeal of this young, blind powerhouse of a prodigy. Ronnie White of the Miracles introduced the boy, then

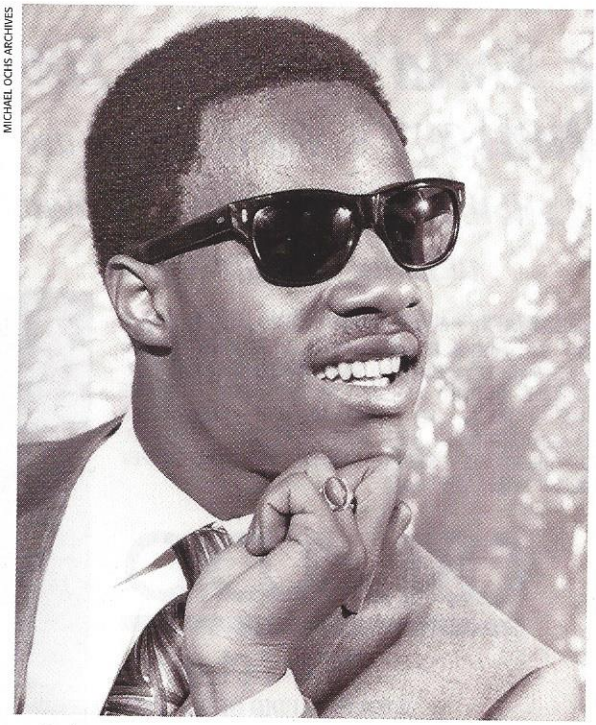
MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES



From his earliest years, it was apparent that Little Stevie Wonder possessed superstar talents.

10, to Gordy, who proclaimed him, quite literally, a Wonder, and signed him to the Hitsville U.S.A. label, soon to be rechristened Motown.

Wonder's output from his Little Stevie years is spotty, and best left to greatest-hits compilations. Most folks think of the young singer as a consistent hitmaker, but his early chart successes were fairly sporadic, and not every song that was released vaulted up the charts. "Fingertips (Part II)," of course, was the first of his hits to gain national attention, a harmonica showcase that introduced both black and white audiences to his instrumental chops and infectious, irrepressible manner ("Say *yeeaaahhh!*"). It rose to No.1 in 1963. That success was followed by songs like "Workout Stevie, Workout" and "Hey Harmonica Man," which were pretty much cut from the same cloth. Repetition was the name of the game in pop music back then (and today as well for that matter), as most acts looked to milk their big hit for all it was worth, then sink back to their appointed stations in life.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

By the late '60s, Wonder—still a teenager—was on the verge of radically changing the image of himself that this photo depicts.

Motown was no stranger to this strategy, nor was the label above piggybacking the success of one artist on that of another. It's somewhat discouraging to look back today and see how much of Little Stevie's early success was predicated on the career of Ray Charles, another black, blind "genius" who at that time had reached the zenith of his career with an unprecedented stylistic hybrid of R&B, gospel, jazz, and country—in other words, soul music.

You have only to glance at the titles of Wonder's early albums, originally released on the Tamla imprint—*The Jazz Soul of Little Stevie Wonder* and *Tribute to Uncle Ray*, both released in 1962; *The 12 Year Old Genius* and the bland *With a Song in My Heart*, from 1963; plus the teensploitation *Stevie at the Beach*, in 1964 (all five titles are currently out of print)—to see that Motown was aiming pretty low, glutting the market with albums after his big hit, and fashioning him as a groovy little sibling of big Brother Ray.

Wonder transcended their expectations. He seldom worked with the same writers and producers that hit with the label's other acts, which is one of the reasons many of his songs don't sound like stock Motown material. Another factor is Wonder himself. "Uptight (Everything's Alright)" was his first writing credit, and it's one of his greatest early hits, reaching No.3 in 1966. That same year, he released a soulful recasting of Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," which suggested that Wonder's interests lay further afield than those of most Motown artists. The albums from this period—*Uptight* from 1964, 1966's *Down to Earth* and *I Was Made to Love Her*, the holiday album *Someday at Christmas* from 1967, and the instrumental effort *Eivets Rednow* ("Stevie Wonder" backwards—get it?) from 1968, are also out of print.

