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The Ballads of Marvin Gaye

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The Ballads of Marvin Gaye

ANDREW FLORY

Marvin Gaye is one of the most famous African American vocalists of the twentieth century. He was a leading player in the Motown Records “assembly line” of the 1960s, performing solo tracks like “Pride and Joy,” “Stubborn Kind of Fellow,” and “Can I Get a Witness.” He sang duets with female Motown artists like Mary Wells, Kim Weston, Tammi Terrell, and Diana Ross. His crowning achievement of the 1960s was “I Heard It through the Grapevine,” a record initially rejected as a Motown single that later became the company’s best-selling release. In the 1970s, Gaye worked in a far more independent manner, creating albums that were among Motown’s most successful. He acted as musical auteur for the groundbreaking *What’s Going On*; worked as a film composer on *Trouble Man*; asserted a forward sense of sexuality on *Let’s Get It On*; and explored disco with collaborator Leon Ware on *I Want You*. After leaving Motown during the early 1980s, Gaye staged a major comeback with *Midnight Love*. He toured the world, reached the top of the charts, and received his first Grammy Award before being killed by his father in tragic circumstances in April 1984.¹

More than thirty years after his death, Gaye is a musical icon. Biographies are plentiful and his music is still played widely on commercial radio. A recently successful lawsuit launched by his estate made international news, charging that Robin Thicke’s song “Blurred Lines,” one of the most popular releases of 2013, was actually based on the 1977 Gaye song “Got to Give It Up.”² Remembrances of his work are common, such as a 2012 program at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, that celebrated the fortieth anniversary of a historic concert during which he performed the entirety of *What’s*

This article discusses many commercially available recordings by Marvin Gaye in addition to a few that are not available to the public. I have made every effort to indicate how readers might access these recordings. For several of the ballads associated with Frank Sinatra and the arrangements by Bobby Scott, I have listed the different versions of the songs and their commercial sources in the Appendix. At the time of writing, a digital-only release created in conjunction with the research that led to this article is forthcoming.

1. Accounts of Gaye’s early life appear in Ritz, *Divided Soul*; Gaye, *Marvin Gaye, My Brother*; Turner, *Trouble Man*; and Dyson, *Mercy, Mercy Me*.

2. Thicke’s “Blurred Lines” is on his album of the same name.

Going On. A looming persona is also evident in the plethora of modern songs *about* Gaye, which usually assert his identity as a type of sensual forebear. Charlie Puth's "Marvin Gaye" (2015) quotes snippets of well-known Gaye songs and uses his name as a verb, suggesting to a potential lover, "let's Marvin Gaye and get it on."³ In "Marvin Gaye and Chardonnay" (2015), hip-hop artist Big Sean claims to use Gaye's music together with a particular wine varietal "just to set the mood."⁴ These examples help to show the manner in which the modern reception of Gaye commonly intersects with representations of race, gender, sexuality, genre, and business practices, focusing his "iconicity" through a number of meaningful lenses.

Gaye made his first recordings for Motown in mid-1961.⁵ Even though he would later become famous for releasing dance-based rhythm and blues records that appealed to the masses in a manner that few black artists equaled during the 1960s, most of the music he performed during these early recording sessions was far from stereotypical R&B. Instead, this work led to the release of his first album, *The Soulful Moods of Marvin Gaye*, a collection that focused entirely on standards. As one of Motown's first LPs, this record provides an aural snapshot of both Gaye's initial foray into recording ballads and Motown's move into an album market targeted mostly at adults. It used a band featuring guitar and piano, walking upright bass, and delicate brushed drumming, and contained chestnuts like "(I'm Afraid) The Masquerade Is Over," "How High the Moon," and "My Funny Valentine," songs performed regularly by vocalists and aligned with the "middle of the road" (MOR) sector of the music business. Extended solos, romantic themes, big vibrato, and playful melodic invention all helped to cast it firmly in the realm of album-oriented vocal jazz.

This was not out of character for Gaye. He embodied the culture surrounding jazz standards in a number of ways at the time, adopting the image of a 1950s lounge singer in his dress, public performances (which were limited), and press photos. He wore smart suits and processed his hair. He not only made his name with this first Motown release, he also changed it, adding an "e" to the end like his idol Sam Cooke. At a time when Motown was creating pop hits like "Shop Around," Marvin Gaye, as he was newly christened, was clearly focusing on a very different area of the music business from many of his label mates.

As is apparent from the content and cultural positioning of his first album, the story of Gaye's career is far more nuanced than his modern reception as a widely popular soul singer who turned to politics and lasciviousness. His early output traversed multiple musical demographics, including well-known

3. Puth's "Marvin Gaye" is on his album *Nine Track Mind*.

4. Big Sean's "Marvin Gaye and Chardonnay" is on his album *Finally Famous*.

5. For the history of Motown, see Smith, *Dancing in the Street*; George, *Where Did Our Love Go*; Early, *One Nation under a Groove*; and Flory, *I Hear a Symphony*.

pop singles, duets, and a series of standards albums that were meant to appeal to an older audience in the manner of those of successful black balladeers such as Cooke, Harry Belafonte, and Sammy Davis Jr. For listeners of today, Gaye's focus on standards during the first half of the 1960s might seem contradictory to our sense of the soul aesthetic.⁶ As a result, the historiography surrounding Gaye is heavily influenced by the success of his soul singles during the 1960s and 1970s, while his work with standards, or "ballads," as he referred to them, is mostly forgotten.⁷

Gaye's work within the MOR market was earnest. He loved the "great American songbook," a loose conglomeration of material that was different from his pop fare in a number of significant ways. Many of the ballads he recorded were decades old and popular among jazz vocalists; others were modern tunes that came from Broadway shows, films, and the repertoire of popular torch song singers like Barbara Streisand and Frank Sinatra. Little of this material was written by composers under contract with a Motown-owned publishing house, as most of his pop repertoire was. During the first half of the 1960s, Gaye usually recorded ballads away from Detroit, in places like Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. His sessions in these music centers employed first-call session players and arrangers to create lush arrangements featuring strings and horns. This contrasted with the teen pop style that was being forged in Michigan at the time by Motown's backing band, a group often called the Funk Brothers.

Gaye's interest in ballads was born out of a long history of crooning and MOR pop in the American music business. Recent work by Allison McCracken has explored a generation of crooning that emerged during the 1920s and 1930s, a period in which male singers began to explore more obvious aspects of gender and vocality.⁸ Although this movement occurred three decades before the beginning of Gaye's time at Motown, the crooners outlined in McCracken's research dealt with issues that were also applicable to the African American balladeer of the early 1960s. Much of Gaye's ballad material came from this earlier era, and reading his performances against this background can provide a broader understanding of his connection to a much longer history of male singing.

The development of microphone-based recording and live performance was critical to the rise of crooners. Using microphones as an aid, these singers were able to employ vocal techniques that had previously been ineffective to project more intimate sounds than those possible using acoustic recording. This greatly enhanced their vocal styles. In a similar manner, Gaye's reliance

6. For the rise of soul music and Motown's interaction with changing racial identity within the R&B market, see Flory, *I Hear a Symphony*, 69–99; Burford, "Sam Cooke"; and Fink, "Goal Directed Soul?"

7. Biographical commentary on Gaye often mentions his interest in standards in passing, with little attempt to explore the subject further. The exception to this is Ritz, *Divided Soul*.

8. McCracken, *Real Men Don't Sing*.

on technological developments was central to his ballads work, albeit more subtly than in the work of 1920s crooners or Motown's more audible pop records of the period. He became an expert with the microphone, and increasingly used multitrack technology to write new material, create new interpretations of existing songs, and amass intricate composites of multiple, interlocking vocal performances. McCracken's work discusses the sexualized reception of crooning, and the manner in which audiences perceived "effeminate" voices and performance styles as homosexual, creating a new style of heterosexual mass-media frankness that contrasted with older, more genteel attitudes. This is quite relevant when trying to decipher what is often seen as a cultural chasm between the grinding soul numbers and supper club standards that Gaye performed and recorded during the middle part of his career. It allows us to look at his ballads through a history of sexualized music, unifying aspects of his work and finding logical connections between songs like "My Funny Valentine" and "Let's Get It On."

The performative contexts of Gaye's ballads were quite unlike those of the crooner movement. Mass media was essential to the rise of crooning during the late 1920s but worked very differently in Gaye's career. "[Rudy] Vallée was a fan-produced star," McCracken writes about a leading crooner's relationship with his audience.⁹ In contrast, Gaye received little support for this area of his repertoire, rarely performing standards in public after 1968. Instead, he incorporated an affect of romanticism drawn from his early ballads into a new type of original work, sometimes even transforming songs written in a ballad style into more modern forms of sexual expression. He worked extensively as a balladeer in private during the 1970s, making experimental vocal recordings with little sense that they would ever be released.

Gaye idolized the most important MOR singers of the 1950s, such as Frank Sinatra and Perry Como, whose multifaceted careers and pop-friendly repertoire represented the pinnacle of success during his formative years.¹⁰ This crooner market and its later MOR manifestation were mostly a white man's world. McCracken reminds us that crooning in the 1920s helped to create a homogeneous sense of whiteness during a period in which Americans from Italian, German, and Irish backgrounds were less likely to brandish their cultural identity.¹¹ Gaye's lifelong love of material made famous by these singers is a striking reminder of the larger goals of many R&B singers before the authenticity-heavy soul era made it more difficult for African American performers to express admiration for the fruits of white society.

9. Ibid., 31.

10. For MOR, see Keightley, "Long Play"; Keightley, "Music for Middlebrows"; Keightley, "You Keep Coming Back"; and Lanza, *Elevator Music*. For a related study that considers the rise of "smooth jazz," see Carson, "Bridging the Gap."

11. McCracken, *Real Men Don't Sing*, 23–24.

White performers like Sinatra and Como were certainly among Gaye's favorites, but so were a variety of black balladeers. While only a handful of black singers were popular in the MOR market before 1960, this was still one of the few areas of the music business in which African American performers had achieved success with audiences outside of black communities. In many of the earliest recordings of African American male vocalists, discussed in work by Tim Brooks and others, singers interpret popular songs and art song material using a refined, classically oriented vocal technique.¹² During Gaye's formative years, Sammy Davis Jr., Nat "King" Cole, Sam Cooke, Billy Daniels, and Billy Eckstine were among the few black male singers to enjoy mainstream success, and each had recorded MOR music and performed in supper clubs. Reaching white audiences was not always easy. These singers had to negotiate difficult industry terrain in order to achieve this level of stardom, an issue that Mark Burford calls "the 'problem' of the black pop balladeer."¹³ Cole was attacked on stage in Birmingham in 1956 and his short-lived national television show was canceled not long afterward, on account of a lack of corporate sponsorship. In Eckstine's case, a photograph published in *Life* in 1950 in which he appeared with a fawning white woman caused a societal and industry backlash that forever changed his relationship with mainstream outlets. In 1958, Cooke had a disastrous opening at New York's famous Copacabana nightclub, one of the pillars of the MOR market.¹⁴

Gaye's interest in this sector of the music business was based on the success of these forebears. Cole was a generation older and had peaked in the early 1950s, but Cooke, who was closer to Gaye in age and made his mark as a MOR vocalist during Gaye's teen years, increasingly became an important model. During the early part of his career, Gaye clearly patterned himself on Cooke. He emulated the older singer's dual-market approach, recording both teen-oriented singles and albums pitched to adults. The cover of his first LP was even remarkably similar to that of Cooke's debut album, having the same color scheme, physical profile, and processed hairstyle.¹⁵ "He idolized Sam Cooke," according to Motown's New York producer Mickey Gentile, who assisted with many of Gaye's ballad sessions during the mid-1960s. "He had all his records."¹⁶

12. Brooks, *Lost Sounds*. See also Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 36–41, and Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 187–214.

13. Burford, "Sam Cooke," 141–55, here 145.

14. For Cooke's 1958 Copa performance, see Guralnick, *Dream Boogie*, 221–25. For a later, 1964 performance, see *ibid.*, 576–85.

15. Agency varies across these aspects of production. Gaye may have had control over his visual appearance but most likely did not participate in the creation of album art. He would have been active in choosing material, but probably did not have much say over what was eventually released or its marketing.

16. Michael ("Mickey") Gentile, interview with the author, October 5, 2015.

Gaye emerged as a pop star during a period of immense change for balladeers. In a series of articles, media historian Keir Keightley has charted the emergence of the MOR market in the years after World War II, and the prominence of musical styles associated with MOR within the mainstream during the 1940s and 1950s. Keightley's work helps to explain Gaye's career goals, which were formulated during the late 1950s when MOR releases were among the most popular records in the music industry. This pre-Beatles era was remarkably different from the period in which Gaye rose to popularity. The majority of popular vocalists did not write their own material, nor were they expected to be expert instrumentalists. They left their recording careers in the able hands of industry-savvy A&R men, who helped to commission album content and acted as intermediaries with record companies and publishers. Standards singers were some of the most important entertainers of the time. They rose to the top of the pop charts and often had simultaneous television and film careers, winning both Grammys and Oscars in the process.

