



## The Story of The Supremes from the Mary Wilson Collection

13 May – 19 October 2008

The performance costumes of *The Supremes*, one of the most successful groups of all time, will be on display at the V&A this summer. On show will be over 50 outfits that chart the changing image of the group from their dresses in the early days when they were known as *The Primettes* to the glamorous Hollywood designs they wore at the height of their fame. Set against the backdrop of the meteoric rise of Motown Records, and the turbulence of the American civil rights movement, the display will explore the inspirational role *The Supremes* played in changing racial perceptions and their influence on today's performers.

*The Supremes* recorded 12 US No.1 hits between 1964 and 1969, including an unprecedented five consecutive chart toppers. The display will include costumes worn by the original Supremes – Mary Wilson, Diana Ross and Florence Ballard, as well as the 70s Supremes. It will examine how the group was carefully styled by Berry Gordy and his Motown associates to appeal to the widest possible audience. Based on the collection of Mary Wilson, the display will feature the group's music, album covers and archive footage of them performing as well as new video interviews with Wilson and Maxine Powell, Motown's in-house Artist Development Director.

On show will be one of the first gowns purchased by the group when they were still called *The Primettes*. There will be several costumes designed by Hollywood designer Bob Mackie (known as the "Sultan of Sequins") and costumes designed for appearances on television including 'The Ed Sullivan Show' (on which the group performed 17 times). The gold, bronze and yellow 'Butterfly' gowns worn on the cover of the 1969 album *Cream of the Crop* will be displayed as well as the beaded dresses *The Supremes* wore to meet the Queen Mother in 1968. The black velvet gowns encrusted with rhinestones, pearls and gold brocade designed by Mackie and

worn for Diana Ross's 1970 farewell performance with the group will also be on show.

In addition original photographs, footage of television appearances and magazine spreads will examine *The Supremes* as black role models in the 1960s. Appearing on radio and television screens across the world, the group broke down racial barriers and enjoyed unprecedented success.

As the 50th anniversary of Motown Records approaches in 2009, the display also looks at the company's history. After lowly beginnings in Detroit, a city more famous for car production than music, Motown became the largest independent record label in America and the most financially successful black owned business in the country. *The Supremes* epitomised the vibrant, sophisticated crossover appeal of the label. On display will be a reconstruction of the mixing desk from the famous 'Recording Studio A' at Motown headquarters – 'Hitsville USA'.

The final section looks at the group's influence today. A set of costumes worn by *Destiny's Child* will be exhibited and there will be a specially commissioned video interview with radio and television broadcaster Trevor Nelson who will discuss the *The Supremes* and today's generation of girl bands.

Mary Wilson said: *"I have kept these dresses in storage for over 30 years, it was my dream that that one day I could share them with the world. I am delighted that they are going on display at the V&A and on tour around the UK."*

The display is part of the V&A's programme for its Theatre and Performance Collections. It has been adapted and curated by Geoffrey Marsh (Head of V&A Theatre and Performance Collections) and Victoria Broackes (Head of Exhibitions). Carol Tulloch, research fellow at the V&A and co-curator of the Museum's 2004 *Black British Style* exhibition, has also contributed.

**ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors:**

- Admission to *The Story of The Supremes from the Mary Wilson Collection* is £5. The display is FREE to Under 18s. To book call 0870 906 3883 or visit [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)
- To accompany the display V&A Publishing has produced *The Supremes* (£12.99 hardback). The book has an introductory essay by music journalist and Head of Catalogue at Universal Music, Daryl Easlea and includes archive images of the group throughout their career. For further information about the book, contact Julie Chan on 0207 942 2701 or 07747 607 822 or email [j.chan@vam.ac.uk](mailto:j.chan@vam.ac.uk) (not for publication).
- A double-CD set/download to accompany the display, 'The Story of The Supremes', will be released by Universal Music Catalogue on 12 May. The collection is a comprehensive package of the group's hits and selected album tracks compiled by MOJO contributor and soul historian Lois Wilson. For further information about the CD, contact Dave Clarke at Planet Earth Publicity 07966557774 or email [dave@planetearthpublicity.com](mailto:dave@planetearthpublicity.com) (not for publication).
- The display is part of the V&A's programme for its Theatre and Performance Collections which includes opening a new permanent gallery at the V&A in 2009, touring exhibitions and development of Theatre Collections Online ([www.vam.ac.uk/tco](http://www.vam.ac.uk/tco)). The next Theatre and Performance exhibition at the V&A will be *Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes* in spring 2010. The public can see and consult the Theatre and Performance Collections at the V&A's archive at Olympia.

### **Exhibition Tour Details:**

- The display was originated by Mary Wilson with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland. It has been developed and adapted for display at the V&A. For more information about the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame visit [www.rockhall.com](http://www.rockhall.com).
- After the V&A, the exhibition will travel to The Grundy Gallery, Blackpool (November – January 2009), Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (March – June 2009) and The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, Bristol (July – August 2009), with further dates to be confirmed. The tour is managed by Tourwest Ltd.

**For further PRESS information on *The Story of The Supremes from the Mary Wilson Collection*, please contact Alex Bratt in the V&A press office on 020 7942 2503 or email [a.bratt@vam.ac.uk](mailto:a.bratt@vam.ac.uk) (not for publication).**

**A selection of high-resolution images are available to download from [www.image.net](http://www.image.net)**