A couple of years later, Wonder's restlessness and curiosity led him to begin flirting with production work on his own albums, starting with *Signed, Sealed & Delivered* in 1970, and on singles by David Ruffin, the Spinners, and Martha Reeves (only some of which were released at the time). *Signed, Sealed & Delivered* is in print on CD (Motown 374 635 176-2), as are its immediate predecessors, 1968's *For Once in My Life* (Motown 374 635 234-2) and 1969's *My Cherie Amour* (Motown 374 635 179-2). All of them still make for worthwhile listening, and, better yet, they're budget-priced. Still, they do stick to the accepted album format of their time: a vehicle for cashing in on hit singles, with lesser material used as filler.

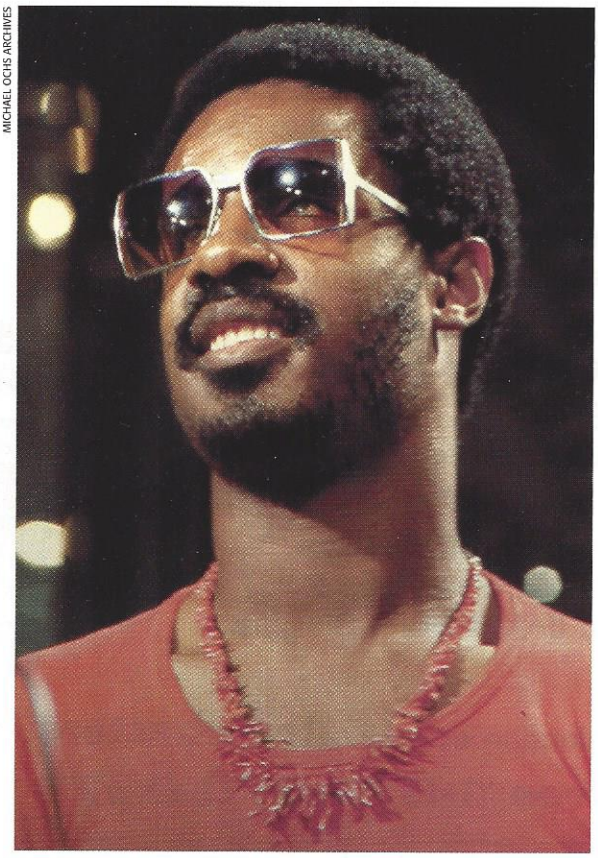
For Once in My Life contains the title hit, plus "Shoo-Be-Doo-Be-Doo-Da-Day," both of them Top 10 hits, and "You Met Your Match," which reached No.35. The rest of the album ping-pongs between standards such as Billie Holiday's "God Bless the Child" and Bobby Hebb's "Sunny," and soulful originals such as "I Don't Know Why" and "I Wanna Make Her Love Me." *My Cherie Amour* is more sentimental, including versions of "Hello Young Lovers," "The Shadow of Your Smile," and "Yester-Me, Yester-You Yesterday." Interestingly, Wonder also takes a stab at the Doors' "Light My Fire," but the version is more José Feliciano than Lizard King—not that there's anything wrong with that.

Wonder helmed the board for *Signed, Sealed & Delivered*, but the album doesn't differ significantly from the previous two, except that it heads in a more soulful direction and lays off the Vegas-style schmaltz. In addition to the title hit, a No.3 smash, there's also a nifty version of the Beatles' "We Can Work It Out," and the portent-laden "Heaven Help Us All."