In this article, I consider Gaye's work with ballads over an eighteen-year period between 1961 and 1979, offering a number of new findings from extensive archival research and from work with Motown's corporate vault recordings. I present this material in two large swaths. First, I look at Gaye's official and unreleased ballads material from the years 1961–66, when Motown marketed him as a balladeer and he performed frequently in upscale supper clubs. Gaye recorded more than 150 ballad tracks during this period, many of which were alternate vocal takes, allowing us to examine closely his wide repertoire and changing approaches to these songs. His balladeer activity slowed between 1966 and 1968, a time when MOR music became less popular with mainstream listeners. Gaye stopped performing live for several years between 1969 and 1972 and then played mostly one-night dates in large halls and stadiums after returning to the stage, leaving behind the model of extended engagements in high-end nightclubs. His repertoire followed suit. His records released after 1968 were mostly oriented toward the soul market and their relationship to MOR romanticism was very different. Gendered themes concerning love were highlighted in these later recordings, but they were often projected in a more sexualized manner.

Gaye did not stop working on standards in the intimate realm of the recording studio, however, where he continued to record ballads for the remainder of his life. This "private" period is the focus of the article's second section. Although he no longer released standards or performed regularly in supper clubs, he revisited this repertoire in a number of ways at several critical points during the 1970s. He recorded a mostly self-written suite of songs probably intended for Sammy Davis Jr., who was briefly a Motown labelmate. During an interim period in which Motown refused to release the "What's Going On" single, Gaye experimented with the vocal components of various other ballads, adding new interpretations and composing melodies and lyrics through a process I call "vocal composition." Several of the original

songs on his 1973 LP *Let's Get It On* were created in this way. Even more significantly, he experimented extensively with older ballad recordings, revisiting scores of previous sessions to add new vocal interpretations. A series of seven tracks recorded in 1966 with producer and arranger Bobby Scott was Gaye's favorite source for ballad exploration between 1967 and 1979. He used these instrumental tracks to experiment with different forms of technologically based composition and recording in a manner that paralleled and inspired his methods for creating pop records.

Public Ballads

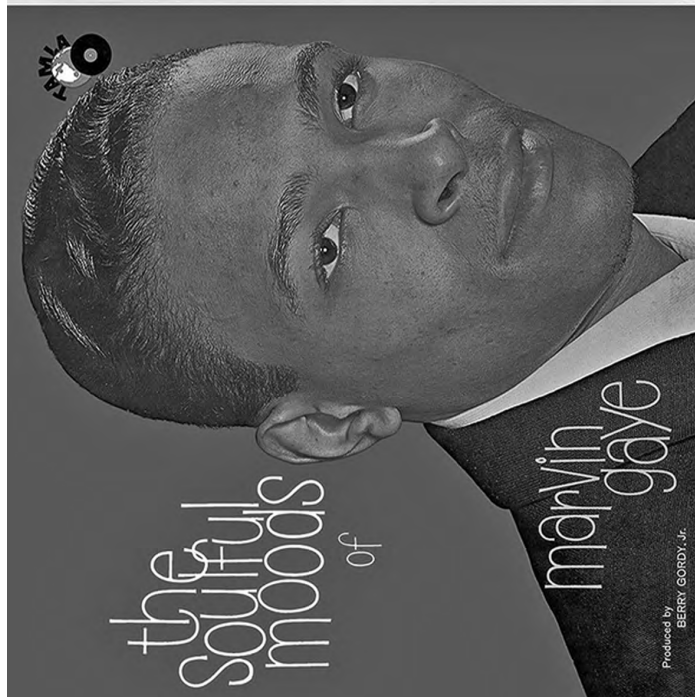
The cover of Gaye's *Soulful Moods* album (1961) depicts its balladeer intentions in a number of ways (see Figure 1). A photo presents a boyish version of the Gaye that the world would later know, complete with straightened hair, a slight mustache, and a small patch of fuzz under his chin, whose wispieness seems to stem more from youth than from grooming choices. In what was surely not a coincidence, the color scheme and profile head shot are nearly identical to those of Sam Cooke's first album, which had been released in early 1958. On the back of the sleeve, a line drawing of a coffee cup with the initials "MG" and an ashtray holding two smoking cigarettes sets the mood. A note introduces Gaye as someone whom Harvey Fuqua ("his manager and personal friend") had developed into "one of the nation's great jazz vocalists." More significantly, it explains the use of the word "soul," which refers to something different from the gritty, gospel-infused genre that was emerging in the R&B market at the time. Instead, the short essay aligns the "soulful" in the album's title with an older jazz tradition, in which "the singer surrounds himself with his contemporaries and relaxes into an atmosphere of easy-going, sustained moodiness."¹⁷

The *Soulful Moods* sessions were among Motown's first, and they were captured on tape using one of the company's most rudimentary early setups. They most likely took place at the firm's new West Grand Boulevard studio, which had been running for about a year and a half. Three of the recordings were made using a two-track machine ("Masquerade," "How Deep the Ocean," and "Always"), tracking vocals separately from the instrumental backing.¹⁸ Other songs were recorded to a single track in live takes in which Gaye sang together with the instrumentalists.¹⁹ These were standard recording techniques at the time, a period just prior to the explosion in recording

17. These notes are unattributed.

18. The title "How Deep the Ocean" is consistently mislabeled on this release. (The standard title is "How Deep Is the Ocean.")


19. In most cases, there is no reliable source for the identities of Motown's session musicians on individual tracks. The band probably consisted of future members of the group that would later be known as the Funk Brothers, most of whom were also active in the local jazz scene.



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THE SOULFUL MOODS of MARVIN GAYE



MARVIN GAYE, a young man in his early twenties is a talented drummer, guitarist, composer, arranger and singer. At the early age of three, Marvin was a soloist in his father's church in Washington, D.C. Marvin continued his religious singing until his early teens, when he launched his career into the popular field, singing locally around D.C. Harvey was a very popular singer and a close personal friend, developed Marvin into one of the nation's great jazz vocalists.

"The Soulful Moods of Marvin Gaye"

The mood in music inevitably changes in the very heart of the morning... hours after the regular "jazz" is over. This, in the opinion of those in the jazz idiom, is frequently called the "soulful hours."

The singer surrounds himself with his contemporaries and releases into an atmosphere of easy-going, sustained moodiness in a room misty with the smoke of cigarettes and half-finished cups of coffee. Out of this and snatches of conversations, fragments of past failures and successes and a sense of the future, Marvin Gaye has created a unique sound. It is a work-a-day problem and pours forth the anguish and frustrations within his soul in the communication he knows best - words and music. A single chord he hears may be responsive and stir the mechanism within him, as within all of us, that brings back a memory of perhaps a love lost or a dream deferred. The mood of the music is the mood of the man, the mood of the vocalist's message, or the musician's traditions, here this is common with the artist.

As you listen to Marvin Gaye it is 2:30 A.M., -you've just lit up a cigarette - it's another cup of coffee - and now with the first number that he sings into

Yes, do you remember the time...?

SIDE 1

1. MASQUERADE 5:12
2. FUNNY VALENTINE 3:21
3. WITCHCRAFT 2:25
4. EASY LIVING 3:04
5. HOW DEEP THE OCEAN 3:08

SIDE 2

1. LOVE FOR SALE 2:54
2. ALWAYS 2:58
3. HOW HIGH THE MOON 2:27
4. LET YOUR CONSCIENCE BE YOUR GUIDE 3:04
5. NEVER LET YOU GO 2:44
6. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT LOVE IS 2:52

Guest Artists:
Wendell & Wedell

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MOTOWN RECORD CORP.
2648 W. Grand Blvd.
Detroit, Michigan

Produced by BERRY GORDY, JR.

Printed in USA

Figure 1 Artwork for Marvin Gaye, *The Soulful Moods of Marvin Gaye* (Tamla TM-221, 1961). Used by permission. This figure appears in color in the online version of the Journal.

capability that would drastically change the means of creating popular music. Gaye croons and emotes his vocal part like a 1950s pop singer in these performances, using wide vibrato and exaggerated vowel sounds. Like Cooke, he also uses improvisation that draws clearly on gospel to invoke African American vocal codes throughout the record.

Motown was a tight-knit family business at the time. In February 1962, Gaye moved into the company's inner circle when he married Anna Gordy, older sister of Motown chief Berry Gordy Jr.²⁰ He began his live performance career in earnest that year, going on the road for dozens of dates with Motown's packaged Motortown Revue—the "Motor Town Special," as it was called at the time. A slew of these were one-nighters, often presenting multiple shows within a single day. Gaye performed mostly at "chitlin' circuit" theaters, older opera houses and movie palaces located in black neighborhoods that usually hosted week-long touring revues. The Motor Town Special stopped at all of the biggest venues on the circuit, including the Howard in Gaye's hometown of Washington, DC, the Regal in Chicago, and the Fox in Motown's home of Detroit. Gaye traversed the American South with the tour during November and December, ending with a series of shows at New York's Apollo Theater before the holidays.

Motown recorded a number of these revues and released several related various-artist live albums during the 1960s.²¹ To listen to these records, and the similar unreleased material in the Motown vaults, is to be transported to a period that still felt the weight of World War II and the Cold War but had not yet experienced the full brunt of the Civil Rights Movement. The evenings were package performances, with an emcee serving as host, a single backing band playing for all of Motown's vocalists, transition music between acts, and a highly scripted set list that placed performers on the bill in an order that took account of their current popularity. Gaye was one of the featured artists during the December 1962 run at the Apollo, appearing at the top of the listing, and his role as a balladeer in these performances was clear. Each act performed only a couple of tunes during its time on stage, and Gaye's set list was always crafted to include a ballad just before his current hit, the teen dance number "Stubborn Kind of Fellow."

Gaye alternated between two songs in this slot—"The Christmas Song," written by Mel Tormé in 1945, and "What Kind of Fool Am I," from the new musical *Stop the World—I Want to Get Off*, which had been a *Billboard*

20. Motown was not the only record company run by members of the Gordy family. Berry's sister Gwen and Gaye's mentor Harvey Fuqua operated a series of labels together, the most successful of which was Anna. For the history of Anna, see Broven, *Record Makers and Breakers*, 319–40.

21. See *Motortown Revue in Paris*; *Motortown Revue Live*; *Motortown Revue, Recorded Live*, vol. 2; and *Motor-Town Revue, Recorded Live at the Apollo*, vol. 1.

"Easy Listening" hit that season for Sammy Davis Jr.²² Before these performances, the emcee cedes the floor and Gaye gives a formal introduction in a soft-spoken manner; the audience then politely applauds as he begins each familiar tune. (The beginning of his performance of "What Kind of Fool Am I" on December 17 may be heard in Audio Example 1 in the online version of the *Journal*.) The band transforms from a dance-oriented R&B outfit into a floor show orchestra, with a swinging rhythm section, tutti horns, and call-and-response figures between piano, flute, and saxophones. The following year, Gaye performed "The Days of Wine and Roses" in the same context during a number of performances that Motown recorded at both the Graystone and Fox theaters in Detroit. These occasions remind us of the importance of ballads in Gaye's repertoire at the time. They also help to broaden our understanding of the manner in which chitlin' circuit theaters, famous mostly for stereotypical African American styles like soul, R&B, and blues, also served as venues for a variety of other musical forms performed by black acts.

Gaye worked as a public balladeer during his first eight years at Motown, from early 1961 until late 1968. He released three more studio albums focused on standards (*When I'm Alone I Cry*, *A Tribute to the Great Nat King Cole*, and *Hello Broadway*) and also worked on dozens of other related tracks, including several unreleased collections. Collectively, his official releases help to reveal the stylistic boundaries of the MOR market in this period. The songs included on *When I'm Alone I Cry*, released in April 1964, were mostly older works, written for film, popular vocalists, or the Broadway stage. (Two of the tunes—"When I'm Alone I Cry" and "If My Heart Could Sing"—were composed by Motown songwriters and published by the company's new Stein and Van Stock publishing wing.) The record opens with a thirty-second instrumental passage that showcases a huge backing ensemble comprising a jazz-style rhythm section and a full complement of reeds, brass, and strings. Far from the boxy combo of *Soulful Moods*, Gaye is supported by top-notch session players and smooth, professional arrangements. Nearly all of the songs are realized as slow-tempo ballads and Gaye croons through each one using a big voice with wide vibrato.²³ In a discussion of R&B reception during the early 1950s, Philip Gentry has written about a sense of masculine "smoothness" that existed in African American popular music in this period. Gentry focuses on the dress and stage persona of Sonny Til, the lead singer of the Orioles, as he was portrayed in articles that appeared in publications like *Tan Confessions*, a magazine that catered to middle-class black women

22. A version of "What Kind of Fool Am I" was released on *The Motor-Town Revue, Recorded Live at the Apollo*, vol. 1; a version of "The Christmas Song" appears on *The Marvin Gaye Collection*.

23. The Detroit-based tracks also include a close-harmony vocal background group, performing tight but bland arrangements modeled on the "easy listening" sound of the time. These "straight" vocals resemble those used in Sam Cooke's recordings of the period.

and teenagers.²⁴ Gaye's vocal component in *When I'm Alone* fits perfectly into this sort of smooth persona. There is a clear sense in this collection of trying to conjure a late-night atmosphere similar to that of Sinatra's *In the Wee Small Hours* or Cooke's *Night Beat*.

