



# Rhythm Ride: A Road Trip Through the Motown Sound

*Andrea Davis Pinkney*

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## **Rhythm Ride: A Road Trip Through the Motown Sound** Andrea Davis Pinkney

From award-winning author Andrea Davis Pinkney comes the story of the music that defined a generation and a movement that changed the world.

Berry Gordy began Motown in 1959 with an \$800 loan from his family. He converted the garage of a residential house into a studio and recruited teenagers from the neighborhood-like Smokey Robinson, Mary Wells, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and Diana Ross-to sing for his new label. Meanwhile, the country was on the brink of a cultural revolution, and one of the most powerful agents of change in the following decade would be this group of young black performers from urban Detroit. From Berry Gordy and his remarkable vision to the Civil Rights movement, from the behind-the-scenes musicians, choreographers, and song writers to the most famous recording artists of the century, Andrea Davis Pinkney takes readers on a Rhythm Ride through the story of Motown.

## **Rhythm Ride: A Road Trip Through the Motown Sound Details**

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Author : Andrea Davis Pinkney

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# **From Reader Review Rhythm Ride: A Road Trip Through the Motown Sound for online ebook**

## **Monica Edinger says**

Loved the Groove, loved the ride, loved the clear and focused writing, loved the respectful way the Groove recognized that today's young readers might need context here and there, loved that it is about Motown and NOT its influence on other music (something one reviewer complained about)...basically just loved it.

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## **Sara says**

Definitely made me want to listen to a lot of Motown music. I read this at the same time as *The Song Machine: Inside the Hit Factory*, and it was interesting to compare Motown as a "factory" to the modern hit factory, and the amount of control exerted over the music. Obviously as a children's book this didn't go too deeply into the darker side of that control - it presented Berry Gordy's control over Motown artists' work and lives in a pretty positive light.

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## **Jo Oehrlein says**

Late elementary or middle school book about Berry Gordy and Motown records. It's picture book format, but too thick to really be a picture book.

Great to go with a study of the 1960s or Civil Rights. Would also pair well with a trip to see the musical *Motown*.

Illustrated with photos and the captions to the photos provide information, also. Love the page numbers styled as records.

Told directly to the reader, breaking the 4th wall about once per chapter.

It doesn't gloss over the problems, but does minimize some of the conflict near the end.

Everything will make more sense if you can hear some of the songs, so the best way to read the book would be after listening to Motown music.

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## **paula says**

I read *Rhythm Ride* while my husband was reading *Once in a Great City* by David Maraniss. Both books covered Berry Gordy and the unique factors that made Detroit ground zero for hit after hit after hit throughout the 60's and 70's. But Andrea's book reads like your cool auntie telling you a story, and Bob didn't finish the Maraniss book. So there.

## **Sharon says**

I thoroughly enjoyed and savored, Andrea Davis Pinkney's *Rhythm Ride: A Road Trip Through the Motown Sound*. What a pleasurable journey down Memory Lane this book provided for me! I remember listening to all that wonderful music on WHBC am radio during my childhood. Dancing along with the Jackson 5 and so many other talented Motown artists, whenever they appeared on TV. This book provided such a fun and accessible introduction to Motown for my daughter. We loved looking at the photos - the clothing, the hairstyles - it was a glimpse into an era of class and style that I fear will not pass our way again.

I loved the voice of "The Groove" - how "The Groove" was at the beginning of Motown's story and still goes on in the music of today. "The Groove" is a historian, who doesn't make light of the serious issues that existed during this time, but presents these challenges as a part of Motown's story and weaves tragic events into the fabric of Motown. Music ties all races together, providing a soundtrack of joy, celebration, protest and conscience to humanity.

Berry Gordy had a unique vision for Motown and he created a family and a musical legacy, by the sheer force of his determination and his ability to spot the talent & gifts of these young artists. As with many enterprises - jealousy, greed, ego come into the mix, but the foundation of Motown, created from investments from Berry Gordy's immediate family, was a force that changed perceptions in the United States and echoed around the world.

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## **Richie Partington says**

Richie's Picks: *RHYTHM RIDE: A ROAD TRIP THROUGH THE MOTOWN SOUND* by Andrea Davis Pinkney, Roaring Brook, September 2015, 176p., ISBN: 978-1-59643-973-3

"Smiles have all turned to tears  
But tears won't wash away the fears  
That you're never ever gonna return  
To ease the fire that within me burns  
It keeps me crying baby for you  
Keeps me sighin' baby for you  
So won't you hurry  
Come on boy, see about me"  
--Holland-Dozier-Holland (1964)

"R&B was a soulful sound that put its arms around listeners and rocked them, sometimes gently, other times with a sure sway. It was popular in cities across America. But like many aspects of life in the United States, R&B wasn't free to roam where it pleased. This was a time in America when segregation laws prevented black students and white students from attending the same public schools. When drinking fountains and restaurants wore signs that said 'Colored' and 'Whites Only.' When movie theaters and hotels didn't let

black customers past the front door.

The same was true for R&B. Prejudice tried to keep it out. Hold it back. Limit its soul-rousing power.

