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REVIEW

Music DVD Review: Various artists - *Don't Forget The Motorcity*

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One of the biggest ironies of the history of pop music is that during a time when African American Blues musicians were seeing their material being recorded by white performers without them receiving a penny in royalties, the one pop music label featuring Black performers had no interest in working with the Blues. Berry Gordy's Detroit-based [Motown Records](#) was so concerned with receiving mainstream, in other words white, acceptance for their music, that anything even bearing the slightest tint of Blue was deemed too risqué for mass production.

Berry Gordy Jr. was born in 1929 in Detroit, the child of an affluent middle class African America family. They owned commercial property in downtown Detroit, his father ran the Booker T. Washington grocery store, and his mother founded the Friendship Mutual Life Insurance Co. All in all not your typical African American family of the '30s and '40s.

Berry's first career was as a featherweight boxer, and it wasn't until after he had served two years in Korea with the American army from 1951-53 that he even entered into the music business as owner of a Jazz record store.

In spite of putting the store into bankruptcy due to his refusal to stock the Blues music his neighbours wanted, Berry took to song writing for Al Green in the late 1950s. He was determined to come up with a sound that wasn't going to be Blues based. He very rightly figured that mainstream America wouldn't stand for the rough and unpolished sound of the Blues or any of the images that went with it. Once Motown was up and running in the early 1960's he actually hired a woman who had run a finishing school to turn his talent into debutantes and gentlemen.



At its best the music of the Motown hit factory was slick, professional and infectious music that could pull you out of your seat and onto your feet. At its worst it was insipid dance music without any of the edge of Funk or the groove of Rhythm & Blues. Gordy operated Motown along the same lines as the rest of the assembly line businesses in Detroit with teams of songwriters creating specific songs for particular acts. From wall of sound girl groups like Martha Reeves & The Vandellas to the slick sounds of Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, under his guidance Motown lived up to the name he coined for it of "Hitsville USA," as it produced hit after hit through out the

music makes that perfectly obvious. Of the 30-odd songs on each disc of this collection I was hard pressed to find two or three that were worth listening too. Part of the problem was the lousy sound quality of some of the performances, while in other instances they are recordings made when the performers were years past their prime and out on low rent tours.

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Richard Marcus is a long-haired Canadian iconoclast who writes reviews and opines on the world as he sees it at [Leap In The Dark](#) and [Epic India Magazine](#).

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