



American Legends: The Life of Stevie Wonder

Charles River Editors

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“Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn't mean he lacks vision.” – Stevie Wonder

A lot of ink has been spilled covering the lives of history's most influential figures, but how much of the forest is lost for the trees? In Charles River Editors' American Legends series, readers can get caught up to speed on the lives of America's most important men and women in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known.

Among the most innovative and independent artists to come out of Motown in the latter half of the twentieth century, along with colleagues Marvin Gaye, Isaac Hayes, and Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder was said by many to possess three distinct obstacles to fulfillment in the music industry. First, he was poor, and worse, he was black and blind. Wonder, however, refused to shrink from or acknowledge any of these realities as barriers, asserting that he had not been in any way disadvantaged or limited in his path toward success.

Through a long and prodigious career at Motown, and a vast experience of collaborations with great musicians of the era, Stevie Wonder has gone on to prove that his optimistic view toward life and work was correct from the very beginning, in a lengthy and extraordinarily productive career. From childhood appearances and record releases to a non-stop regimen of over half a century, he has produced an almost unparalleled catalogue of hits, a long list of exceptional tunes written for fellow musicians, many working within Motown, and a touring legacy that has taken him to locations around the globe where no Motown artist has previously gone. Winning virtually every award and accolade that the music industry has to offer, his humanitarian efforts on behalf of particularly challenged groups in society have been vast in scope, and steadfastly loyal.

As an experimental musician, Wonder gained at least competence, and usually a high degree of fluency, on so many instruments at a young age that he could, in many cases, man the recording studio single-handedly. Further, he was one of the pioneers in the modern studio, incorporating the Moog and other early synthesizers, along with a vast array of additional modern electronic instruments and effects, into his daily studio regimen. Never satisfied with merely passable skills in taking on any part of the creative process, he studied classical piano at the Michigan School for the Blind to improve his keyboard “chops” in every genre that he touched, despite never intending to appear on stage with Beethoven Sonatas or Chopin Etudes, more usual goals for such studies. By taking on this added level of skill, he developed not only the expected requirement of “covering” the correct notes, but took on a sensitive palette of touches, pedaling, and a fine-tuned sense for texture and quasi-vocal lines on keyboard instruments. Likewise, he studied traditionally classical and twentieth century music theory at the University of Southern California, one of the nation's premier classical music schools, to expand his harmonic and rhythmic language in the composition process. As a result, Wonder possessed both the historical harmonic language of non-classical songwriting, and the advanced classical intricacies with which to create truly sophisticated, innovative examples, far beyond the normal keys, rhythms and harmonic progressions.

American Legends: The Life of Stevie Wonder looks at the life and career of one of America's most famous

musicians. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Stevie Wonder like never before, in no time at all.

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