Wonder's break with the Motown machine began in earnest with *Where I'm Coming From*, a 1970 album that is, unfortunately, out of print. He wrote and produced the album and plays nearly all of the parts himself, which would become his standard operating procedure for years to come. The change in recording methods didn't produce a revolutionary breakthrough—that would come soon enough—but did yield some enduring music, such as the lovely ballad "Never Dreamed You'd Leave in Summer," and the breezy "If You Really Love Me."

As fine as some of the albums are from the first phase of Wonder's career, none are essential, and most collections would be complete with the addition of the two greatest-hits sets from the period, *Greatest Hits* (Motown 314 530 941-2) and *Greatest Hits, Vol.2* (Motown 314 530 942-2). Both clock in at a meager 12 tracks each—relatively short compared with the hits'n'bonus-tracks collections of today. Still, they manage to cover the highlights. The former volume ranges from the days of "Fingertips" up through "I'm Wondering," while the latter takes

on "Shoo-Be-Doo-Be-Doo-Da-Day" through "If You Really Love Me." For a more comprehensive view of the entire period, though, the out-of-print *Looking Back* is essential. Originally issued on three LPs, the set covers nearly all of Wonder's chart hits of the era and includes non-album singles as well. Its current unavailability is a major disappointment.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

Was there a '70s star who shone brighter than Stevie Wonder?

The auteur takes charge

In 1971, Stevie Wonder was at the end of his second five-year contract with Motown. Discontented with the company and chafing at his lack of control over his own life and career, Wonder shopped around for a new label. He eventually re-signed with Motown, but on his own terms. His new contract allowed him an unprecedented level of artistic freedom and an unusually high royalty rate. He was free, he was rich (having recently collected the money that had been held in trust for him by the company until he reached his majority), and he would use those powers over the next half decade to set the world on its collective ear.

Is there another pop act on the planet that has had an unbroken string of genius and near-genius comparable to Stevie Wonder's between the release of *Music of My Mind* and *Songs in the Key of Life*? You could maybe name three, and then two others who come close: Bob Dylan, from *Another Side of Bob Dylan* through *John Wesley Harding*; the Beatles, whose genius took on different forms both early and late in their career, but kicked into high gear from *Rubber Soul* through *Sgt. Pepper's*; and Bruce Springsteen, from *Born to Run* through *Born in the U.S.A.* After that, perhaps Joni Mitchell, from *Ladies of the Canyon* through *Court and Spark*; and the Rolling Stones, from *Let It Bleed* to *Exile on Main Street*. Any way you look at it, this is pretty heady company.

Alongside performers like Sly Stone, Marvin Gaye, and Isaac Hayes, Wonder helped liberate R&B artists from the old-fashioned notion of what an album could be. There were hits, sure, but these performers began to follow the notion that rockers had already discovered—that an album could be more than a hit collection; it could be a journey unto itself, exploring different viewpoints and addressing the social issues of the day.

He was free, he was rich (having recently collected the money that had been held in trust for him by the company until he reached his majority), and he would use those powers to set the world on its ear.

With the exception of a stray guitar solo and a trombone part, (played by Art Baron, trombonist on *Stereophile's Rendezvous* CD, with Jerome Harris) Wonder played every note heard on *Music of My Mind* (Motown 374 630 314-2). As the liner notes proclaim, "The man is his own instrument. The instrument is an orchestra." Wonder doesn't attempt anything too heavy on the album, but there is a unifying sensibility, whether he's exploring the aggressive funk of the opening track, "Love Having You Around," the straight-up pop of "I Love Everylittle Thing About You," or the country-soul sounds of "Sweet Little Girl." The album's hit, "Superwoman (Where Were You When I Needed You)," is a gorgeous, searching ballad bifurcated by a soaring synthesizer part that drives the song to a higher level, then keeps it there.

The synthesizer was an instrument of primary importance to Wonder, and he seized on it as few other musicians could, allowing it to free him from depending on others to re-create the sounds he heard in his head, but also using it to make new sounds that became identifiable with his music. As Herbie Hancock has pointed out, Wonder didn't use synths to re-create what live strings or horns sounded like—he *liked* the artificial, electronic noises produced by the machines, and let them be.