Gaye began to perform more often with solo billing after the release of *When I'm Alone I Cry*. A batch of July 1964 recordings from the 20 Grand club in Detroit includes a passionate rendition of "Star Dust" in an arrangement that featured Ron Wakefield on tenor saxophone. After an upbeat group of his hit songs, Gaye offers to "slow the pace down just a bit" and croons through a version of the song that features Motown's trademark vibes and organ together with Wakefield's saxophone as a featured voice. The vault recording of this performance includes audible audience noise, mostly faint sounds of people chatting over the music.²⁵ While this might be easy to dismiss as an unwanted relic of the recording setup, or even as an attempt to create a sense of "atmosphere," it also reminds us that the smaller rooms at the 20 Grand—the Driftwood Lounge and the Fireside Lounge—and at Leo's in Cleveland were quite different from venues like the Apollo and the Howard. All of these spaces catered to a black clientele (on some nights, at least), but the 20 Grand and Leo's were nightclubs, smaller establishments that served drinks to older patrons who either sat or danced on a dedicated floor in the center of the room. Writing at the time for the black-oriented *Reporter of Macon*, Georgia, journalist Ed Chatman commented on the difference between one of Gaye's small club performances and those more commonly pitched to a younger generation. "It has the kind of class that keeps it from becoming monotonous," he wrote. "The show is clean, inspiring and its morals [are] on such a high level that it [is] refreshingly different."²⁶

By this point, Gaye was not Motown's only balladeer. As early as 1963, the company was trying to make the transition into more expensive supper club shows for many of its acts. This led a number of Motown performers to explore styles associated with MOR during the middle of the decade, often while maintaining popularity in youth-driven sectors of the R&B and pop markets. Acts like the Miracles and Mary Wells recorded standards as album material and often performed these songs in their live acts. Successful groups like the Temptations and the Four Tops worked in dinner clubs, released dedicated standards records, and used television and film appearances to appeal to adults. Motown also signed singers with previous MOR success like Barbara McNair, Tony Martin, and Billy Eckstine, and released society

24. Gentry, *What Will I Be*, 50–52. Like Til, Gaye would later appear in features printed in magazines such as *Sepia* and *Tan*.

25. A version of this song recorded on July 22, 1964, is included on Motown's archival duplicate master 93, Motown Master Tapes (digital transfers and scans), Universal Music Enterprises Corporate Archive, New York.

26. Quoted in Jim Cleaver, "Marvin Gaye Revue Comes to 20 Grand," *Michigan Chronicle*, April 18, 1964, B13.

band renditions of its biggest hits with the Choker Campbell Orchestra. The Supremes became Motown's pathbreakers in this market sector. In 1965 alone, the year in which they had a run of singles reach the top of both the pop and R&B charts, the group played Blinstrub's in Boston, the 20 Grand in Detroit, the Latin Casino in Cherry Hill, the Safari Room in San Jose, and New York's Copacabana, while simultaneously reaching out to an adult audience with their LP recordings. They released an album of Sam Cooke songs, a record of material composed for the musical *Funny Girl*, a collection of country-and-western tunes, and a tribute to the famous American songwriting team of Rodgers and Hart. On television, the group veered from dance program appearances in 1963 and 1964 to prime-time shows like *Hollywood Palace* and the *Ed Sullivan Show* mid-decade.

Gaye's records also explored different kinds of MOR repertoire. Most of the selections on *Hello Broadway*, released in November 1964, were from recent musicals. In the years that followed, a number of Motown's albums referred to Broadway as both a physical location and a style, and Gaye's new record helped to explore both of these.²⁷ Rather than evoking a "smoky backroom" in the manner of *When I'm Alone I Cry*, this collection creates big and joyous renditions of standards. Gaye eschews the cool persona, often venturing into a strained, melismatic vocal tone. As noted in the liner essay, written by Detroit television host Bill Kennedy, Gaye's "hello to Broadway is a sparkling cheerful one."²⁸

Late that year, Gaye started work on a fourth ballads record. A batch of ten instrumental tracks were committed to tape in Los Angeles during December, including material like "All the Way," "More (Than the Greatest Love)," and "Fly Me to the Moon." Although this project has never been mentioned in writings about (or interviews with) Gaye, it seems to have been a tribute to one of his biggest idols, Frank Sinatra. The tribute album was a popular genre in MOR at the time, and there were a number of black balladeers who released LPs of this type, such as Aretha Franklin, who recorded a set of songs associated with Dinah Washington in 1961, and Sam Cooke, who dedicated his *Tribute to the Lady* record to Billie Holiday in 1959. Work on Gaye's potential Sinatra project was quickly aborted, however, when Nat Cole died in mid-February 1965. Motown shelved the earlier tracks and shifted direction immediately with Gaye's next album suite, which paid tribute to Cole, connecting Gaye to

27. Many of the songs included on *Hello Broadway* were well known in the pop music world. Louis Armstrong had recorded a popular version of "Hello Dolly!" that year; "The Days of Wine and Roses" had been issued recently in commercially successful renditions by Billy Eckstine and Andy Williams; "On the Street Where You Live" was a hit for Vic Damone in 1956; and Barbara Streisand's version of "People" had reached the *Billboard* top ten in the years immediately preceding Gaye's recording.

28. A promotional photograph of Gaye and Kennedy appeared in *Record World*, December 5, 1963.

one of the most successful African American balladeers of the 1940s and 1950s.²⁹ With two recent notable deaths among black MOR performers—Cooke had been tragically killed only weeks earlier—Motown was pushing for Gaye to become “next in line.” On the very day of Cole’s passing, the company issued a press release implying that Gaye might cover some of Cooke’s outstanding club dates, and Gaye later performed at an event in honor of the fallen singer at the Norfolk Municipal Auditorium.³⁰

Gaye’s next album, titled *A Tribute to the Great Nat King Cole*, includes twelve tracks from Cole’s repertoire. Gaye recorded his vocals in Detroit at virtually the same time that Motown was launching a historic tour of England and France. He had been booked on the transatlantic outing, but remained in Michigan after Motown announced that he had “a virus infection and a possible case of pneumonia.”³¹ With the majority of the company’s most prominent artists and background musicians, as well as many of its executives, out of town for several weeks, Gaye and producer Harvey Fuqua must have had the run of the Motown facilities. Motown issued the album at the end of the year, making Gaye’s standards collections a holiday tradition. Like *Hello Broadway*, *Tribute* begins with a huge orchestral flourish, announcing that it would surely not be a suite of songs intended for dancing. The album’s opener, “Nature Boy,” is performed mostly without a rhythm section or steady pulse, relying instead on Gaye’s emotive vocals and intense interjections by winds, horns, and strings. A number of the other arrangements create a similar affect, such as “Too Young” and “Mona Lisa,” falling more naturally into the “ballad” category than some of Gaye’s contemporaneous upbeat work with standards.

Up to this point, Gaye’s standards had mostly been arranged by Motown staffers like Gene Page, but in late 1965 he (or Motown on his behalf) began to actively commission work by outside arrangers. Six of the arrangements for a project produced by Mickey Stevenson in New York City were written by legendary jazz performer Melba Liston, who had played with Dizzy Gillespie and Count Basie and was an arranger-for-hire for many well-known groups during the 1950s and 1960s.³² This turn to Liston, a well-respected jazz luminary at the time, is evidence that Gaye and Motown were looking

29. Both projects were recorded at Radio Recorders, with Marc Gordon and Hal Davis producing and Gene Page providing arrangements.

30. [Alan E.] Abrams, “Marvin Gaye Revue Returns to 20 Grand,” Motown press release, February 15, 1965, Alan E. Abrams Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

31. [Alan E.] Abrams, “Popular Vocalist Marvin Gaye Hospitalized in Detroit,” Motown press release, March 18, 1965, Alan E. Abrams Collection, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

32. Liston created arrangements for at least six Gaye ballads of the time, including “Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars,” “Maria,” “Good-Bye,” “So In Love,” “If I Had to Go On,” and “You’re All That Matters.” For Liston, see the Melba Liston Research Collective, eds., special issue, *Black Music Research Journal* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2014), which is dedicated to her life and work.

for more adventurous forms of balladry. (The beginning of her arrangement of “Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars” is shown in Figure 2.) In her scores, the instrumental group is treated more like a nimble big band than an orchestra. Her arrangements for songs like “If I Had to Go On” and “So In Love” use Latin, swing, and other styles, leaning heavily on interplay between winds, horns, and strings, and moving instrumental voices deftly between these sections to create extremely vivid coloristic textures.

Gaye initiated what was to be his final set of standards in February 1966 with another freelance arranger. These arrangements were written by musical polymath Bobby Scott, who was also listed internally as producer for the recording sessions, a rare instance in which someone without a Motown production contract was employed in this manner.³³ Scott had been active

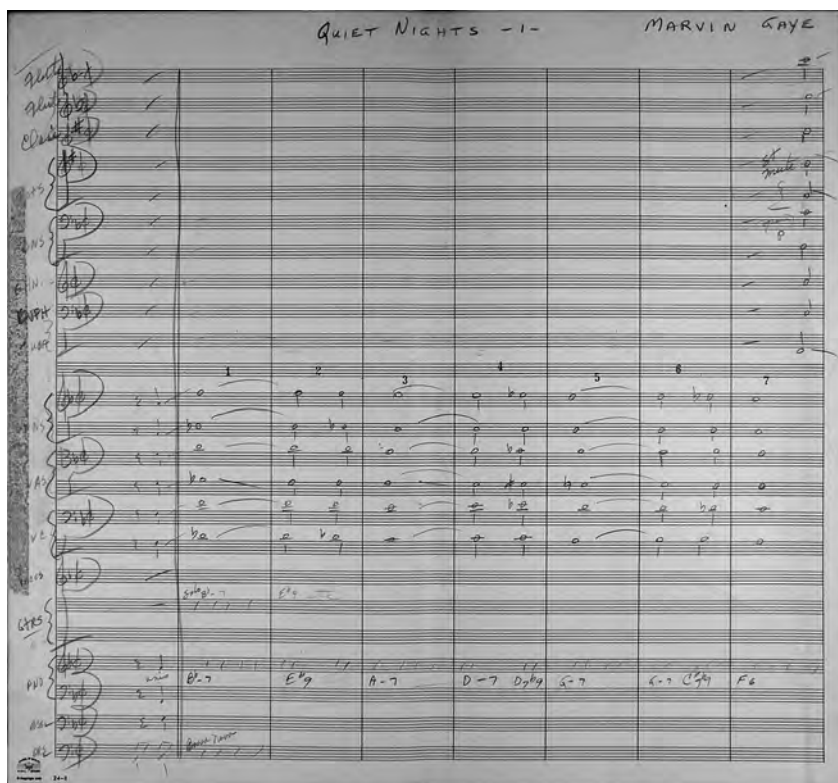


Figure 2 The opening of Melba Liston's arrangement of "Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars." Melba Liston Collection, Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College, Chicago. Used by permission. This figure appears in color in the online version of the *Journal*.

33. Scott's contractual obligation to Motown became an issue after Gaye's death, when Motown and CBS were sorting unreleased recordings for potential release. See further below.

in a number of musical areas. He played several instruments extremely well, wrote television music, composed art music, and had also written well-known pop songs like “A Taste of Honey.” In this context, he drew upon his work as a jazz pianist, arranger, bandleader, and vocalist. Like the Liston arrangements recorded the previous year, these sessions reveal Gaye’s interest in more serious forms of jazz crooning, a style of performance that was quickly going out of fashion but that held great allure for singers like Gaye. The Motown vaults include a recording of Scott performing demonstration versions of these songs, singing along to his own piano accompaniment, showing that he had a clear sense of the mood he wanted to create.³⁴

Together with Mickey Gentile, a Motown producer working full-time in New York, Scott recorded eight songs over two sessions for this project. He split his work accordingly: four of the tracks featured a swinging jazz band and the other four used a large string section. Audio evidence suggests that Gaye performed his vocals live in the studio from a mostly isolated vocal booth during these sessions. The songs varied in background. Their origins were more obscure than the material on records like *Hello Broadway* and *Tribute*. “Why Did I Choose You,” from the recent Broadway musical *The Yearling*, was released that year as a single by Barbara Streisand. “Night Life” had been written by Willie Nelson and performed most famously by country singer Ray Price. “I Won’t Cry Anymore” was known best from a 1951 recording by Tony Bennett. These were not obvious choices for new recordings; they were interesting tunes that in most cases were not well known. Unlike Gaye’s previous collections of standards, all of Scott’s arrangements called for medium and slow tempos. The sessions were all recorded live to three tracks with no overdubs. At a time when Motown had been using eight-track machines for more than a year, dutifully layering instruments and recording them using methods that allowed for maximum flexibility during the mixing process, the approach of these Scott sessions was old-fashioned. It looked back to the halcyon days—an older approach for a more “classic” sound.

The arrangements themselves were much more active than anything Gaye had used in the past. Scott’s arranging prowess was foregrounded in the musical parts. He used a huge dynamic range, extended introductions and postludes, multiple instruments assuming lead voices in each song, and numerous melodic tutti sections in the horns and strings. “Night Life,”

34. An unnumbered demonstration reel, owned by Mickey Gentile and much later shared with Motown executives, contains a large collection of Scott demos created either to pitch the project to Motown or to teach Gaye the songs. Two tracks not included in the later sessions are included among these recordings. One is a version of “The Love We Never Knew,” a Scott original. This song had been released in 1965 on an LP by Greek vocalist Nana Mouskouri, an international artist who enjoyed immense popularity around the world for the next two decades, going on to a career in European politics during the 1990s. The other is a version of “Where I Belong,” an older song written by famous actor Mickey Rooney that had been recorded by Vic Damone.

