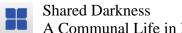
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A Communal Life in Film and DVD, Examined



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Mary Wells: Greatest Hits



This entry was posted on 3/15/2007 8:09 AM and is filed under DVD Reviews.



Generally credited as being one of the founders of the world famous "Motown Sound" that swept the nation in the 1960s, Mary Wells is considered not only one of the best female singers in the music industry, but also a vital part of the success of Berry Gordy's prestigious label. This DVD release, though definitely too brief and somewhat dashed off, celebrates her musical offerings.

Like many of that era, Wells came up quick, as a talented youngster. While still in her teens, Wells began working as a contract songwriter for Tamla Records, and in short order got her own performance contract. Health problems plagued Wells

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throughout her life (as a small child, she suffered a bout of spinal meningitis, which left her temporarily paralyzed, and with partial blindness in one eye), so it was somehow less shocking — but no less unfortunate, for music lovers and her loved ones — when Wells passed away in July of 1992, at the age of 49 years old.

Wells reached her greatest creative and commercial heights by working with Smokey Robinson as a producer. She penned and recorded "Bye Bye Baby" in 1961, and the tune became a big hit, marking the start of a very successful five-year run. Three major singles would follow the next year: "The One Who Really Loves You" which would chart at #8, "You Beat Me to the Punch," which would chart at #9, and "Two Lovers," which would hit #7. Tours of Europe and the American South and Northeast followed, turning Wells into a solo sensation, which was confirmed in 1964 with her own #1 hit, "My Guy."

Recorded live at the Rock 'n Roll Palace in Orlando, *Mary* Wells: Greatest Hits contains a collection of a half dozen of the singer-songwriter's tunes, along with four more bonus tracks from the up-tempo Contours and the Crystals, groups that were also part of Gordy's satellite of stars. The aforementioned quartet of 1961 songs kick things off, followed by "What's Easy for Two Is So Hard for One." Signature tune "My Guy," meanwhile, closes things out, with Wells' soulful performance coming across as at once intimate and forcefully grand (older American Idol fans can see a pinch of Wells in Melinda Doolittle). At 40-some minutes, and with no supplemental features, this DVD feels fairly threadbare. While remaining true to the title of the collection (these are her hits), it's a shame that there's no room for "Once Upon a Time," Wells' captivating duet with Marvin Gaye, or other of her offerings. **B- (Concert) D (Disc)**

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