That strategy certainly paid dividends on *Talking Book* (Motown 374 630 319-2), which is a symphony of keyboard bleeps and burbles, and a real songwriting breakthrough for Wonder. The album is chock-full of stone classics, from the supper-club soul of "You Are the Sunshine of My Life" and the yearning "Blame It on the Sun" to the political/social commentary of the raging "Superstition" and "Big Brother," a grim portrait of inner-city life. "Maybe Your Baby" is so dead-on funky that it sounds as if Prince based his entire career on it. Fun fact: Wonder initially was determined to give "Superstition" to Jeff Beck rather than record it himself, but the suits at Motown nixed the idea. (They still had *some* power over his career, after all.) Wonder's version beat Beck's to the stores, much to the British rocker's chagrin.

Wonder cemented his crossover appeal by opening shows for the Rolling Stones on their 1972 tour (they, after all, had opened for him in 1964), and followed up the success of *Talking Book* with *Innervisions* (Motown 374 630 326-2) and *Fulfillingness' First Finale* (Motown 374 630 332-2), both of which continued in the same vein, addressing con-

cerns both temporal and mystical. *Innervisions*—appropriately named for being both introspective and visionary—was highlighted by "Living for the City," an urban tableau that might seem a study in hopelessness until you get to "Higher Ground," just the sort of keep-on-keeping-on anthem the era (and the album) demanded. Both songs were Top 10 hits. "Jesus Children of America" addressed spiritual concerns, however trippy, while the Latin-flavored "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing" was lithe and sexy. It's a perfectly balanced album.

Fulfillingness continued in a philosophical vein with "Heaven is 10 Zillion Light Years Away." "You Haven't Done Nothin'," meanwhile, is perhaps Wonder's most pointed political screed, chastising President Nixon (though not by name) over one of the deepest funk grooves the singer has ever conjured. The somewhat dark and melancholy mood of the album is lightened considerably, though, by the playful and plainly horny "Boogie On Reggae Woman."

Many think of *Innervisions* as Wonder's true masterpiece, but it's hard to pick just one disc for that particular accolade, especially when you consider that his working methods generally found him obsessively working on tracks and parceling them out when they were finished and it was time to deliver an album. It's easier to think of *Talking Book*, *Innervisions*, and *Fulfillingness* as one continuous effort, a series of dispatches from the top of the pop heap. The latter two took consecutive Album-of-the-Year Grammys in 1973 and '74, prompting 1975 winner Paul Simon to thank Wonder in his acceptance speech for not making an album that year.

Songs in the Key of Life (Motown 374 630 340-2) would have completed Wonder's trifecta and aced Simon out had it been finished and released on time. It was delayed a year, though—understandable, given the scope of Wonder's ambition, and justified, given its greatness once it arrived. (Another not inconsiderable factor was Wonder's stalled contract talks with Motown. Berry Gordy eventually coughed up $13 million in the deal—something of a bargain, as it turned out.)

Wonder's stated goal for the album, inspired somewhat by a near-fatal car crash Wonder was in during 1973, was nothing short of capturing the whole of life as we know it—to reflect as many different kinds of experience as possible. While that sounds a little megalomaniacal, the album actually succeeds, pretty much on its own terms. Among the many highlights are the two No.1 singles: "Sir Duke," which pays tribute to a number of jazz greats, and the playfully nostalgic "I Wish." Sociopolitical numbers such as "Village Ghetto Land" and "Pastime Paradise" are given startling arrangements—a neoclassical string arrangement played on keyboards in the case of the former, and a sinewy combination of synthesizer, Hare Krishna bells, and a gospel choir on the latter. ("Pastime Paradise" was, of course, the basis of Coolio's hip-hop smash, "Gangsta's Paradise.") Other tracks include "Isn't She Lovely," a joyful celebration of childbirth, and "If It's Magic," a love song that never mentions the word. *Key of Life* is Wonder's magnum opus, so it was appropriate that he did pick up that third Album-of-the-Year Grammy, even if a year late.

