



The Lost Supreme: The Life of Dreamgirl Florence Ballard

By Peter Benjaminson

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The Supremes were the most successful female vocal group in history. Of the three original members--Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard--two told their life stories in bestselling books. Only Florence Ballard, the spunky teenager who founded the group, remained silent. But, in the months before her 1976 death, Flo actually did tell her own side of the Supremes story—and the story of her entire life—to Peter Benjaminson, who recorded her words on tape.

In this book, for the first time, is Flo Ballard's entire heartbreak tale, revealing: the surprising identity of the man who raped her before she entered the music business; the details of her love-hate relationship with Motown Records czar Berry Gordy—and an account of their first and only date; her serious drinking problem and ignored pleas for treatment; her never-ending desire to sing lead and how she was prevented from doing so; her attempts to get her life back on track after being brutally expelled from the Supremes; and much more.

Flo Ballard traveled around the world in luxury, chatting with royalty and heads of state, applauded by millions. But when she died at the age of 32, she was a lonely mother of three just barely recovered from years of poverty and despair. Though we may mourn the extended silence of such a profound talent, at least now we can begin to understand how and why it happened.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Journalist and author Benjaminson (*The Story of Motown*) attempts valiantly, painstakingly to resurrect the reputation of founding Supreme member Florence Ballard, who left the group early on and descended into litigiousness and alcoholism. Then a reporter with the *Detroit Free Press*, Benjaminson interviewed Ballard a year before her death in 1976 and elicited a sad story of a starry-eyed, single-minded high school dropout whose dream, and fortune, was co-opted by Berry Gordy's Motown empire. Growing up together in Detroit's black working-class Brewster Projects, gospel-singing Ballard and Mary Wilson first formed the Primettes, joined by Diane (as she was then known) Ross and Betty McGlown, who eventually dropped out. In 1961, the teenagers auditioned for Berry Gordy, who kept them doing backup as they matured, touring with the Motortown Review across country by bus until the newly configured Supremes (Ballard chose the name) had their first hit in 1964 with *Where Did Our Love Go?* The boom-boom beat coupled with the nasaly sound of Ross's voice prompted Gordy to promote Ross rather than Ballard as lead. Over the Supremes' several heady years in the spotlight, Benjaminson explains in this engaging biography, gobs of money vanished through flimsy contracts and the fingers of unscrupulous managers, costly clothes and glamorous acquaintances, and Ballard's resentment of Ross's ambition and Gordy's manipulation got her fired. (Apr.)

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Review

"Readers who are familiar with the group and even those who are not will definitely enjoy this well-written biography." —*Library Journal*

"An unmatchable snapshot of the exhilarating yet often ugly 1960s soul music scene." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"Peter Benjaminson's sardonic, hard-nosed series of vignettes from the white-collar world of Tweed-like municipal corruption is the dramatic story of a city unraveling from the top." —*Village Voice*

"Get to know the real Flo, from the beginning to the end. A must read." —Otis Williams, *The Temptations*

"Benjaminson tells Flo's story masterfully, with all the drama and empathy her life deserves." —Gerald Posner, author, *Motown* and *Why America Slept*

"Ballard's voice was never prominently featured in the group's hits. Yet in *The Lost Supreme*, we finally hear Ballard." —*The Boston Globe*

"Benjaminson holds back nothing, sharing with the reader the thoughts and moods of the various figures who

came and went during the early years." —*Soul Magazine*

"Flo was a beautiful person—loving and warm. . . . She was down-to-earth, she loved to laugh, and everyone loved her." —Marvin Gaye

About the Author

Peter Benjaminson

is the author of *Death in the Afternoon: America's Newspaper Giants Struggle for Survival*, *Secret Police: Inside the New York City Department of Investigation*, and *The Story of Motown*, and is the coauthor of *Investigative Reporting*. He is a former reporter for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the *Detroit Free Press*. *The Lost Supreme*'s website can be found at www.thelostsupreme.com

Users Review

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Patricia Kirby:

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Susan Peterson:

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