“Funny (Not Much),” “This Will Make You Laugh,” and “I Wish I Didn’t Love You So”—the tracks arranged for standard big band—shared many features: an active piano throughout (probably Scott himself), a slinky obbligato alto saxophone, muted horns, and a featured flute. The tracks arranged for strings—“The Shadow of Your Smile,” “I Won’t Cry Anymore,” “She Needs Me,” and “Why Did I Choose You”—took full advantage of the melodic and dynamic expressiveness of the ensemble, using techniques ranging from majestic swells to quickly articulated melodic runs and harmonics. Gaye had never had arrangements like this. His vocals were to be embedded within the band, not placed in front of it—part of the action of a larger jazz portrait rather than the featured element.

Motown released only one of the fourteen recordings arranged by Liston and Scott, “Night Life,” which appeared as an album track on Gaye’s May 1966 collection *Moods of Marvin Gaye*. This seems to reflect a move away from MOR releases in Gaye’s record catalog. But during the same period, Gaye was playing at fewer youth venues and more supper clubs. For the former, he appeared at places like the Whisky a Go Go in Los Angeles; for the latter, at Leo’s in Cleveland, the Cave in Vancouver, Bimbo’s 365 Club in San Francisco, and Detroit’s 20 Grand. In all of his performances, Gaye was still operating in the mode of a formal, professional musician in the same manner as his balladeer idols. He wore a tuxedo, performed canned patter, and had a well-rehearsed backing band. Writing about his opening at Bimbo’s, Gaye’s brother Frankie remembered that “he strolled out looking so suave in a top hat and tails, of all things, acting like Romeo but coming across as the Dapper Dans in 1930s movie musicals.”³⁵ All of this seemed to be in preparation for his biggest stage yet, a series of shows at one of the most important supper club venues in the country.

In August 1966, Gaye performed an extended run at New York’s Copacabana. Playing at the Copa was a coming-of-age for Gaye, as it had been for Cooke. It was a high-profile engagement in the entertainment center of the country, where his cabaret act would be heavily scrutinized by mainstream critics who were prone to be less forgiving than the black press. Gaye’s crossing from black-oriented teen pop into this rarefied world was itself a subject of discussion among music writers at the time. In January 1966, a *Billboard* article about his navigating between markets discussed the way he shifted between pop (MOR) and rock (R&B) according to the venue. “I still feel very strongly about r&b,” Gaye said in the piece, using an almost apologetic tone, but “I’d like to become known as a more versatile singer.”³⁶ In another article, local Detroit writer Rita Griffin wondered how Gaye might navigate the selection of material for his Copa sets, mixing teen favorites and harder soul singing with the lighter MOR material expected by the upscale

35. Gaye, *Marvin Gaye, My Brother*, 59.

36. “Gaye, Popping with Pop, Keeps Eye on ‘First Love,’” *Billboard*, January 8, 1966, 12.

crowd. “The Copacabana boasts an extremely vast audience that runs the gamut,” Gaye’s bandleader Maurice King told Griffin. “There’s the prom crowd that favors rock, the swingers who dig a R&B groove, the ‘sing me a ballad’ folks, and the tourists who like heaven knows what.”³⁷

Gaye opened at the Copacabana on August 4 and performed several sets a night for the next two weeks. (A table tent used to promote the performances is shown in Figure 3.) These shows were on a social level that was far above anything he had experienced in show business thus far in his decade-long career. Many of the nightclubs in which he had performed that



Figure 3 A table tent used by Motown to promote Gaye’s August 1966 performances at the Copacabana. Gordy Motown Audio Collection, University Archives, Eastern Michigan University. This figure appears in color in the online version of the *Journal*.

37. Quoted in Rita Griffin, “Airline Woes Won’t Halt Gaye,” *Michigan Chronicle*, July 16, 1966, A19.

year were in smaller cities or suburbs, whereas the Copa was located in one of the most elite neighborhoods in New York City, on the southeast corner of Central Park. A club catering to black patrons like the 20 Grand relied on a small inn next door to accommodate patrons who wanted to while away the late hours. In contrast, the Copa was around the corner from the Plaza, one of the nation's most exclusive hotels. It offered dinner, drinks, dancing, and floor shows with the famous "Copa girls"—a kind of entertainment that had been popular during the first half of the century. The Copa was in many ways a relic, and Gaye's presence there was a test of his ability to perform in the stylistic and cultural world of his predecessors at the upper levels of the mainstream entertainment industry.

Gaye performed for several hours each night to multiple audiences. Comedian Fred Barber opened the show with an act described by one reviewer as "hilarious monologs [*sic*] and brilliant musical instrument impressions."³⁸ Gaye's sets were about an hour long. Each followed a similar pattern, beginning with Cole Porter's "I Concentrate on You" and then moving into a medley of Gaye's hits, complete renditions of other Motown material, and a variety of modern standards like "Just in Time," "Strangers in the Night," and "Who Can I Turn To." He performed a wide range of songs. The driving soul of "Pride and Joy" was followed by a light rendition of Steve Allen's "This Could Be the Start of Something Big"; "Georgia Rose," which also incorporated several stanzas of the Hoagy Carmichael and Stuart Gorrell classic "Georgia On My Mind," came right after Gaye's interpretation of the Brazilian song "Laia Ladia."

Motown recorded five of Gaye's Copa sets on August 12 and 13, midway through his run at the historic venue. Tapes exist for two shows on the first of these evenings and three on the second.³⁹ Each set begins with a male emcee opening the proceedings with the perfunctory line "and now ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Jules Podell proudly presents . . .," before Gaye enters accompanied by a swinging instrumental prelude and is introduced to the audience by a showgirl as "Mr. Marvin Gaye!" (This introduction may be heard in Audio Example 2 in the online version of the *Journal*.) Throughout his act, Gaye fluctuates between MOR-style crooning and the soul vocal approach for which he was known in the pop sphere. He emphasized the former by opening each show with renditions of "I Concentrate on You" and "Just in Time," before changing vocal codes in performances of "How Sweet It Is." In each of the versions of "How Sweet" that Motown captured on tape, he follows the same pattern for the middle of the song: after a long

38. Don Owens, "Gaye Makes It Big in Major Bistro Debut," *Billboard*, August 20, 1966, 14.

39. The five shows were recorded onto ten reels, labeled "Marvin Gaye Copa NY, 1–10": Motown Master Tapes (digital transfers and scans), Universal Music Enterprises Corporate Archive, New York. A modern reissue culled from this material is titled *At the Copa*. When not referring explicitly to this release in what follows, I am discussing these original source tapes.

extemporaneous vocal section, he highlights the gospel orientation of the arrangement by first eliciting group participation from the audience (asking them to repeat the phrase “how sweet”) and then suggesting that they turn to their neighbors and tell them “how sweet it is!” The year 1966 was an important one for the ascension of a new form of heavily racialized soul music within the American mainstream popular music business. Suits and show business glamour were falling out of favor and more overt references to black life—southern and rural locations, social viewpoints, types of food, and so on—became common in best-selling records by black musicians.⁴⁰ In this context, Gaye was taking the audience to church. He follows a similar tack in “Pride and Joy,” assuming the role of a vernacular preacher during a lengthy spoken interlude and riffing on the message “*Everybody* has a pride and joy,” emphasizing the first word each time he pronounces the phrase (the interlude may be heard in Audio Example 3 in the online version of the *Journal*):

Ladies and gentleman, everybody has a pride and joy.
Everybody.
 As I look around the club, I can see several pride and joys.
 Pride and joy sitting over—I see you pride and joys over there.
Everybody has a pride and joy.
 Pride and joy sitting right there.
 Wonderful.
 How you pride and joys in the balcony?
Everybody has a pride and joy.
 Uh huh.
 Pride and joys sitting right here.
 Got to be pride and joys.
 [sings] *Yeah, baby.*⁴¹

He interacts with the audience throughout, walking through the crowd and greeting patrons at their tables. Continuing to speak in an affected dialect, he incorporates comedy into the routine, mentioning that one male patron seems to have “two pride and joys” and questioning the nature of another couple’s relationship before publicly calling on the woman to kiss the man.

It is hard to know how audiences received Gaye’s act at the time, but from a modern perspective it is easy to hear the conflict between MOR and soul in these performances. The material itself certainly had associations with both these areas of the music business, and there are related code shifts throughout each set in the styles of arrangement, vocal approach, dialects, and vernacular references within spoken sections. The tempos of Gaye’s well-known hits are often much faster than those of the famous recorded versions, increasing

40. Discussed further in Flory, *I Hear a Symphony*, 69–99.

41. Transcribed from the recording of Gaye’s third set of August 13 included on *At the Copa*.

their soulful intensity and drive. Despite stereotypes of the Copa as a venue that demanded corny, Broadway-style arrangements, many of Gaye's performances are downright funky. Others show him to be accommodating middlebrow expectations, introducing bandleader Maurice King as a "composer" and "terrific alto saxophonist," and continually referring to the band as an orchestra.⁴² In some instances, these approaches to performance environment extend from Gaye and the backing band to the audience. When he launches into "Strangers in the Night" toward the end of the set, for example, the crowd extends gracious applause, signaling that they recognize the song.

One of the appeals of supper clubs for high-class patrons was the way these venues permitted proximity to the performers. Singers, comedians, and dancers were often situated in the midst of the audience on stages centrally located and partially surrounded by tables. Spectators were respected and made to feel as though they were on the same social level as the famous entertainers performing at the club. Hearing the ambient sound of the Copa can thus be as revealing as Gaye's well-rehearsed act itself, adding social cues to his performance. There are numerous examples of this on the Copa tapes, many of which include audience sounds. Motown followed what was a relatively standard practice for live album production at the time in dedicating one of eight available audio tracks to ambient audience noise, thereby preserving something of the social context for the show. In one performance of "Laia Ladia," for example, Gaye sings the line "I've been searching for love, I've been longing for love, oh where is she?" to which a bold female audience member is heard to reply, "Right over here, baby—don't worry about a thing," eliciting a roar from a group of fellow patrons. This provides a more nuanced perspective than the canned applause that is often included on commercially released live recordings. In another instance, the reel continues to record beyond the last number of the set and Gaye's exit music, capturing the sound of the room as patrons continue their evening at the Copa, get another drink, prepare to leave, and engage in conversation with others at their table. Background music plays, chairs squeak, and plates clatter, capturing the sonic environment of the room during periods without live entertainment.

Gaye began a slow retreat from standards after his Copa performances. Despite having expended considerable energy on the live production and its recording, Motown never released an LP of the show. (A similar record had been issued for the Supremes several months earlier.) Gaye continued to record some ballad material in New York and Detroit—completing tracks like "Sunny" and "Soulie" with Mickey Gentile—and released versions of "Night Life," "I Worry 'bout You," and "One for My Baby (and One More for the Road)" on *Moods of Marvin Gaye*. In the years immediately following his Copa shows, he also recorded versions of modern standards from the rock

42. Ibid., track 15.

and R&B canons like “Stand by Me” and “Yesterday.” Yet his focus on this aspect of his career waned after reaching the pinnacle of the MOR market during 1966. He never returned to the Copa, though he did perform at clubs like the Latin Casino and the Coconut Grove over the next few years. None of these seemed to have the potential impact of the Copa run, however; none carried its excitement or prestige. Gaye continued to explore romanticism through a series of duets with Tammi Terrell, including “Your Precious Love,” “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough,” and “You’re All I Need to Get By,” but these records were steeped in modern forms of R&B and pop songwriting and production. He was becoming more popular as a soul vocalist, especially after the success of “I Heard It through the Grapevine,” a record that hit the charts in late 1968 and dramatically changed the trajectory of his career.

There were also larger forces at work. The relationship between the MOR, R&B, and mainstream markets of the American music business shifted radically during the second half of the 1960s, creating a fissure within Gaye’s multifaceted career. In his pioneering article “Music for Middlebrows,” Keir Keightley writes about these changes, noting that album-oriented rock culture began to eclipse the “easy listening” portion of the business during 1966 and 1967, effectively making it much more difficult for an artist like Gaye to cross between MOR and pop.⁴³ Greats of popular music like Frank Sinatra and Louis Armstrong were no longer hitmakers. They resided in a sector of the industry that was increasingly disconnected from the mainstream. Gaye’s retreat from his dreams of stardom as a balladeer was surely due in part to his individual lack of success with recordings and live performances, but the resultant changes in his career trajectory also had to do with these large-scale industry shifts. No longer was it possible for many audience members to reconcile the gritty soul of “Grapevine” with the smooth sounds of “The Shadow of Your Smile.” This was evident in a number of press articles published in 1967 and 1968. A March 1967 *Billboard* review by Eliot Tiegel called his ballads “his weakest offerings.”⁴⁴ In a prominent column titled “Among the Stars,” which was syndicated in a number of black newspapers in this period, journalist Lee Ivory questioned Gaye’s balladeer work multiple times. He described a run at Ciro’s in Los Angeles as a “disastrous floperoonie.” “He can’t sing ballads, y’awl,” Ivory wrote, “and even his press agent can’t do a thing to cover it up.”⁴⁵ In another well-publicized exchange in mid-1968, Puerto Rican singer José Feliciano

43. Keightley, “Music for Middlebrows,” 324.

44. Eliot Tiegel, “Gaye Best as R&B Blaster, Ballads Slow Down Pace,” *Billboard*, March 18, 1967, 22.

45. Lee Ivory, “Among the Stars: No Ballads for Marvin,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 3–9, 1967, 13. See also Ivory’s “Among the Stars” columns in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 15, 1967, 16, and the *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 14, 1967, 16.

declared that Gaye's non-soulful performance of the "Star-Spangled Banner" at a Detroit Tigers' baseball game "disappointed his people."⁴⁶

Private Ballads and Public Sexuality

During his early years at Motown, Gaye approached the vocal component of his ballads recordings differently from that of his teen pop material. Using a performative breadth that was rare among his contemporaries, he moved freely between gutbucket soul tracks and lushly orchestrated arrangements appropriate for supper clubs. He had to traverse this territory carefully, occupying a liminal space between African American crooners like Cole and Cooke, vocalists who drew heavily on gospel like Ronald Isley and Solomon Burke, and white balladeers like Dean Martin and Andy Williams. It was a delicate balance that required the simultaneous creation of performative identities that appealed to different sets of public interests.

