



Stevie Wonder

Composer of the Week




Stevie Wonder
(b. 1950)





Born May 13th,
1950 in Saginaw,
Michigan



Stevie Wonder, is an American singer-songwriter and musician. He sings in a range of different styles and his use of **synthesizers** , and other electronic musical instruments, reshaped **R&B** music.

R&B – rhythm and blues music combines lots of musical styles with very distinct drum rhythms and smooth, lush vocal lines.



This is an early MOOG synthesizer. Stevie Wonder was one of the first people to use it and make it popular. The synthesiser was able to produce sounds electronically that had never been heard before.

After starting out by singing in church, Stevie Wonder became a child prodigy and was signed to **Motown Records** at the age of 11. He was known as Little Stevie Wonder.



Do you remember another child prodigy?



**Wolfgang
Amadeus
Mozart**

He holds the record for the youngest person to have a No.1 single in the US. When he was only 13, Little Stevie Wonder had a No.1 single with his song **Fingertips**. It shows us that Stevie was a talented harmonica and bongo player.



Stevie worked hard and studied classical piano and musicianship so he could become a better composer.

Some artists who achieve fame as children find it difficult when they get older, but Stevie managed this well and was able to re-negotiate his **Motown** contract on much more favourable terms, giving him almost total control over his records.



Motown Records is an American record label founded in Detroit in 1960. It's name is a combination of the words *motor* and *town* – Detroit is famous for producing motor cars.

Motown was owned by African-Americans and played an important role making African-American composers and performers accepted in the US and all over the world.



In the 1970's Stevie began writing albums with a more social and political content, and instead of a collection of songs, the compositions were designed to follow on from each other with a distinct theme.

Stevie was also one of the first musicians to use **overdubbing** – this means he would record himself singing different parts then play them together so it sounded as if he was singing with himself. His use of the **synthesizer** meant that he could record most of the accompaniments himself too. He was also one of the first people to **sample** (record) real, everyday sounds and use them in his songs. Listen to the traffic in **Living For the City.**



As part of the album **Songs in the Key of Life** he composed **Isn't She Lovely** when his first daughter, Aisha, was born.

Stevie Wonder performed the song live for Queen Elizabeth II (with changed lyrics) at her Diamond Jubilee Concert in 2012.



Stevie Wonder was one of the people who campaigned successfully to have **Dr Martin Luther King's** birthday made a public holiday. He wrote the song **Happy Birthday** to spread the word.

Stevie has been blind, almost since birth, and he has campaigned tirelessly for the rights of disabled people. He especially wanted blind and partially sighted people to have more access to books.

He was named a United Nations Messenger of Peace in 2009.



In 1982 Stevie collaborated with **Paul McCartney** on the song **Ebony and Ivory** which became a No.1 chart hit in both the UK and US.

The song, written by McCartney, tells of the black and white piano keys living and working together just like different races should.

Do you remember
the group Paul
McCartney sang
with?



The Beatles

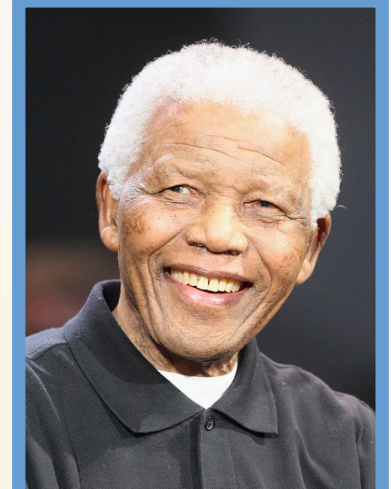
In 1984, Wonder wrote the music for a film called *The Woman in Red*.

The song, **I Just Called to Say I Love You** became a massive No. 1 pop single.

In fact, it became Motown's biggest international hit of all time, topping the charts in 19 different countries. The single also won Stevie an Academy Award for best original song.



Stevie dedicated his Oscar to **Nelson Mandela**, who, at that time, was in prison for his fight against apartheid.



In October 1975 he performed in a historic concert in Kingston Jamaica. The **Wonder Dream Concert** was held in aid of the Jamaican Institute for the Blind and Stevie was joined by a famous Jamaican performer.

Can you guess who?



Bob Marley

Stevie Wonder has won 25 Grammy Awards.

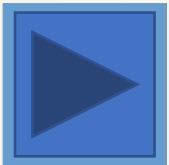
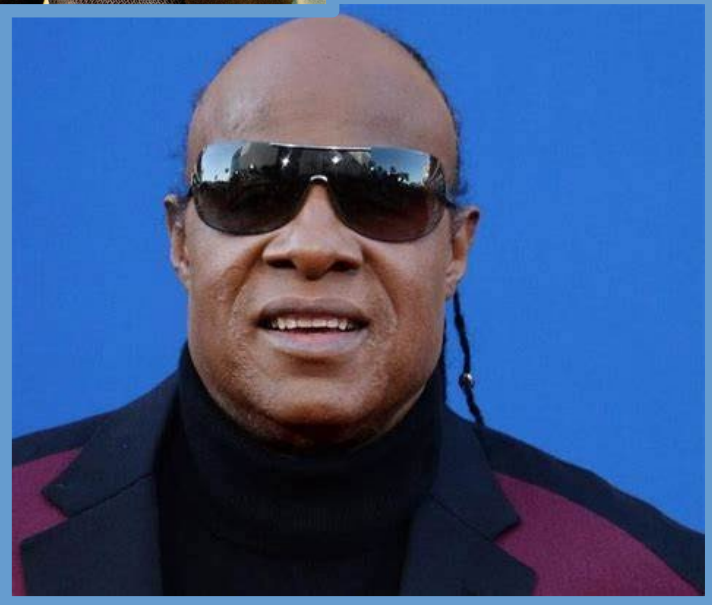
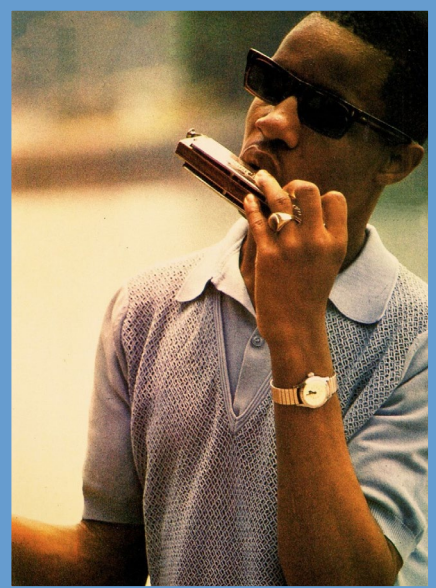
He is one of only two artists who have won the Grammy for Album of the Year three times – the other being Frank Sinatra.

However, he is the only artists to have won the award with three consecutive album releases.



Stevie Wonder has influenced many of the 20th and 21st Century's leading artists from Michael Jackson and Elton John to John Legend and Ariana Grande.

Elton John has said: ***When people in decades and centuries to come talk about the history of music, they will talk about Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder... he [Wonder] evolved into an amazing songwriter and a genuine musical force of nature.***





We all have hearts... If you have a heart, love somebody. If you have enough heart, love everybody.

(Stevie Wonder)

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