

A Detroit Dozen - Essential Songs Everyone Should Know From Detroit Artists

by Marsha Music

Detroit is one of the music cities of the modern world; it was almost impossible to name just a dozen - but I tried. Here's my essential song list.

Boom Boom – John Lee Hooker

The southern migration of Blacks to Detroit made for a raw, urban Blues - distilled into its essence on this archetypal Hooker – who hung out at my father's Hastings Street record shop back in the day.

Baby I need Your Loving- The Four Tops

This lush masterpiece is quintessential Motown – skin tight drums, urgent bass, orchestral strings, and finger pops – with the Tops' fanfare and Levi Stubbs' operatic baritone driving it all to a crescendo of love, longing and Detroit soul.

Cool Jerk – The Capitols

This seminal, razzed up bass and piano was a throwback to the old-time boogie-woogie – the remix, we'd say today. Though it's the Funk Brothers playing, this is one of the many Detroit hits produced outside of the official Motown company's orbit – and an classic dance record.

My Girl – The Temptations

This opulent, musical poesy – written by Smokey Robinson and Ron White of one of Motown's other male groups, the Miracles - is matched by the artistry of the choreography. The Temps, with their molasses sweet cool, were the dark princes of Motown, exemplars of Detroit's men of the sixties - and beyond.

Fingertips Part II – Stevie Wonder

Stevie Wonder is so prolific, so influential, his hits and sound spanning genres and generations, that I'll just go back to the beginning. The "14-Year Old Boy Wonder," blind and shockingly gifted, wowed us as we watched him careen and wobble across Detroit stages – and sing and play every instrument in the band. This joyful record captures the exuberant performances that marked his start.

Be My Girl – The Dramatics

These sons of the city exemplified a post-sixties Detroit zeitgeist - of factories, paychecks and working-class Black pride - melodic, soulful songs of proletarian love.

Mary Don't You Weep – Aretha Franklin

My father was the first to record Aretha at 14, in her father's choir (Joe Von Battle recorded all of Rev. C.L. Franklin's sermons and songs). Later, her secular hits – like Chain of Fools - meshed gospel roots with anthemic calls for R.E.S.P.E.C.T. But on this

song from the album *Amazing Grace*, Aretha's reverent, spectral evangelism is pure holy-ghost spirit on disc.

Mitch Ryder – Devil In A Blue Dress

White Detroit artists – like the MC5, Cub Koda, the Rationals, Bob Seeger - voiced their interpretations of Detroit rock and soul – and for me, Mitch Ryder was king of them all. His signature anthem – the cover of an old Motown song – was flat-out gospel-fueled Detroit Rock & Roll.

The Supremes – Stop in the Name of Love/Martha and the Vandellas – Dancing in the Street

Yes, I'm cheating – there's no choosing between these Queens of Motown. The Supremes *Stop in the Name of Love*, with its iconic, palm-raised choreography, had **Diana Ross** as a full-blown diva even then, ushering in a Detroit style that became international. *Dancing in the Streets*, with its exuberant opening fanfare, is Martha and the Vandellas at their exhilarating best. **Martha Reeves** resides here still, representing our music in Detroit and 'round the world.

Heard it through the Grapevine - Marvin Gaye

Marvin Gaye's seminal, protest anthem, *What's Going On?* is regarded by many as Gaye's best work. But *Grapevine*, his earlier masterpiece – with its undertow of Othello-esque suspicion, paranoia and gossip-fueled jealousy - is a bridge between his early hip, rollicking Motown dance ballads, and the seething social commentary of his latter days.

Lose Yourself – Eminem

From the suburban side of Detroit's 8 Mile - the road after which his breakthrough movie was named - Eminem was knighted to personify the ascendancy of the hip-hop that had been broiling in the city for years. The song hit a glorious apex when performed for an automotive ad - as a bravura Detroit anthem - by the gospel choir, *Selected of God*.

Fall in Love – J Dilla, from the CD, Timeless

The late J Dilla, of Detroit's near-east side, was from the post-Motown generation of Detroit musical genius. I love his *Fall In Love* – the version adapted for orchestra and conducted by Miguel Atwood Ferguson for the Los Angeles Concert, *Timeless*. Reminiscent of Motown's strings, it is an affirmation of Dilla's gift as a composer - and the musicality of Hip Hop.

Detroit has a colossal musical legacy - Little Willie John, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Anita Baker, the Spinners, Little Carl Carlton, Enchantment, The Winans; I could have named many more. They too, with those I chose above, sang essential songs of my life, and I hope that some of them are – or will be - essential in yours, too.