

The Temptations'

Otis Williams Talks Michael Jackson, Smokey Robinson & Berry Gordy

Interview Allison Kugel

Since signing with Motown Records in 1961, the Temptations have gone through many incarnations in their fifty+ years making music. From fledgling singers to international hitmakers, The Temptations' are food for the soul. With nine Grammy nominations, four Grammy wins, and a 2013 Recording Academy Lifetime Achievement Award, the Tempts bring magic to a worldwide audience. Their new album, *All The Time*, is a soulful, blend that The Temptations are celebrated for and covers Sam Smith's "Stay With Me," The Weeknd's "Earned It," Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud" and new songs include "Waitin' On You," "Be My Wife," and "Move Them Britches." I spoke with Temptations' founder and last original member, Otis Williams, to discuss the group's first studio album in eight years, their tour throughout the U.S. and UK and his relationships with fellow Motown alumni including Michael Jackson, Berry Gordy and Smokey Robinson. Williams is humbled by his five-decade success in the music industry, but not unaware of the impact he and band mates have on the music, industry and popular culture.

Allison: What shaped your destiny?

Otis: I was raised by my two grandmothers, mother and father's side. They instilled qualities I carry today. My mother moved us to Detroit from Texarkana and I was in Detroit when Berry [Gordy] started Motown. Aligned with great guys like David, Eddie, and Paul, Melvin, I didn't know we would reach such heights and enjoy this wonderful adventure.

Allison: Why the eight-year break from recording?

Otis: With Motown's demise, we continued to sing and did a few albums, but nothing of real note. At one point I said to myself, "Maybe we should just perform." We were one of the hardest working acts in the business. I went to Universal and I spoke with Bruce Resnikoff (CEO of Universal Music Enterprises) and he asked, "Otis, would you

record?" I said, "Yes, we would love to record!" I have to say that Mr. Resnikoff was the catalyst for the Temptations going back into the studio to record.

Allison: In your new album you cover Sam Smith, Ed Sheeran, Michael Jackson, The Weeknd...

Otis: I love those guys. I heard the songs when our producer Dave Darling and I were given the list and told, "Otis, pick what you want to record." I'm a big Michael Jackson fan. When he was doing the video for, *Remember The Time*, we sat in his trailer and talked in between them getting him ready to do the video. It was memories of him and the song.

Allison: Other Motown artists you're close with?

Otis: I talk with Smokey [Robinson]; he'll always be my wonderful friend. I don't see Stevie [Wonder] much, but we are family. Berry was profound in his dedication what Motown artists should be. At the same, he was funny as hell and like a little kid. I see Berry more than I see Smokey. Berry is a great person.

Allison: The lineup has changed over the years what do you look for in a potential Temptation to join the group?

Otis: I look for the head and heart first. You can have all the talent in the world, but if you are not a nice person or can't take direction, then you negate that talent. You never know a person until you start working with them, and it causes certain changes to happen. I'm an example of that. I've been around some of the most talented people in the world and I'm the last man standing.



Allison: What is your spiritual foundation in life?

Otis: Being raised by my grandparents, spirituality is one I try to carry forth, and I thank God for the blessings, because show business is such a fickle business. You can be thought of as one way today and then tomorrow it's, "Who's that person?" I never lose sight of what's real and I try to remain in touch with my spirituality. Hopefully people can feel that whenever I'm around them.

Allison: What do you hope fans take away from this new album, *All The Time*?

Otis: I think people will say, "Wow, the Tempts did The Weeknd's song, Ed Sheeran..." and all of that, but it will be in keeping with what we have been known for throughout our history. Whether it's cover songs or the originals we always want to put forth our best effort as far as being entertainers and singers. ■

Photo: Jay Gilbert/Universal Music Enterprises
For more Temptations visit AllisonKugel.com. Allison is a syndicated pop culture journalist and author of, *Journaling Fame: A memoir of a life unhinged and on the record.*

around town

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