Introduction

I have written this essay about the course of Motown’s life and death, to help inform the reader about what the impact of Motown had on culture and the world as a whole over the years. I will also write about what Motown evolved into, the musicality of Motown and what genres evolved and took inspiration from Motown.

Where did Motown originate?

Motown originated in a town in Detroit called Motor town on the 12TH of January 1959. This music business was created by Berry Gordy Jr with an $800 loan from his family to start a record label called Tamla records which would later make his net-worth 400 million. In 1988 Berry Gordy sold the label ‘Motown records’ for 61 million dollars to MCA. Motown was seen in Gordy’s perspective as just a business when he started it, but he would soon realise that he helped create one of the most important genres in musical history which effected the future of music and how Motown helped influence other genres like mainstream soul and RnB music. Motown’s musical routes originated from soul, gospel, vocal jazz and RnB. The first ever Motown band that originated were called ‘The Satintones’ which were formed in 1957, from this we clearly know that Motown has been around a while and originated just over 70 years ago and is still streamed to this day by millions of people across the globe.

The lifestyle of a Motown musician

The typical lifestyle of a Motown musician wasn’t that great at all because back in the 60s in America, races weren’t equal which led to a lot of racism for Motown musicians because this music comes from a black background, this also led to very poor pay for the musicians because they would get paid along as they kept writing songs every single day of their working lives. Being a Motown musician was a very competitive lifestyle to have because they were a huge number of musicians in Detroit that wanted to make it in the industry by writing hit songs and having the most gigs around, this was because back in the 60s everybody glorified ‘The American dream’. Which is known as “The idea that every citizen of the United States should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative.”. Personally, I would say that the Motown musician lifestyle is very dull and depressing this is because to me, it seems like all the musicians were living off the bare minimum and basically being a musical slave/robot for Berry Gordy who actually made millions in the end. When researching the lifestyle of musicians, I came across this quote; “Gordy conceived of a record company that worked like an assembly line – a factory of talent that housed under one roof writers, producers, musicians, quality control, artist development, sales and marketing”. I think that this is a good backup to the point I made about the musicians having poor quality lives because it states that they all worked in an assembly line, which is not a good job to have at all.

Motown’s hit songs

During the peak times of Motown in the 1960s many hit songs were created and Motown is still a very popular genre to listen to today because all the hits are timeless classics. Some of Motown’s main stars are, The Jackson five which featured Michael Jackson as a child and his five brothers, Marvin Gaye, Rick James, Barrett Strong, The contours, The Isley brothers, Smokey Robinson & the miracles, Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross and hundreds more. About 90 percent of these songs were created under Gordy’s label and were made in under a few hours which is crazy to even think about how hard all of these musicians worked because it takes the average musician in 2024 weeks or months to make a song from start to finish and record it. When researching Motown’s history of hits I found these quotes from Berry Gordy - “The ‘Hitsville’ sign over the door let it be known that if you want to set foot inside you were expected to sing, dance, write, produce sell or manage” – Berry Gordy “I wanted songs for the whites, blacks, the Jews, gentiles… I wanted everybody to enjoy music” – Berry Gordy. These quotes from Gordy clearly tell us that he meant business and wanted his music to be made for absolutely everybody which is actually a very kind thing to think because equality was not a very big thing in the 60s.

Musical analysis

In the Hitsville ‘factory’ The songs were usually made that fast that they all had some musical similarities between them such as, a syncopated kick drum with a tambourine, plenty of gospel singers and the bass guitar always made basslines using a Motown triangle shape on the bass, this is because it is always catchy yet simple and effective. And because of the technology and equipment being used at the time all the songs sound quality wasn’t that great compared to the present-day technology that we have now, so this might have led the EQ of the song to not be as spread out and as crisp as todays.

The impact Motown created to the world.

I believe that Motown created a very positive impact to the world because most of the songs were happy or about love, this means that when these happy/positive songs are played,

It spreads the vibe around to the listeners and puts them in a better mood. I also believe that this led to help equality overtime because of Motown’s black background and history, this is because the music always made sure to spread a good message. There is also proof that this helped out equality because Kiki Dee which was the first white was signed to label in 1970. she was also from Bradford where I currently go to college. This is proof that equality bettered over the years because the different races collaborated together with no problems and created positive music together to help the worlds culture grow, mature and expand.

What killed Motown?

Just like every music genre at some point in its time Motown died off in the early 70s, this is because Dance and Disco music were on the rise in the music industry and eventually all genres of music have a downfall due to being overused, trends changing and fashion developing. In 1972 Berry Gordy shut down Motown records so Motown slowly faded out of Detroit, and this killed Motown off the most because that is the origin place for the genre and also where 90 percent of the music was made.

Conclusion

Overall, I think that Motown is a fantastic genre of music with a great history and background which has definitely impacted the world in a positive way.

References

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