These areas of Gaye's early career merged in interesting ways in the 1970s. His reaction to changes in the music business during this period is one of the most fascinating aspects of his ballads repertoire. In the public eye, Gaye stopped recording and performing ballads. Instead, while still with Motown and working mostly in Los Angeles, he created political or sometimes overtly sexual music in a popular series of self-produced solo recordings. He continued to explore a romantic persona in duets with Diana Ross, but no longer performed on the supper club circuit and never again released a record focused on standards. In the private realm of the recording studio, however, Gaye continued to work on ballads. He spent many days overdubbing nothing but ballads performances and slipped this work into other pop sessions as a means of procrastination and creative exploration. He recorded ballads in the early 1970s during or in close proximity to the sessions for hits like "What's Going On" and "Let's Get It On," and again later in the decade when he made the relationship-laden *In Our Lifetime*. Few people knew about these ballad recordings, but they were an important focus of Gaye's creative attention during most of the 1970s.

As early as 1965, Gaye's private, experimental work with ballads used recording and writing techniques in a manner that foreshadowed his 1970s creative process, which I have elsewhere called "vocal composition."⁴⁷ In short, instead of writing a song and then recording it, Gaye often developed material with the aid of multitrack recording by improvising vocal melodies and lyrics over prerecorded instrumental backing tracks, "composing" the

46. "Marvin Gaye Challenges Feliciano to Soul Duel," *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 5, 1968, 10.

47. Flory, "Marvin Gaye as Vocal Composer."

vocal component without written notation. He first explored a number of important techniques of vocal composition during his ballad work of the 1960s, and continued to develop these methods throughout his career. He reinterpreted vocal parts in order to achieve a different sense of vocality, re-composed melodies and lyrics while recording, and created vocal composites of his voice, which allowed him to perform multiple roles on the same recording. Gaye worked doggedly on ballads for more than ten years with seemingly little commercial intent, layering over a dozen interpretations of many songs and eventually filling nearly all of the tracks on a twenty-four-track master tape with different vocal takes in varying styles.

Gaye's technological forays during the 1960s and 1970s placed him in a long line of musicians who had used recording apparatus in creative ways. Historian Susan Schmidt Horning's work on the emergence of recording technology during the first half of the twentieth century considers a wide range of experimentation of this sort, from Les Paul's and Sidney Bechet's work with overdubs in the 1940s to novelty records in the 1950s and the rise of tape-based multitracking in the 1960s.⁴⁸ Using an approach more focused on the novelty of documentation and the uncanniness of the recorded voice, media theorist Jacob Smith has written similarly about the ability of recording technology to reproduce nuances of the voice and the use of "raspy" vocal timbres by African American male vocalists during the first part of the twentieth century.⁴⁹ Viewing Gaye's private ballad recordings against the ideas of both Schmidt Horning and Smith helps to broaden our conception of the way his work fits into a larger range of musical approaches in the postwar era.

Contrary to the dominant perception of Motown as a factory in which vocalists were merely cogs in an assembly line system, Gaye's association with Berry Gordy's empire helped to facilitate his experimentation in a variety of ways. For one, Motown tended to skirt the union regulations that dogged some commercial studios. During the early 1960s, the American Federation of Musicians was wary of allowing its members to create tracks for later overdubbing. There were a number of reasons for this. In some cases, studio musicians were made to perform multiple times on a single recording, reducing the cost of the session by avoiding the need for larger ensembles and the demand for unionized players; in other instances, overdubbing shortened ensemble recording sessions by allowing vocalists to perfect their parts without expensive musicians in the room.⁵⁰ Motown's Detroit-based studios and musicians operated mostly outside of union purview, which permitted Gaye to experiment more freely than if he had

48. Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*.

49. Smith, *Vocal Tracks*.

50. See Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*, 176–77.

been based in a larger music center with a more effective union representative.⁵¹ Motown was also an early adopter of recording technology that made it possible for Gaye to work on vocal parts in relative isolation. The company converted to eight-track capability in December 1964, several years before most of the recording industry, and after 1966 it ran several spaces in which Gaye could perform vocal overdubs. Technological innovation was always at the heart of the company's recording ethos.

Schmidt Horning notes the seismic shift in experimentation that occurred during the 1960s, but she also reminds us that—despite the groundbreaking work of companies that specialized in R&B like Motown and Atlantic—very few of what historians think of as “prominent voices” in recording advancement before the 1970s belonged to women or African Americans.⁵² Much of what we know about early experiments with multitracking chronicles the creation of rock music in these years by groups like the Beatles and the Beach Boys. Gaye's work allows us to expand our understanding of those who harnessed technology for compositional purposes during this formative period, incorporating narratives aligned with the R&B market of the time. Gaye and other R&B artists experimented at the same time as these rock luminaries, and documenting the work of these African American artists helps to create a fuller picture of these technological advancements, which were led by a variety of people within the pop music sphere. Listening through Gaye's reclusive ballads produces an uncanny sense of simultaneous sameness and difference, as pieces created at various times and places combine to form a decidedly fabricated text. Stylistically, Gaye's private ballads had little to do with avant-garde black pioneers like Sun Ra and George Clinton, but his approach to technology was certainly in line with the strain of “Afrofuturism” prevalent at the time that used music to negotiate the divide between blackness and what Griffith Rollefson has described as a “cybernetic technological future.”⁵³

Gaye used technology to experiment with ballads as early as 1964.⁵⁴ He recorded more than a dozen alternate vocals during the sessions for both *When I'm Alone I Cry* and *Hello Broadway*, seemingly in an attempt to capture slightly different performances. He then encountered a new sense of

51. During this period, musician, songwriter, and producer Henry Cosby was the main conduit between Motown's session musicians and the local Detroit chapter of the American Federation of Musicians.

52. Schmidt Horning, *Chasing Sound*, 9.

53. Rollefson, “‘Robot Voodoo Power’ Thesis,” 85.

54. My knowledge of Gaye's recording process derives from extensive work as a consulting producer and researcher for Universal Music Enterprises. In 2012, I discussed my role as a reissue producer in greater detail in a paper titled “Reissuing Marvin: Musicology and the Modern Expanded Edition,” delivered as part of the AMS / Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum Lecture Series.

freedom in working with multitrack tape during his Sinatra project, the sessions later released as *A Tribute to the Great Nat King Cole*, and the Bobby Scott sessions. The band sessions for these performances had all been recorded in California and New York using three-track machines, with two tracks used for the band and one for the vocal performance. In order to work with this material, Motown's main recording apparatus required these tapes to be transferred to eight-track tape. The move from three to eight tracks provided Gaye with a master tape that retained the original vocal take and instrumental backing but also included five open tracks for new vocal performances.

While recording *Tribute*, Gaye used this newfound tape space to complete between two and four vocal takes for each song. Mixes exist for many of these in the Motown vaults in both mono and stereo, suggesting that various agents associated with Motown—most likely Gaye, producers Marc Gordon, Hal Davis, and Harvey Fuqua, and members of the Motown Quality Control department—evaluated them for release. Although it would later become a common technique, rarely at this early time did Gaye and his various Motown engineer collaborators create “composite” vocal tracks, which used selected parts from multiple takes to create a single, stitched-together, best performance.

In mid-1965, Gaye worked in this way on several tracks from his aborted Sinatra collection. Although he recorded only a couple of performances during this series of sessions, it was a sign of his interest in revisiting older material. In many of these tracks, he experimented with small improvisational elements and performative aspects such as vocality, vocal timbre, and microphone techniques. More work with previously discarded material occurred about eighteen months later, during a roughly two-week period in early 1967, only months after his run at the Copa. He was performing standards regularly in live clubs at the time. He had just completed a long run at Detroit's 20 Grand in December 1966, and was set to perform for nearly a month at Leo's in Cleveland and Ciro's in Los Angeles. (He had also just played a Christmas Eve engagement at the Los Angeles Palladium with Otis Redding, which reflected his growing popularity as a soul singer.) Like many of Gaye's later, autonomous sessions, the purpose of this work is now unclear. Perhaps he was working toward a new album release. Or maybe he was just enjoying himself in the studio.

This group of early 1967 sessions certainly looks like the beginning of a new record. Motown had commissioned fourteen tracks for each of Gaye's last three ballads albums, and Gaye revisited nearly the same number of previously unreleased Scott and Sinatra songs during late January and the first two weeks of February (see Table 1). He clocked into nearly twenty different vocal sessions at the time, setting up shop in Motown's Studio A to record about thirty ballad-oriented vocal performances. Some days he recorded only ballads; on other occasions, he was already in the studio to record pop music

Table 1 Gaye's vocal sessions for ballad tracks, January–February 1967

Date	Title	Session source
January 29, 1967	All the Way	Sinatra
	Emily	Sinatra
January 31, 1967	Funny (Not Much)	Scott
	She Needs Me	Scott
	The Shadow of Your Smile	Scott
	This Will Make You Laugh	Scott
February 1, 1967	I Won't Cry Anymore	Scott
	She Needs Me	Scott
	The Shadow of Your Smile	Scott
February 2, 1967	Fly Me to the Moon	Sinatra
	Maria	Sinatra
	More	Sinatra
February 3, 1967	All the Way	Sinatra
	Funny (Not Much)	Scott
	This Will Make You Laugh	Scott
	Why Did I Choose You	Scott
February 8, 1967	The Shadow of Your Smile	Scott
February 9, 1967	I Wish I Didn't Love You So	Scott
February 13, 1967	Fanny	Sinatra
February 14, 1967	What's New	Sinatra
	Where Are You	Sinatra

with Motown producers. Several of Gaye's most famous singles came from this period. In late January, he added his vocals to "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," which became the first of many duets between Gaye and Tammi Terrell. Several weeks later, he recorded the vocal component of "I Heard It through the Grapevine."

Gaye's work in these early 1967 ballad performances was more experimental than his earlier attempts at revisiting older material. He used melisma and vibrato to change melodic and lyrical elements, creating tracks that aligned more closely with the soul movement of the time. He often altered his vocal style drastically. Even when he used similar tunes and words, the timbral qualities of these new performances contrasted sharply with his earlier attempts. Gaye's approach to the final note of "All the Way" is a good example: whereas the 1965 performance employed a full, open voice and heavy vibrato, each of Gaye's 1967 tracks used a straight tone with no vibrato, pushing the diphthong in an awkward way that eschewed conventional voice production.⁵⁵ The vocals for songs like "Fly Me to the Moon" and "She

55. The different published versions of "All the Way" are shown in section A of the Appendix. Readers should note the precise and consistent uses of the terms "track" and "version" throughout the article. I use "track" to refer to a performance (or compilation of performances) preserved on a discrete section of a multitrack tape, while "version" is used to refer to completed mixes of ballad performances in stereo or mono form.

Needs Me” were much more intimate in these later renditions, with little room sound, no added reverb printed to tape, and an approach to vocal recording that relied on the power of the microphone.

Gaye’s first documented use of expanded vocal composition techniques occurred during these 1967 ballads sessions in two vocal tracks for “I Won’t Cry Anymore,” both of which contain substantial recomposed melodic and lyrical material (see Example 1, tracks 1 and 2). In the first, Gaye scats vocables and phonemes, presumably representing his early ideas about how to approach a new melody; the second contains a much more developed performance based on the same idea, with more specific lyrical content and a more sure-footed melodic element. Later tracks that Gaye recorded on the same reel in Detroit before Motown’s westward move at the beginning of the 1970s show an attempt to create different vocal backgrounds, including a hummed reduction of the main melody and a rendition in which he speaks the words throughout (Example 1, tracks 4 and 5).⁵⁶ (All five of the track excerpts shown in Example 1 may be heard in Audio Examples 4a–c in the online version of the *Journal*.)

He went even further in “The Shadow of Your Smile,” recording five new vocal tracks between 1967 and 1972 that filled all of the available space on the multitrack reel. In one take he performed a version of the original melody, albeit in a much more intimate vocal setting (see Example 2, track 1). In another he recorded a spoken track using a jive vernacular throughout, imbuing the performance with a sense of soul culture (Example 2, track 4). (It is unclear whether this was a primary statement of the soul aesthetic or a commentary upon it.) In three other vocal performances Gaye sings different countermelody figures: two contain rhythmic and melodic material that complement the primary melody, while the third is a more compositional performance that retains few of the melodic elements of the original (Example 2, tracks 2, 3, and 5 respectively).⁵⁷ This last track might be viewed as a possible countermelody, but its approach is more adventurous than those of the others. It has a distinct melodic character, alternating between heterophony and call-and-response with the original melody while also incorporating new lyrical material and more extended variants of the original words. This performance also has reverb printed to tape, creating an indelible layer of space on Gaye’s vocals.⁵⁸ (The excerpts from tracks 2, 4, 5, and 6 shown in Example 2 may be heard in Audio Examples 5a–b in the online version of the *Journal*.)