Rhythm and blues was called 'race music'--songs meant only for black singers and black listeners.

As R&B's popularity started to spread, it was kids who first realized that the concept behind race music made no sense. Rhythm doesn't have a color--it just has a beat. And the blues, well, everybody gets the blues."

If you lived through the sixties and know most of the songs mentioned in this book, you might want be careful. After reading RHYTHM RIDE right before bedtime, I was awakened in the middle of the night by Supremes and Jackson 5 songs running through my dreams.

On the other hand, if you're a young person who can't readily cue up a Miracles, Temptations, Four Tops, or Martha and the Vandellas tune in your head, you're not going to get the full effect of this outstanding musical and cultural history unless you have the soundtrack. Here's a Motown playlist I just put together for you:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list...>

It's a blast to peer behind the scenes of 1960s Motown. Secretaries turn into pop stars. In Friday morning meetings, writers pitch their latest compositions and everyone votes for their favorite new tune, which is then recorded and released. There are the unsung heroes of the Motown family: Maxine Powell, known in-house as "Miss Manners," who teaches the young performers elegance and etiquette; Cholly Atkins, who runs the choreography program; The Funk Brothers, musicians who play on virtually all of Motown's recordings; and, of course, the composers of these unforgettable songs.

In the years that Motown was gaining steam, Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed, Dr. King shared his dream, Medgar Evers was assassinated, and the march from Selma to Montgomery took place. During those tumultuous times, Motown founder Berry Gordy had a significant impact on American race relations by building an assembly line for creating R&B hits that crossed over to young white audiences.

It didn't matter what neighborhood you lived in. The soundtrack for the lives of millions of young Baby Boomers was dominated by Motown and The Beatles. Motown connected white suburban kids to the culture of the people who were still not permitted to buy houses in white suburban neighborhoods. Dancing and swaying to Motown songs was a pleasure that crossed racial and cultural lines, one that people across America could enjoy together.

"...[T]hat's the Motown legacy. Born at a time of so much struggle, so much strife, it taught us that what unites us will always be stronger than what divides us."

--President Barack Obama

What a fine ride it is, cruising through this chronicle of Motown and the America in which it took place. Tune in and turn up the volume on Andrea Davis Pinkney's well-written and extremely-fun history of Motown.

Richie Partington, MLIS

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## **Morgan says**

Really fascinating look at the behind-the-scenes of Motown--its rise, fall, and the eventual sale of the company. I was familiar with almost all the artists and most of the songs (thanks, Mom), but had no idea about the backstories for many of the artists--Marvin Gaye had to fight Berry Gordy to get "What's Goin' On" (song and album) released; Martha Reeves was a Motown secretary before getting her big break when Mary Wells missed her studio appointment; Stevie Wonder's name is Steveland Morris; because of Wonder's mother's overbearing demands, Gordy was reluctant to sign the Jackson 5 and deal with more child-labor laws; and more.

The book is narrated by an omniscient narrator who speaks directly to the reader, who takes us on a tour of Detroit and ends in Hollywood, where Gordy continued to spread his empire. The Detroit riots, murders of RFK and MLK, upheaval of Vietnam and Civil Rights, and other historical moments are highlighted along the way. Ultimately, though, this is a celebration of the joy and magic that was Motown. I found myself bobbing my head as I heard the songs in my head, and smiled as yet another familiar musician was introduced. It would have been easy to focus on the major acts--Diana and the Supremes, the Temptations, the Jackson 5--but credit is given to behind-the-scenes figures who wrote the songs, dressed the performers, taught them to dance, taught them poise and stage presence, managed their money (for the younger performers, the money was in a trust), and the acts that have often been overshadowed but laid the foundation for the bigger acts to come. This is undoubtedly a sanitized version of the story, but again, the emphasis is on the celebration and joy of this Black-owned label and pride this label instilled in listeners. There are some slight critiques of Gordy's reluctance to be politically involved (hence his initial refusal to let Gaye record "What's Goin' On"), but overall, he oversaw a highly successful business that provided an outlet for musicians and performers who would not otherwise have been given opportunities.

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## **Kris - My Novelesque Life says**

RHYTHM RIDE: A Road Trip Through Motown Sound

Written by Andrea Davis Pinkney

2015; 176 Pages (Roaring Books Press)

(I received an ARC from the NETGALLEY)

Rating: 4 Stars

(Review Not on Blog)

"Berry Gordy began Motown in 1959 with an \$800 loan from his family. He converted the garage of a residential house into a studio and recruited teenagers from the neighborhood-like Smokey Robinson, Mary Wells, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and Diana Ross-to sing for his new label. Meanwhile, the country was on the brink of a cultural revolution, and one of the most powerful agents of change in the following decade would be this group of young black performers from urban Detroit. From Berry Gordy and his remarkable vision to the Civil Rights movement, from the behind-the-scenes musicians, choreographers, and song writers to the most famous recording artists of the century, Andrea Davis Pinkney takes readers on a Rhythm Ride through the story of Motown." (From Publisher)

What a great day to read this (Women's March) as I really got into the era and music. I am a big fan of 1960s Motown so this was right up my alley. It is a book for children, but I still think it is a great book for any ages

- a good beginner's book. I enjoyed Pinkney's writing and the way she transforms you in the time and place where Motown began.

