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Supremes

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The Supremes

One of the most successful vocal groups of all time, the Supremes originally started as an all-girl group while the members were schoolgirls in Detroit, MI. Formed in 1960 as the Primettes (a sister group to the all-male Primes), the members included Florence Ballard (1943–1976), Diana Ross (b. 1944), and Mary Wilson (b. 1944). At times the group also included Betty Travis and Barbara Martin. After a few recordings with the Detroit-based Lupine label, Ballard, Ross, and Wilson were signed to Motown Records as a trio. Renamed the Supremes, the group released their first album, Meet the Supremes, in 1963 (the Primes, who also signed with Motown, were renamed the Temptations). After a number of changes that included Ross being repositioned as lead singer, and the new collaboration with songwriting team Holland-Doxier-Holland, the Supremes had their first major hit with “Where Did Our Love Go?” (Motown MOTD-5270) in 1964. This was the first of 12 number one hits the group would have, including “Baby Love,” “Come See About Me,” “Stop! In the Name of Love,” and “Someday We’ll Be Together.” Poised and glamorous, they represented the trademark Motown sound and look.

In 1967 Ballard left the group and was replaced by former backup singer Cindy Birdsong (b. 1939). At that time the focus of the group almost completely shifted to Ross, and the group was renamed Diana Ross and the Supremes. Ross left the Supremes in 1970 for a solo career, and Jean Terrell (b. 1944) was brought in to fill the vacancy. Following Ross’s departure, the trio continued to record songs that charted in the Top 20, such as “Stoned Love” (1970), “Nathan Jones”...
Suzuki, Pat (1930–)

Pat Suzuki was one of the first Asian American women to take a starring role in American musical theater with her role as Linda Low in the 1958 original Broadway production of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Flower Drum Song, the first Broadway production to feature an all-Asian cast. Despite negative attitudes toward Americans of Japanese descent in the post–World War II years, Suzuki rose to stardom through her talent and perseverance. Her career as a singer and actress has taken her from nightclubs to the recording studio, from Broadway to television. In her prime, she was compared to Judy Garland (1922–1969), Ella Fitzgerald (1917–1996), Billie Holiday (1915–1959), Sarah Vaughan (1924–1990), and Ethel Merman (1909–1984).

Pat Suzuki was born Chiyoki (“a thousand times good”) Suzuki in Cressy, CA, on 23 September 1930. Her parents emigrated from Toyohashi, Japan, and settled on a farm in Yamato Colony in Merced County, where she grew up. At the outbreak of World War II, when thousands of Japanese American families were gathered into internment camps, she and her family were held in Amache (Granada), CO, for four years. Suzuki studied fine arts and education and graduated from San Jose State University with a B.F.A. degree (1953). After graduating she moved to New York City, where she auditioned and was cast in a walk-on part in the national touring company of Teahouse of the August Moon. She left the tour in Seattle and launched her singing career at the Colony, a fashionable supper club, where she attracted the attention of RCA Records and talent scouts at the William Morris Agency. In 1957 Suzuki was voted Best Female Singer of the annual Downbeat Magazine Disc Jockey Poll. During the next three years she released four solo albums of jazz standards and Broadway show tunes with RCA Victor Records: The Many Sides of Pat Suzuki (VIK LX-1127), Pat Suzuki’s Broadway ’59 (RCA Victor LSP-1965), and Looking at You (RCA Victor LSP-2186).

In 1958 Suzuki was approached by Richard Rodgers to play the role of Linda Low in his forthcoming musical Flower Drum Song, an adaptation of C.Y. Lee’s book of the same title. The musical opened on 1 December 1958 at the St. James Theatre on Broadway, and Suzuki was catapulted to stardom as a musical theater personality. Later that month she graced the cover of Time magazine with her co-star, Miyoshi Umeki. Suzuki won a Most Promising Actress award from the theater trade magazine Bloom’s Theatre World in 1959.

In 1960 Suzuki married Mark Shwayder and took a break from performing to raise their son David. She soon resumed performing and guest appeared throughout the United States and Europe, including a special performance in the 1970 world’s fair in Osaka. Suzuki returned to performances and guest appearances for benefit raising events.

See also Asian American Theater

For Further Reading


Svigals, Alicia (1991)

Violinist and composer considered one of the best klezmer fiddlers. She is a prominent force noted for her klezmer music that combines Jewish tradition with a modern aesthetic. She plays klezmer music at the annual National Klezkonik Festival and has presented klezmer music to several hundred students. She has also performed with the best professionals in the United States, worked with Itzhak Perlman on his album In the Fiddler’s House, and also appeared in the television production of Marvin Hamlisch’s musicalizing the Emmy Award-winning film, The Yentl.