56. The various different published versions of “I Won’t Cry Anymore” are shown in section B of the Appendix.

57. Tracks 7 and 8 of the reel hold instrumental performances.

58. The various different published versions of “The Shadow of Your Smile” are shown in section C of the Appendix.

Example 1 A transcription of Gaye's 1967 vocal tracks for "I Won't Cry Anymore" (together with the 1966 original), 0:20–0:35, as preserved on Motown eight-track reel 8S131, Motown Master Tapes (digital transfers and scans), Universal Music Enterprises Corporate Archive, New York

Track 1 (scatting) FA

uh - da - bout - ta - nu _____ they will un - der -

Track 2 (developed)

Girl I've got good news _____ they won't see me _____

Track 4 (humming)

Mmm _____

Track 5 (spoken)

Track 7 1966 vocals

I _____ won't

- stand it _____ an - y - more _____

_____ cry - in' _____ an - y - more _____

Mmm _____

I won't cry an - y - more

cry an - y - more _____

Example 1 continued

Am

uh - duh - bow - dah we - ee

I won't have to weep

Mmm

now

Gm

how done se - par - a - - - ted

'cause we're se - par - a - - - ted

now that you've left me

that you've left me

Example 2 A transcription of five of Gaye's vocal tracks for "The Shadow of Your Smile" (together with the 1966 original), 0:19–0:26, as preserved on Motown eight-track reel 8S130, Motown Master Tapes (digital transfers and scans), Universal Music Enterprises Corporate Archive, New York

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Shadow of Your Smile" by Marvin Gaye. It consists of six staves, each representing a different vocal track. The first staff is the original melody, followed by two countermeasures, a spoken track, and the 1966 vocal track. The lyrics are written below the notes. The score is in 4/4 time and G major. The first staff is marked "(unmeasured)" and the second staff is marked "(meter begins)".

Track 1 (original melody) (unmeasured) (meter begins)
The sha-dow of your smile

Track 2 (countermelody take 1)
The sha-dow of your smile _

Track 3 (countermelody take 2)
Sha - dow _ of your smile _

Track 4 (spoken)
Ba - by the sha - dow of your smile

Track 5 (countermelody take 3)*
I know I know the sha-dow of your smile _

Track 6 (1966 vocals)
The sha-dow of your smile

*contains reverb printed to tape

The vocal composites for "I Won't Cry Anymore" and "The Shadow of Your Smile" point to a new method of creating music for Gaye. They feature intricate experimentation with heterophonic vocal duets and vocal composite textures, both of which became hallmarks of his 1970s style. Each maintained some degree of compatibility with the original melody, but in many cases the new material was independent enough that it could constitute its own lead performance. Multiple vocal takes of this sort were not common at Motown during this period. In most cases, producers working in the company's Hitsville studio would have filled six or seven of the available eight tracks with instrumental performances, allowing for maximum flexibility during the mixing process. Moreover, Motown's engineers and tape librarians rarely saved outtakes, instead compiling the most usable take from each basic tracking session.

None of Gaye's ballad performances from this period were released at the time. This may have been because of their unconventional creative processes; it is also possible that they were never intended as commercial products. Gaye's next solo LP, *In the Groove*, was not delivered to stores for nearly eighteen months. It contained mostly upbeat pop material and interpretations of 1950s R&B hits like "Some Kind of Wonderful" and "There Goes My Baby." It also included Gaye's performance of "I Heard It through the Grapevine," which was initially released as an album track but later issued as a single through popular demand. After the success of "Grapevine," Gaye's solo singles focused in large part on emotive soul music. He slowed his performance schedule, and eventually took a long break from the stage. After a performance at Motown's Sterling Ball charity event in October 1969, he did not perform publicly for more than two and a half years.⁵⁹

Not long after the start of this self-imposed performance hiatus, Gaye began an ambitious new ballads project. In February 1970, working with long-time Motown arranger Gene Page, he ran a group of ensemble recordings in Los Angeles. In a set of six sessions over three days—three pairs of tracking and sweetening—Gaye, Page, and a large group of first-call Los Angeles session musicians created backing tracks for nine songs. This was the first large-scale set of recordings that Gaye created as both writer and producer.⁶⁰ A number of indicators suggest that these songs were intended for Sammy Davis Jr., who was on the brink of signing to Motown.⁶¹ There are no vocal components on these tapes, and it is not clear if Gaye had composed their melodic and lyrical elements before the Los Angeles tracking sessions. By the standards of his later vocal composition method, it would not have been unusual for the songs to have been inchoate; they had seemingly incomplete titles, and Motown's various publishing arms did not copyright them. Motown announced Davis's signing about two months later and his first (and only) album for Motown, *Something for Everyone*, was released in the middle of the year. But the record contained none of Gaye's material, which Davis had never pursued. Instead, it used a batch of recordings that Davis had made outside of Motown's purview.

Gaye retreated again for several months after his sessions with Page, then reemerged in Detroit at the beginning of June with "What's Going On."⁶² The band tracks and vocals for this record were completed over the span of a

59. It is possible that Gaye performed at a small fundraiser for Detroit mayoral candidate Richard Austin during this period.

60. Gaye worked on his own and with Motown producer Richard Morris to record tracks like "The Bells" and "Baby, I'm For Real," but never approached anything on the scale of these sessions. For Gaye's emergence as a producer at Motown, see Edmonds, *What's Going On?*

61. See "Sammy Davis Joins Motown as Top Production Coordinator," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 16, 1970, B2A, and Ben Fong-Torres, "Honor Thy Brother-in-Law: A Visit with Marvin Gaye," *Rolling Stone*, April 27, 1972, 32–40.

62. For more on the creation of the *What's Going On* LP, see Edmonds, *What's Going On?*

week and a half that month; but, as is well established in the lore surrounding the project, Motown initially refused to release it.⁶³ Strings were not recorded until September, and the single was finally issued in January of the following year. Gaye recalled his reaction to the rejection of “What’s Going On” in an interview with David Ritz: “basically I said, ‘Put it out or I’ll never record for you again.’”⁶⁴ Accordingly, there was a long gestation period between the initial June 1970 recording dates for the “What’s Going On” single and the March 1971 sessions in which Gaye and the Funk Brothers recorded the remaining eight tracks on the *What’s Going On* album.

The statement “I’ll never record for you again” is somewhat misleading. More specifically, Gaye responded to the cool reception of “What’s Going On” by refusing to record material provided and produced by Motown. Motown’s tape card filing system, which tracked songs’ recording histories, listed Gaye as the performer on a number of songs written by Motown songwriters at this time, each of which was later given to another artist.⁶⁵ No evidence of Gaye’s lead vocals exists for these tracks, which seems to indicate his avoidance of the Motown process. The Motown session logs list nearly three dozen dates for Gaye material in this nine-month period, however.⁶⁶ This was material that he created on his own terms. Nearly all of his recording activity during this “What’s Going On” interim period involved the Scott tracks or music that he had written in situations where he had also acted as producer. Most of it reflected his interest in ballads. His first sessions after “What’s Going On” focused on “Why Did I Choose You” and “She Needs Me,” tracks that he would revisit several times before resuming work on his pop masterpiece early the next year. In September 1970, he also recorded a series of vocal takes for the songs he had written for Davis earlier in the year. Given the ephemeral nature of these performances, it is likely that Gaye was composing many of these songs’ lyrical and melodic elements during the recording sessions.⁶⁷

63. Most accounts claim that Motown refused to release the single for some time, after extensive questioning of the track’s political leanings. Berry Gordy remembers this exchange more favorably in his autobiography: Gordy, *To Be Loved*, 302.

64. Ritz, *Divided Soul*, 148

65. Motown Tape File Cards (1961–72) and Motown Artist Cards (1972–80), Universal Music Enterprises Corporate Archive, New York. The many examples of songs with changing attribution include “And If You See Her (And If You See Him),” which was later released by Diana Ross, and “Meet Me at the Station” / “Time Bomb People,” which was later recorded by Hearts of Stone.

66. Motown Session Log (1961–74), Universal Music Enterprises Corporate Archive, New York.

67. A number of the studio recordings that Gaye made during this time were experiments that did not come to fruition—accompaniment tracks to which he never added a vocal take and for which we thus have no evidence of melodic or lyrical content. Examples include “I Live for You,” “I Love the Ground You Walk On,” and “Taken For a Ride” (later “Come Get to This”). None of these unfinished tracks resembled the Scott arrangements or Gaye’s original

Gaye began work on several new ballads in November 1970. He fused his previous romantic supper club persona with a new style of “slow jam” popular in the R&B market at the time that explored black masculinity. One new track, “I Love You Secretly,” was an arrangement of a slow, compound dupe song that took on a doo-wop quality when it was eventually completed by the Miracles in 1972. Another, “Distant Lover,” became a song for which Gaye recorded about a dozen different vocal parts and a number of ongoing instrumental overdubs in the years that followed. He also returned to material he had started to work on with other acts years earlier. He recorded a vocal performance for “Sad Tomorrows,” which he had produced for the Originals in August 1969, and also added his lead vocals to “Symphony,” a track he had produced for the Fantastic Four in October 1969.

In a number of cases Gaye used advanced vocal composition techniques to create new songs from old ballad tracks. “Just to Keep You Satisfied” was one of these original ballads, whose convoluted history is representative of his highly unorthodox creative process at this time (see section D of the Appendix). He produced backing tracks for the song’s first iteration in February 1968 and later added a vocal component performed by the little-known Motown group the Monitors, who completed their parts later that year. On June 1, 1970—the same day on which he produced the band track for “What’s Going On”—he created a different set of instrumental tracks for “Just to Keep You Satisfied,” and eventually completed these with the Originals singing the lead parts. He then revisited the Monitors version several weeks later, performing a lead vocal track and changing the melody and lyric to a new song, “God Is Love,” which was later released as the B-side to “What’s Going On.” A third set of instrumental tracks, initiated in March 1971, was used for the recording of “God Is Love” that appeared on *What’s Going On*. (Excerpts from these various versions may be heard in Audio Examples 6–9 in the online version of the *Journal*.)

Because they share the same harmonic content but have distinct melodic material, we might think of “Just to Keep You Satisfied” and “God Is Love” as contrafacts. Gaye rewrote the melody for each recording of “Just to Keep You Satisfied,” creating high, triadic lines and dense group-vocal parts for both the Monitors and the Originals. “God Is Love” features a very evasive, smooth, syncopated main melody in a much lower register as well as a newly composed composite of backing vocals. The thematic juxtaposition of these songs reveals the range of Gaye’s subject interests at the time: “God Is Love” deals with spiritual devotion in the context of a contemporary secular world, while the more ballad-oriented “Just to Keep You Satisfied” is about corporeal love.

Davis ballads in style, but they nonetheless remind us of his continued interest in intermixing recording and composition, as well as his willingness to halt or revise a project midway through the creative process.

In the short term, Gaye slowed his ballads work following the success of *What's Going On*. He received global accolades for this record and appeared at a number of high-profile awards shows. In the album's press reception, he was labeled a protest singer who had the rare gift of being able to connect with popular African American sentiment. On May 1, 1972, Gaye returned to the stage for the first time in two and a half years in a well-publicized performance at the Kennedy Center, during which the mayor of Washington, DC, declared it Marvin Gaye Day and presented the singer with a key to the city.⁶⁸ There was little evidence of his balladeer past in this performance. It contained a medley of 1960s hits followed by a complete (but reordered) rendering of *What's Going On*. This seemed to reflect a larger shift toward topical songwriting. In the period following the album's release, Gaye created a series of funky tracks with Hamilton Bohannon and Willie Hutch and recorded two versions of the topical song "You're the Man." Later that year he began to divide his time between Michigan and California, completing work on a soundtrack and album for the blaxploitation film *Trouble Man* in Los Angeles. But he did not stay away from ballads for long.

In June 1972, Gaye returned to several of the 1966 Scott arrangements, performing new vocal takes of "The Shadow of Your Smile," "Funny," and "This Will Make You Laugh." These were most likely Gaye's last recording sessions in Detroit. It was as if he was saying his goodbyes during these sessions and remembering the golden days of Motown. As it turned out, Gaye recorded ballads during his first and last Detroit studio work. Motown's center of gravity was moving westward by this point, but the company's tape library was still located in Michigan. Immediately after his official move to California, Gaye requested that a number of tapes be sent to Los Angeles. Entries in the company's Detroit-based filing system indicate that a rash of reels were delivered to the California offices at this time, more than 200 making the move, including several dozen attributed to Gaye. As one of the rare Motown artists who enjoyed a degree of autonomy, Gaye seemed to be amassing a stockpile of basic tracks that he hoped to complete.

The sessions with Hutch and Bohannon were among the reels Gaye requested, as were the Scott tapes and a number of the original ballads he had started work on during the *What's Going On* interim period. The funkier Hutch and Bohannon tracks were eventually passed over, but Gaye did a lot of work with many of the other tapes, especially the Scott ballads. Now working on a sixteen-track reel that contained two band tracks from 1966 and a number of older vocal takes, between January and March 1973 Gaye added dozens of new takes over these arrangements.