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### **Lynn says**

I loved this book. The writing was fun and clearly structured for young readers who may not know anything about this subject. Wonderful design and photographs! The only thing I wished for was a sound track, although there certainly was one running through my head ;-)

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### **Molly Dettmann says**

1. Snazzy cover
  2. Interesting and thorough history of Motown Records and Berry Gordy
  3. I could hear all the music mentioned in my mind as I was reading this. It made for a very fun read! For kids who might not listen to their local oldies station, it might be cool to have them listen to some songs on YouTube at least, before and after reading this book. I can see this being kind of boring if you'd never heard any of the music before.
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### **Ettore Pasquini says**

I really liked that this quick history of Motown begins by describing the founder, Berry Gordy. He started out as a boxing fighter (!) and most importantly as a humble worker at Ford, where he learned how the assembly line works. He then implemented the assembly line idea into Motown. Motown worked with a group of song writers, a core of "backup" musicians, and finally the stars / lead singers. Everyone was interchangeable, allowing Motown to steadily put out a ton of (great) music.

Quality was the most important thing. Songs needed to be so good that people would prefer spending their lunch money on the record rather than on food. (Which reminds me Marc Andreessen's — actually, Steve Martin's — “Be so good they can’t ignore you.”) They had reoccurring Friday meetings to decide if a song was awesome enough.

They weren’t immune of errors though. One of the songs that was initially rejected was What's Going On by Marvin Gaye... a song that Gordy reputed way too political. Only after pressure from other executives and Marvin Gaye himself was the song (and the following album) published — and then it became their best seller of all times.

Another good thing about this book is that it provides some (well, just a little bit of) context of the times. The civil rights movement, the racial tensions, the riots... good photos too. There’s an aerial photo during the 1967 riots where Detroit looks like a war-zone.

I think things started to slowly change when Gordy moved the HQ from the original house on West Grand to downtown Detroit in 1968, and then to LA in 1972. Up until that point Motown was deeply connected to the neighborhood, with kids hanging around for a job or an audition at Hitsville USA. How cool was that! Many stars started like that: Aretha Franklin, Martha Reeves, Stevie Wonder, Mary Wells...

I snubbed R&B for the longest time, I admit it. The sugar coating on top of these songs came off to me as insincere, and just turned me off. I was so wrong. The kids behind the Motown "school" (which btw included manners and choreography, beside the music) were taken from the streets just like the punk bands I grew up with: like them, they put a ton of passion into it and had a close network of other musicians to look up to. Differently from the punk-rockers, these guys also had somebody who looked after them. It's this close-knit circuit (local roots, peers, talent, education, label) that allowed all the amazing stuff to happen.

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### **Mary Sanchez says**

The attractive book cover caught my eye as I was browsing the children's book display and I had to check it out and find out about Motown.

I was a Hispanic teenager during the 1960s and had no idea how hard Barry Gordon worked to make his dream come true, but I knew I liked Motown music and so did the other teenagers, from various cultures, I knew.

What fun it was to turn up the radio dial once again and to relive those by-gone days, with the bonus of background information this time around to complete the Motown picture for me. Who knew Barry Gordon was a professional boxer at one time or that Marvin Gaye had problems performing because he got so nervous? I especially enjoyed learning about the finishing school Motown provided for its performers, taught by Maxine Powell; and the stories of how various songs came about.

The photographs, author's note, timeline of Motown, source notes about the chapters, and the hit parade of music through the years add reference material to the story. A book I will take for a spin again and again!

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### **Diana says**

Very enjoyable! This unique biography/musical history tells the popular story of the rise of Motown while also capturing the social tensions of the time. Like the music of Motown, the story of the label, the artists, and its creator - Berry Gordy - is very compelling and enjoyable. It's a story that's interested people for years, but Pinkney's telling is something a little different. She writes the journey of music or "the groove" through the decades from the first person perspective of the groove and a young passenger who she has taken along for the ride.

I wasn't sure what to expect from this book, and I honestly kind of drug my feet on reading it, but it turned out to be a nice, quick read. I love how much of the music, fashion, and culture was so easily provided in the book. As soon as I finished the book, I jumped onto Spotify to listen to the songs cataloged in the back matter which was pretty awesome. The story feels topical and interesting and the music is amazing so this one is a win/win.

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### **Stewart says**

Great information, unfortunately presented in a condescending/folksy voice that quickly grows tiresome and irritating.



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## **Liza says**

I can't wait to hear Andrea Davis Pinkney speak to the kids at my school this fall! The book brought me through memory lane, as I remembered the many songs that were such major parts of my life. The tone and story telling of the book were great. I loved how she was able to weave the history of the times with the stories of the music and the stories of the many members of Motown. Great fun to read.....although, my heart is also breaking that we still have so far to go with our Race relations. I continue to pray that music can bring us together and through this dark rain cloud we are in right now.

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