Martin Luther King Day: When was the last time you can remember national policy being made based on the wishes of a pop song, or even a pop singer? That's the kind of sway Stevie Wonder could muster at the peak of his popularity.

His next move was an unexpected one, even for a mercurial talent like Wonder. He holed up in the studio for three years to make *Journey Through the Secret Life of Plants* (Motown 374 636 127-2), a decidedly noncommercial turn that was savaged by critics on its release in 1979, though it did chart at No.4. The set was a soundtrack album, but the attendant film lasted only two weeks in theaters in 1978. In one sense, the two-disc set is something of a victim of the digital age: It's now housed in a charmless double jewel case, but when first released on vinyl it came in a scented gatefold sleeve with Braille lettering on the outside.

Time has been somewhat kinder to the music. The perspective of years gone by allows us to view *Secret Life of Plants* as an album in the vanguard of the New Age movement—which, to be sure, only certain folks will consider a good thing. Still, it's full of ecological anthems ("Race Babbling"), songs about the interconnectedness of everything on the planet ("Come Back as a Flower"), touchy-feely instrumentals ("Trees," "The First Garden"), and hints of Asian and African influences ("Seasons," "Kesse Ye Lolo De Ye"). As if to placate the pop crowd, however, there's a hit single, too—the gorgeous "Send One Your Love." Reviled by some, misunderstood by others, *Secret Life of Plants* is held at arm's length by most Wonder fans, 20 years after the fact.

The present and future star

Hotter Than July (Motown 374 636 205-2), from 1980, is the follow-up to *Key of Life* that fans perplexed by *Secret Life of Plants* had wanted all along, and if it's sometimes more craftsmanlike than inspired, it at least finds Wonder working at a level very near the standard he set for himself in the early to mid-'70s. "Master Blaster (Jammin')," a No.5 hit, is the song that everyone remembers—it finished the job of introducing reggae music to America that Eric Clapton had begun with his version of Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff"—but there are other memorable tunes as well. "All I Do" is a simmering love song, while "Lately" is one of Wonder's most heart-rending breakup tales. Most significant, however, is "Happy Birthday," which Wonder wrote to popularize the idea of making Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday a national holiday. With Wonder at the forefront of the fight, King Day was eventually made official, which is remarkable enough. But when was the last time you can remember national policy being made based on the wishes of a pop song, or even a pop singer? That's the kind of sway Stevie Wonder could muster at the peak of his popularity.

Wonder summed up his incredible run of the previous decade on the 1982 two-disc retrospective *Original Musiquarium I* (Tamla TCD06113TD). Every significant hit from *Music of My Mind* through *Secret Life of Plants* is here, and it's staggering to hear them all laid end-to-end. The set isn't arranged chronologically, so listening to it gets you pleasantly unstuck in time, traveling from one high-water mark of Wonder's career ("Superstition," say, or "Sir Duke") to the next ("I Wish" or "You Are the Sunshine of My Life"). Mixed among the hits are four tracks recorded for inclusion in the set: "Front Line," a

gritty Vietnam vet's lament that predates Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." by two years; "Ribbon in the Sky," a gorgeous, gossamer ballad; the light-funk number "That Girl," which hit No.4; and "Do I Do," a playful, jazzy cut sporting a harmonica/trumpet cutting contest between Wonder and guest Dizzy Gillespie.