He also worked with a number of his original ballads from 1970 during the first half of 1973. These tracks fit perfectly within Gaye's new album

68. This performance is included on Gaye, *What's Going On (Deluxe Edition)*.

project written and produced with Ed Townsend, *Let's Get It On*, a suite of songs concerned with relationships and sexuality. One original ballad, "You're My Everything," had been among the songs ostensibly written for Davis in 1970. Gaye transformed it into a piece called "I'd Give My Life for You" during these 1973 sessions, but later shelved the attempt. Others proved more useful. Side 2 of *Let's Get It On* featured three older tracks from this Detroit stockpile. One was an upbeat song originally called "Taken for a Ride," which Gaye changed into "Come Get to This" by altering its melody and lyrics. Most of "Distant Lover" had been completed in 1970 and 1972, and Gaye now revisited it to overdub several small elements and complete the mix. He also transformed the Originals version of "Just to Keep You Satisfied" into a new recording. He did not completely rewrite the song, instead keeping many of the lyrics, the same title, and a significant amount of the Originals' backing vocals. But his revised melody was quite different, he added instrumental and backing vocal overdubs, and the track's overall mix contrasted sharply with that of his earlier recording. (An excerpt may be heard in Audio Example 10 in the online version of the *Journal*.)

These new versions of "Just to Keep You Satisfied" and "Distant Lover" traversed Gaye's interests in ballads and soul music.⁶⁹ Written initially in the MOR tradition, the inclusion of these songs on a thematic record steeped in overtly sexual material helped to move them from a socially conservative 1950s vantage point to a much more open take on love and romance that was growing in popularity within the R&B market under the influence of people like Al Green, Barry White, and Isaac Hayes. Motown was aware of this shift, writing about it in the album's official press release. "Though Gaye is channeling his talents—temporarily at least—into romanticism again, he has not succumbed to sweetness, like many of the currently popular groups that are putting out saccharine soul ballads," the four-page document stated. "With this album, Gaye has introduced a tough eroticism into soul music."⁷⁰

In January 1974, Gaye made another return to the stage. He had performed only once in public since late 1969 and, much like his 1972 Kennedy Center event, the concert was marketed as a rare chance to see Gaye in a live environment. Motown recorded the show, which took place at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, and an edited version was released later that year as *Marvin Gaye Live!* Despite Gaye's move into political and sexual

69. Gaye's collaborative authorship was often complex. "Distant Lover" was credited to Gaye, Gwen Gordy, and Sandra Green, while "Just to Keep You Satisfied" was credited to Gaye, Anna Gordy Gaye, and Elgie Stover.

70. "Let's Get It On," Motown press release, ca. August 1973, Music Library and Sound Recordings Archives, Bowling Green State University.

themes on studio albums like *What's Going On* and *Let's Get It On*, the material preserved on this record is more indebted to the type of stage show he had developed in the mid-1960s for cabaret clubs. There is an "overture," which incorporates fragments of Gaye's most popular material. The stage band plays orchestrated melodic themes under his stage patter and when he enters and exits. A "fossil medley" revisits many of his 1960s hits in the manner of a carefully organized stage show, transitioning quickly through six numbers in just under twelve minutes. Similarly, Gaye relates deferentially to the audience throughout the record, reflecting a type of showmanship derived from MOR nightclubs.

Gaye played a number of other live dates that year, and continued to perform small tours in both the United States and Europe for the remainder of the decade. A relic of these performances is the LP *Live at the London Palladium*, recorded in late 1976. (This two-record set was only three-quarters live; the fourth side contained an extended version of the single "Got to Give It Up.") *Live at the London Palladium* reflects Gaye's older stage shows in a manner similar to *Marvin Gaye Live!*, featuring an overture, incidental music, and tight instrumental segues. It mostly comprises three large-scale medleys: one containing 1960s hits, a second focusing on tracks from *What's Going On*, and a third including duet material with Florence Lyles.

"Distant Lover" was a fixture at the end of Gaye's live show during the late 1970s, and one of the few songs to appear on both *Marvin Gaye Live!* and *Live at the London Palladium*. The versions of this song included on these live records are quite similar: both use an arrangement that incorporates melodic material from *Trouble Man* at the beginning under a spoken dramatic lead-in by Gaye, who sets the song's context with a story about a relationship gone sour. Screams figure prominently in the audio mix when Gaye finally reaches the opening melody. (This section of the performance may be heard in Audio Example 11 in the online version of the *Journal*.) Clearly a production choice, this audience noise highlights the role of "Distant Lover" in Gaye's live show. In one sense, the song represented Gaye the balladeer, especially in the context of evenings that touched upon many different aspects of his career. Yet it had been dramatically transformed since its origins in late 1970. Relinquishing Gaye's older connections to MOR, "Distant Lover" now furthered his persona as a "love man," a sage voice who sang about his relationship experiences for a large group of fans, most of whom seemed to be female.

Performances of "Distant Lover," and related songs like "Jan," were not the only way in which Gaye continued his ballads work in the last decade of his life, the period from roughly 1974 to 1984. Because he disliked touring, Gaye was much more comfortable working on recording projects, which sometimes translated into further experimentation with ballad material. Motown moved permanently to California in 1973, and two years later Gaye

opened his own studio on Sunset Boulevard.⁷¹ It was an intimate space, where he could retreat into a creative world that he controlled completely. Removed from corporate facilities, Gaye's studio work during this period was often very private and sometimes quite adventurous. Many sessions involved only him and an engineer, working out details of vocal passages. "As he worked on [*Here, My Dear*]," remembers his second wife Jan Gaye in her autobiography, "he banned the Motown suits from his studio. Aside from myself, his engineer Art Stewart, and a few select backup musicians, no one was allowed inside."⁷² Marvin Gaye worked in this facility, which is known today as "Marvin's Room," until sometime in 1979, when the government shuttered its doors. (He had serious financial problems, which were revealed publicly in a 1978 bankruptcy filing.) He eventually completed portions of *I Want You* (1976), all of *Here, My Dear* (1978), and the earliest sessions for *In Our Lifetime* (1981) in this space. Near the end of his time there, after recording most of *Love Man* (which would later be transformed into *In Our Lifetime*), Gaye revisited the Scott ballads for a swan song set of performances.

To prepare for this work, in June 1977 his most recent ballads masters were transferred from sixteen-track to twenty-four-track tape. This twenty-four-track reel collated nearly all of the ballad performances dating back to the original 1966 Scott sessions, with tape transfer groups mostly intact. Gaye did not get to these tapes for nearly two years. In June 1979, during what were probably the last sessions in his Los Angeles studio, he recorded several dozen vocal tracks on all seven of the unreleased Scott tapes, arrangements with which he had now been tinkering for more than a decade. This was a tumultuous time in his life. He had extensive tax liability and little means with which to pay his arrears; he was in the throes of a heavy cocaine addiction; and he had recently divorced his wife, Anna (sister of his record company chief Berry Gordy), and recorded a poorly received album about the breakup. It is easy to hear these ballad performances as an attempt to mitigate this instability. Through this lens, we witness Gaye squirreling away in his private studio and retreating from the complications of his current life by revisiting familiar arrangements, over which he had complete control. Ballads had become a form of refuge.

Gaye worked on vocals for the Scott arrangements in July and August 1979, mostly during a period of a little more than a week from late July to early August (see Table 2). Two songs, "Funny (Not Much)" and "This Will

71. The documentation of Gaye's studio work is scant during this period. Motown's tape library moved to the West Coast and many of the company's record-keeping systems changed. Moreover, Gaye himself did not keep good personnel records in his own recording space. Notes affixed to tape boxes and tracking sheets written by engineers like Art Stewart constitute the bulk of what is available as a means of dating these sessions: Motown Master Tapes (digital transfers and scans), Universal Music Enterprises Corporate Archive, New York.

72. Gaye with Ritz, *After the Dance*, 181.

Table 2 Gaye's vocal sessions for ballad tracks, July–August 1979

Date	July 25, 1979	July 29, 1979	July 30, 1979	July 31, 1979	August 2, 1979	August 30, 1979
Funny (Not Much)	X	X				
This Will Make You Laugh	X	X				
The Shadow of Your Smile	X					X
I Won't Cry Anymore	X			X		
She Needs Me			X			
I Wish I Didn't Love You So					X	
Why Did I Choose You	X		X			

Make You Laugh,” received minimal treatment. For “Funny,” he recorded a single vocal performance during two sessions.⁷³ This track highlights, in sound, the distance that Gaye had traveled, personally, professionally, and artistically, since recording with Bobby Scott in New York in 1966. Listening simultaneously to the 1966 and 1979 performances of the song invokes what Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut have called the “intermundane,” as recording technology makes it possible to hear a dialogic duet between a strapping young Gaye and his much older and weathered counterpart.⁷⁴ The newer tracks were recorded dry, while Gaye’s earlier vocals had reverb printed to tape, creating a sense of space that mapped directly onto the function of the performances. At the time of his earlier sessions, Gaye had hoped to become a star, while in 1979 he was simply fighting to keep his head above water. His musical choices reflect these periods in his career. In the 1960s Gaye performed with heavy vibrato, far away from the microphone at a high volume; but in the 1970s he sings very close to the microphone (in many cases noted as an AKG 414), and uses far less volume and vibrato in a much more controlled manner, creating a much stronger sense of intimacy. Even the squeak of his chair is occasionally audible on the vocals of the newer tracks. Listening to these performances in isolation provides a chilling perspective on the atmosphere at Marvin’s Room during the late 1970s.

Gaye recorded two vocal takes of “This Will Make You Laugh” during this period.⁷⁵ One is undated, and the other was created in two sessions on July 25 and 29. Experimenting with lyrics, rhythm, pitch, and phrasing, Gaye reinvents the vocal line in both of these takes: one assumes an agitated spirit of conflict, while the other is more assured and free, often moving in a linear manner that he may have intended to harmonize more fully at a later time with other vocal takes.

73. The various different published versions of “Funny (Not Much)” are shown in section E of the Appendix.

74. Stanyek and Piekut, “Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane.”

75. The various different published versions of “This Will Make You Laugh” are shown in section F of the Appendix.

Other work was more elaborate. Gaye completed half a dozen vocal takes on “I Wish I Didn’t Love You So” during this group of sessions.⁷⁶ Most were attempts at lead vocals, and quite different from one another. Several were improvisations based on Frank Loesser’s melody. One uses many of Loesser’s words, but varies the pitch content and phrasing; another combines the beginning of a 1973 performance with a newly recorded second verse. Other performances were less clearly developed, or perhaps intended as supportive vocals, moving in stepwise motion in a manner that suggested a framework for backing parts. Vocal punching—the insertion of a word or phrase into a recording, as illustrated in Figure 4—is audible on nearly all of these tracks.⁷⁷ (The vocal punches and blends shown in Figure 4 may be heard in Audio Example 12 in the online version of the *Journal*.) In some instances, Gaye changed short sections within a performance; in others, he composed his vocals one phrase at a time. He often constructed parts in this way, cutting and pasting between phrases during short silences or blending sounds to join together multiple performances in an imperceptible manner. With the use of modern digital technology, it is easy to see these cuts and blends through marked differences of volume in the visual representation of waveform amplitudes. These techniques reveal Gaye’s close collaboration with various Motown engineers, who were experts in various forms of audio trickery that allowed him to stitch together performances and create compositional ideas at the microphone.

We can imagine the manner in which Gaye may have filled out his vocal harmonies, since he did this for several of the Scott ballads during these 1979 sessions, on tracks like “I Won’t Cry Anymore,” “She Needs Me,” and “Why Did I Choose You.”⁷⁸ He added multiple-voice backing textures to all of these recordings (up to seven voices), performing “ooh”s and “ah”s, short supporting figures, and dense harmonies.⁷⁹ (An excerpt from a vocal composite for “She Needs Me” may be heard in Audio Example 13 in the

76. The various different published versions of “I Wish I Didn’t Love You So” are shown in section G of the Appendix.

77. In Figure 4, a waveform from a standard audio editor illustrates segmentation through amplitude changes; four portions have been shaded for illustrative purposes. Musical transcription of these phrases shows Gaye interpolating snippets of ideas that draw on different approaches to phrasing, rhythm, and melody. (The notated phrases are shaded in correspondence to their waveform pair.) Broken lines signify a hard punch, or an audible pop on the tape resulting from the process of insertion; the circular connection shows an instance of blending, where either Gaye performed the same note to try to avoid a noticeable gap, or postproduction editing used cross-fading to move from one performance to another.

78. The various different published versions of “She Needs Me” and “Why Did I Choose You” are shown in sections H and I of the Appendix.

79. Three of the vocal takes for “I Won’t Cry Anymore” came from March 1978, when Gaye was working on *Here, My Dear*. Several other tracks of “I Won’t Cry Anymore” are not datable, but were most likely created after *Let’s Get It On* and before the June 1977 transfer to twenty-four-track tape (though one can never be sure!).