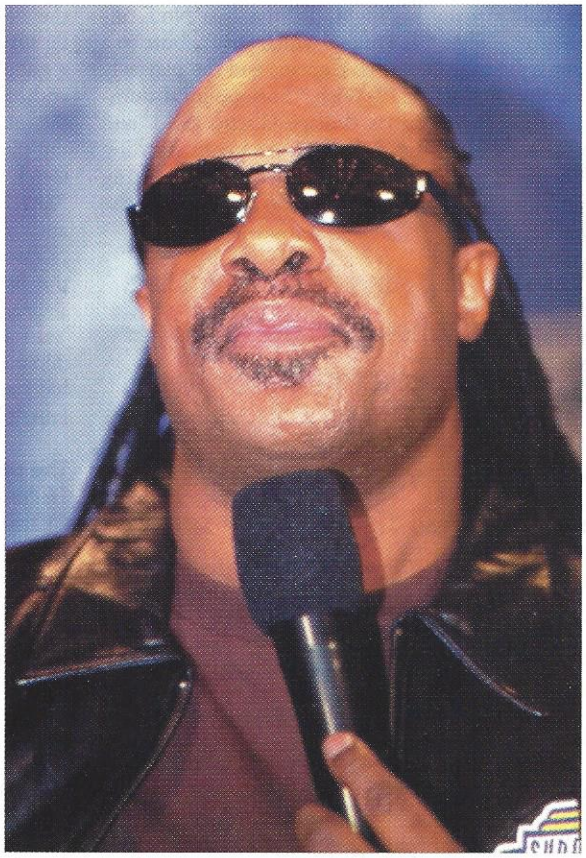
And then began Wonder's precipitous slide from greatness.

His first step after *Musiquarium*'s triumphant backward glance was to join with Paul McCartney to record a single, a clash of the pop-music titans if ever there was one. But the result was the bland and simplistic "Ebony and Ivory," which asks the musical question "Can't we just get along?" by comparing race relations to the keys on a piano.

Wonder then turned his attention to soundtrack work, resulting in *The Woman in Red* (Motown MOTD-6108), a slight collection of songs that was perfectly suited to the slight film it accompanied. The album produced Wonder's first No.1 hit in seven years—unfortunately, it was "I Just Called to Say I Love You," a piece of drum-machine–driven piffle that even the powers that be at Hallmark would reject as being too sickly sweet. The song won an Oscar, a tribute to its ubiquity if not its overall quality. Elsewhere on the album, a pre–Psychic Friend's Network Dionne Warwick is featured on two tracks, and she adds some unintentional humor to the proceedings by beginning the song "It's You" by singing, "I look inside my crystal ball of desire." Sure you do, Didi.

Somewhat better is "Love Light in Flight," which became a No.17 hit, but "Don't Drive Drunk" exemplifies the heavy-handedness of Wonder's message songs to come: good advice, lousy music.

Around the same time, Wonder became a prime mover behind the benefit singles "We Are the World," by the all-star USA for Africa aggregation, and "That's What Friends Are For," a song benefiting AIDS research, by Dionne and Friends (Warwick, Wonder, Elton John, Gladys Knight). No need to dis worthy causes—both songs deserve to be remembered for the issues they brought to light and the money they raised, not their musical value, which was inconsiderable.



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

The superstar at the 1998 Super Bowl. Now that he's 50, can Wonder reinvent himself and return to musical relevance?

Wonder's 1985 album *In Square Circle* (Motown 374 636 134-2) confirmed that he was beginning to lose a step or two against competition such as Prince—who was establishing himself as *the* R&B innovator of the '80s—and the nascent hip-hop scene, which was where most of the relevant social commentary was taking place. *Square Circle* certainly has its moments—"Overjoyed" is a lovely ballad, and "Part-Time Lover" a worthwhile hit if hardly one of his best—but songs like "Land of La La" and "It's Wrong (Apartheid)" are lyrically obvious and musically weak. More troubling still is "Spiritual Walkers," which touts the efforts of door-to-door religion salesmen. Wasn't Stevie the one who years before had sung "Superstition ain't the way?" Guess not.