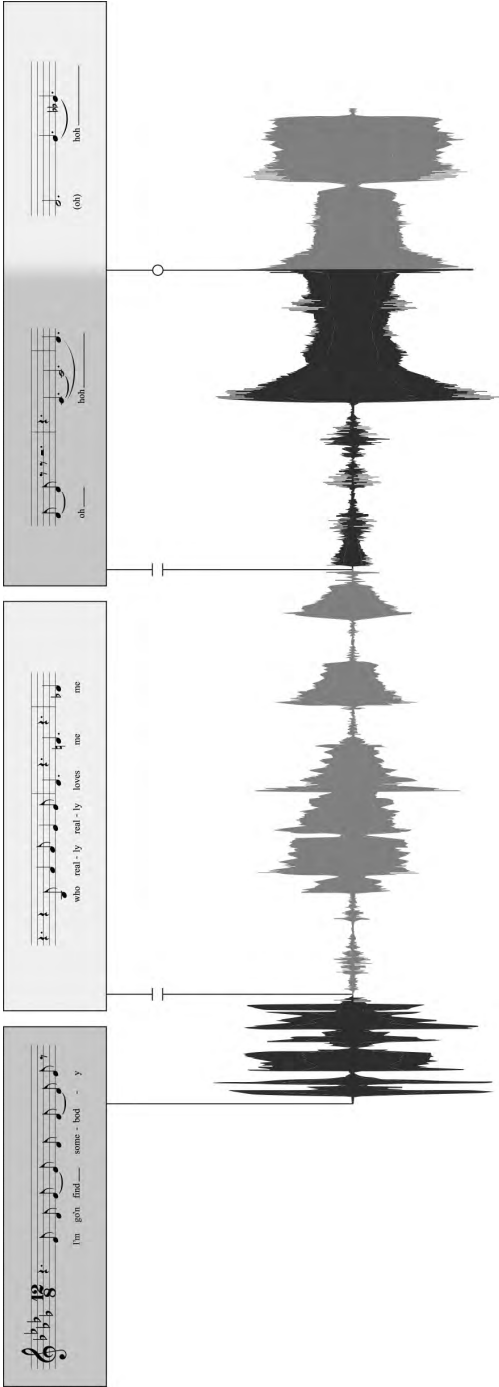


Figure 4 A visual representation of Marvin Gaye's vocal punches in a 1979 backing vocal performance of "I Wish I Didn't Love You So," reel P2307, Motown Master Tapes (digital transfers and scans), Universal Music Enterprises Corporate Archive, New York

online version of the **Journal**.) The voice type and range of these vocals is astounding. At one point in “She Needs Me” Gaye’s bass reaches down to C2 while his tenor hits C5, a full three octaves apart. These were clearly experiments: vocal punching, chair squeaks, and low-end bleed are audible. More importantly, Gaye did not complete the work, but only built upon selected sections within the song. He experimented with more extreme forms of vocal composition in work on “I Won’t Cry Anymore” and “The Shadow of Your Smile.” Over the sixteen-measure introduction for “I Won’t Cry Anymore,” for example, he wrote words to the melody performed by the pianist during the original 1966 sessions and added a double-tracked countermelody. “Why Did I Choose You” is the most complete of the 1979 set, employing a six-voice composite that increases in activity and intensity as it progresses.

The last documented work on the Scott ballads took place on August 30, 1979, during a session for “The Shadow of Your Smile.” Among the many interesting things about the vocal composite Gaye created for this song was the liberty he took with recomposition. At the start of the second verse, he completely abandoned the written melody, using many of the same lyrics with a jagged, improvised countermelody. “To hear him interpret ‘The Shadow of Your Smile’—altering, improving the already exquisite melody, honing harmonies in the stratosphere—is an emotional experience of gentle grandeur,” writes Gaye biographer David Ritz of these performances.⁸⁰ Apparently, Gaye played new versions of the Scott ballads for Motown executives late that summer, but the project never moved forward while Gaye was alive. Instead, “his Hidden Hills home and studio were shut down, while his family scrambled to save the furniture and recording equipment,” Ritz recalls. “Federal agents put everything else under lock and key. Gaye’s entire empire collapsed.”⁸¹

The Ballads Legacy

There was an industry scramble after Marvin Gaye’s death in April 1984. He had been enjoying a new wave of popularity after reviving his career with the hit single “Sexual Healing,” performing several sold-out tours and making notable national television appearances, including one in which he sang a thrilling version of the “Star-Spangled Banner” at the 1983 NBA All-Star Game in Los Angeles. His death became instant international news, and there was an immediate market for new material. The initial wave of releases following Gaye’s demise was the result of a complicated dance between two

80. Ritz, *Divided Soul*, 241.

81. *Ibid.*, 256, 263–71, here 264.

corporate entities: Motown, which was still independently owned by Berry Gordy, and CBS, the major label where the singer landed in the early 1980s.

The two companies had made a convoluted agreement about rights to previous and new material when Gaye moved from one to the other, which needed to be clarified before either could compile a posthumous release. Many of the tracks under consideration were inchoate ballads, and Gaye's processes created unforeseen complications. Bobby Scott had never received a Motown producer's contract, which made it difficult to use the tracks he had produced; many of the tapes were unfinished, which confounded executives at both companies and required the involvement of those who had worked with Gaye; and Gaye had composed and recorded components of the Scott tracks during periods of his career now controlled by different entities, something for which there was little precedent.

CBS eventually compiled two posthumous Marvin Gaye records in the years immediately following his death. The first, released in May 1985, was called *Dream of a Lifetime*. It contained a set of unfinished dance tracks from Gaye's Motown years in addition to four original ballad recordings from the early 1970s—"It's Madness," "Symphony," "Life's Opera," and "Dream of a Lifetime." In December of the same year, the company issued its second Gaye release, *Romantically Yours*, which was a compilation of tracks from the Sinatra and Scott projects together with a number of original ballads from the period around 1970. More than a decade later, in 1997 (when under different ownership and in a very different era), Motown released *Vulnerable*, a compilation that contained mixes created mostly from the 1979 Scott sessions. Despite all of these releases, public perception of Gaye as a balladeer is still scant. In a world of CD and digital releases, boxed sets, and "expanded editions," Gaye's ballads occupy a mostly unknown corner of his discographic world. In another example of what Mark Burford calls a "retreat from listening" in his work on Sam Cooke, most modern fans know Gaye solely for his soul material.⁸² His ballads have been forgotten.

Gaye's career as a balladeer raises a number of issues pertinent to studies of race and class in American popular music in the period after World War II. His work with standards helps to expose a tension concerning representation among black artists in the 1960s and 1970s, reminding us that music markets were open differently to these performers. While many historians consider the rise of soul music during 1967 and 1968 to have been a positive development in the history of the R&B market, the trajectory of Gaye's career shows how this type of identity could be limiting to black performers, forcing them to operate within the confines of race and class stereotypes. In light of important writings by Joan Rubin and others on the rise of middle-brow culture during the 1950s, it is also possible to view Gaye's work with

82. Burford, "Sam Cooke."

ballads as a form of middlebrow self-improvement.⁸³ Ballads allowed him to appear as if—despite his pop material—he was versed in serious, erudite, and adult musical forms. Detailed exploration of his career as a balladeer provides crucial evidence for his development as a composer and independent producer: the Scott ballads and other original songs in the ballad mold are the earliest examples of the techniques he used to create—and in some cases actually form the material included on—well-known records like *What's Going On* and *Let's Get It On*. Clearly indebted to his ballad experiments, his method of multitracking vocal performances to create composites became a hallmark of his 1970s style in records like *I Want You* and *Here, My Dear*.

Gaye's approach to romance changed between his first Motown sessions in early 1961 and his 1983 hit "Sexual Healing." But the spirit of one clearly led to the other, and the meandering course of Gaye's work during the intervening decades tells an important story about vast technological, performative, creative, and cultural changes in American popular music. In his early years, Gaye aligned himself with the work of crooners like Nat "King" Cole and Sam Cooke, pathbreaking artists who died in the mid-1960s, before the drastic changes that transformed the music business in the latter part of the decade. Gaye was younger; he approached standards differently and lived nearly twenty years longer than either of these singers. Through his work we are better able to understand the next generation of R&B crooners, who often negotiated the murky terrain between markets, experiencing their era's own set of tensions between race, class, and the popular music business.

83. Rubin, *Making of Middlebrow Culture*. Middlebrow studies has been an established field of inquiry in disciplines like history and literature for several decades, and musicology is finally starting to take notice. A multiday conference entitled "Music and the Middlebrow" organized by Christopher Chowrimootoo and Kate Guthrie in London in 2017 presented a critical mass of music scholars working on middlebrow topics.

Appendix Marvin Gaye ballads: versions, dates, and sources

Key:

~ = most likely

New York = exact studio unknown

Hitsville = Motown studio at 2641 West Grand Boulevard, Detroit

Golden World = Motown studio at 3246 West Davidson, Detroit

Mowest = Motown studio on Romaine Street in West Hollywood

Marvin's Room = Gaye's private studio at 6553 West Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles

A. Different published versions of "All the Way"

Vocal recording dates	Location	Released audio source
February 1 and 5, 1965	Hitsville	<i>Motown Unreleased 1965; Marvin Gaye</i>
January 29, 1967; February 3, 1967	Hitsville	<i>Motown Unreleased 1967</i>

B. Different published versions of "I Won't Cry Anymore"

Vocal recording dates	Location	Released audio source
(ca.) mid-1967	Hitsville	<i>Romantically Yours</i>
February 1, 1967	Hitsville	portions on <i>The Marvin Gaye Collection</i> ; <i>Vulnerable</i> (as alternate track)
February 21, 1973	Mowest	<i>The Marvin Gaye Collection</i>
July 25, 1979	Marvin's Room	<i>Vulnerable</i>

C. Different published versions of “The Shadow of Your Smile”

Vocal recording dates	Location	Released audio source
(ca.) mid-1967	Hitsville	<i>Motown Unreleased 1967</i>
~ January–February 1967; ~ July–December 1970	Golden World	<i>Romantically Yours</i>
January 26, 1973	~ Mowest	<i>Love Songs: Bedroom Ballads</i>
February 26, 1973	Mowest	<i>The Marvin Gaye Collection</i>
July 25, 1979	Marvin’s Room	<i>Vulnerable</i>

D. Different published versions of “God Is Love” and “Just to Keep You Satisfied”

Accompaniment recording	Title of song	Artist	Released audio source
February 13, 1968	Just to Keep You Satisfied God Is Love	Monitors Marvin Gaye	<i>Let’s Get It On (Deluxe Edition)</i> B-side to “What’s Going On” single; <i>What’s Going On (Deluxe Edition)</i>
June 1, 1970	Just to Keep You Satisfied	Originals	intended for single, withdrawn; <i>Let’s Get It On (Deluxe Edition)</i>
March 17, 1971	Just to Keep You Satisfied God Is Love	Marvin Gaye Marvin Gaye	album track on <i>Let’s Get It On</i> album track on <i>What’s Going On</i>

E. Different published versions of “Funny (Not Much)”

Vocal recording dates	Location	Released audio source
January 31, 1967; February 3, 1967	Hitsville	<i>Motown Unreleased 1967</i>
February 8, 1972	Mowest	<i>The Marvin Gaye Collection</i>
July 25, 1979; July 29, 1979	Marvin’s Room	<i>Vulnerable</i>

F. Different published versions of “This Will Make You Laugh”

Vocal recording dates	Location	Released audio source
January 31, 1967; February 3, 1967	Hitsville	<i>Motown Unreleased 1967</i>
February 12, 1973	~ Mowest	<i>The Marvin Gaye Collection</i>
July 25, 1979; July 29, 1979	Marvin’s Room	<i>Vulnerable</i>

G. Different published versions of “I Wish I Didn’t Love You So”

Vocal recording dates	Location	Released audio source
February 15, 1973; March 3, 1973; July 1979	multiple	<i>The Marvin Gaye Collection</i>
August 2, 1979	Marvin’s Room	<i>Vulnerable</i>
August 2, 1979	Marvin’s Room	<i>Vulnerable</i> (as alternate track)

H. Different published versions of “She Needs Me”

Vocal recording dates	Location	Released audio source
(ca.) mid-1967	Hitsville	<i>Motown Unreleased 1967</i>
July 30, 1979	Marvin’s Room	<i>Vulnerable</i>
various 1970s	multiple	<i>The Marvin Gaye Collection</i>

I. Different published versions of “Why Did I Choose You”

Vocal recording dates	Location	Released audio source
February 15, 1966	New York	<i>The Marvin Gaye Collection</i>
(ca.) mid-1967	Hitsville	<i>Romantically Yours</i>
~ February 3, 1967; ~ July 16, 1970	Hitsville	<i>Vulnerable</i> (as alternate track)
February 15, 1966; February 3, 1967; July 16, 1970	multiple	<i>The Marvin Gaye Collection</i>
July 25, 1979; July 30, 1979	Marvin’s Room	<i>Vulnerable; The Marvin Gaye Collection; The Master</i>

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Abstract

This article focuses on Marvin Gaye's involvement with music related to the "middle of the road" (MOR) market within the American music business between 1961 and 1979. From 1961 to 1966, in addition to his work as a teen idol, Gaye performed regularly in supper clubs, released four albums of standards material, and recorded dozens of other related songs that were eventually shelved. In a fascinating turn, he worked extensively on a series of unreleased tracks between 1967 and 1979, using experimental techniques to revise, reinterpret, and recompose melodies over already completed backing music. Gaye's interest in ballads connects to a different tradition of American music from his soul hits, drawing on the legacy of 1920s crooning, mainstream swing vocalists like Frank Sinatra, and African American forebears such as Nat "King" Cole and Sam Cooke. This article makes a number of new claims about Gaye's career trajectory: that his method of composing with his voice in the studio—building up complex textures from multiple takes and composing lyrics and melody directly to tape—began as early as 1967, well before his better-known experiments for *What's Going On* in 1970; that the popular, sexuality-charged music of his final decade was an extension of his work with romantic balladry in the 1960s; and that his interest in standards continued much farther into his career than is suggested by his official discography.

Keywords: Motown, Marvin Gaye, MOR, R&B, technology, race