Released two years later, *Characters* (Motown MCD06248MD) was a stronger album than its immediate predecessors, thanks largely to "Skeletons," Wonder's funkiest track and strongest lyric in some time. Though it names no names, the song captures the overriding dishonesty of the era, while its basic message is that whether you're a politician, a businessman, or just a guy in the street, payback is no fun, and it's on its way. "Dark and Lovely" is another topical number—it's about apartheid—and it has some bite as well as some musical muscle. There are several interesting guest appearances on the album: Michael Jackson pops up on "Get It" (Wonder had duetted with Jackson on "Just Good Friends," from The Gloved One's *Bad* album), while B.B. King and Stevie Ray Vaughan cross swords on "Come Let Me Make Your Love Come Down," a song ill-suited to their blues-drenched styles, though they seem to make the most of it anyway. There's no way to make excuses for trifles like "Galaxy Paradise" or "In Your Corner," however, so *Characters* still ends up something of a mixed bag.

Wonder traveled back to movieland for *Jungle Fever* (Motown MOTD-6291), his soundtrack for Spike Lee's 1991 film about an interracial relationship, and it's too weak a compliment to say that the music has held up better than the film. Having written the music in a month, rather than the years it usually takes him to compile an album, Wonder seems more energized than on any album since *Hotter Than July*. The best tracks are the celebratory opener, "Fun Day," and the positively randy "Queen in the Black." "These Three Words," meanwhile, may seem soppily sentimental—the song's message is to tell those you're close to that you love them because they won't be around forever—but Wonder pulls it off as only he can. "Make Sure You're Sure" is another fine ballad, while the title song is a funky George Clinton–style throwdown. On the strength of *Jungle Fever*, the '90s looked like a real return to form for Wonder.

It was not to be. Wonder waited a frustrating four years before he dropped *Conversation Peace* (Motown 314 530 238-2), which contains plenty of perfectly adequate if over-orchestrated pop and R&B, but little of the kinetic energy he'd shown on *Jungle Fever*. The songs seemingly roll on forever, almost all of them for five and six min-

utes at a clip. A little judicious editing would have gone a long way on the album's better songs ("I'm New," "For Your Love"), and would have kept weaker numbers ("Taboo to Love") off the album entirely.

That same year saw the release of *Natural Wonder* (Motown 314 530 546-2), a double live album recorded in Osaka, Japan with a symphony orchestra, and Wonder's first live recording since his Little Stevie days. Now, the proper response whenever a pop musician decides to record with an orchestra is "Uh-oh." And things certainly don't look good when you open the elaborately folded cardboard packaging to reveal a brief tribute to Wonder from, of all people, Yanni. But, surprise — *Natural Wonder* turns out to be a pretty lively affair. The song selection is good, with a fair number of hits ("Master Blaster," "Higher Ground," "Superstition," "My Cherie Amour," etc.), and some previously unreleased tunes ("Dancing to the Rhythm," "Stevie Ray Blues," and others). Though things bog down toward the end of disc one, the pacing of the show is generally good, and the orchestra is fairly noninvasive — it simply fills in where synths did the job in the studio. Most of all, though, Wonder is still enough of a firecracker to make sure *he* is the focus of attention here, not his backing musicians.

But again, it's one step forward, two steps back. Wonder's most recent release, *Song Review: A Greatest Hits Collection* (Motown 314 530 767-2), doesn't quite live up to its billing. There's a fair amount of overlap with *Original Musiquarium*, and the other hits are collected from film soundtracks and other outside sources. "Ebony and Ivory" makes its debut on a Wonder album here, as does his majestic reading of Bob Marley's "Redemption Song," from the soundtrack of Spike Lee's *Get on the Bus*. But for someone who owns all the rest, the rarities aren't enough to justify the price of the package.

It's hard to say where Wonder will go next with his music. He's still a vital artist, however, and though it seems as if he's been with us forever, Y2K will mark only his 50th birthday. There are rumors that an album may come out to celebrate the occasion, but we've heard that kind of thing before. And while it's unlikely that whatever he does will surpass the work he's already given us, it would be wrong to underestimate Stevie Wonder's capabilities. Don't count him out just yet.