

# The Supremes: The Supremes Sing Holland-Dozier-Holland: Expanded Edition

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Daniel Bromfield

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Holland-Dozier-Holland wrote some of the Supremes' greatest songs. Not many of them are on *The Supremes Sing Holland-Dozier-Holland*, a good but not great album released in 1967, not long before the departure of Florence Ballard and the trio's rebranding as Diana Ross & the Supremes. Motown's tightest songwriting trio doesn't come off too well on what's ostensibly a tribute to themselves, and only a few of these songs even approach the heights of "Baby Love" or "Where Did Our Love Go." And though Diana Ross is as cool as ever, her remove and restraint aren't ideal for songs like "(Love Is Like A) Heat Wave," so fiery in the hands of Martha and her Vandellas, or "It's the Same Old Song," a third-rate song given spark by the Four Tops.

There are a few keepers. "You Keep Me Hangin' On" pulls that trick Holland-Dozier-Holland do so well of sounding ominous yet essentially lively and good-hearted. The one-note guitar riff is tense and worried, the drums clatter restlessly, but it's a great dance record. The circus-bear waddle of "Love Is in Our Hearts" is delightful, and though the child metaphor of "Mother Me, Smother Me" is a little creepy, Ross injects her lead with the right amount of sweetness. But

*The Supremes Sing Holland-Dozier-Holland* is worth more in 2018 as a historical document than an artwork, a snapshot of one of the biggest girl groups ever at the end of their glory days. No one really sounds over-the-hill here, but it's clear both singers and songwriters are coasting.

The record has been reissued and expanded with bonus tracks, stereo mixes and a live performance from 1967 at the Copacabana club, which would prove their last with the original lineup. A lot of the bonus tracks are previously unavailable alternate versions that you'd have to be a pretty hardcore Motown nerd to care about, though "We Couldn't Get Along Without You," a tribute to Berry Gordy, is funny given that Holland-Dozier-Holland would quit the label shortly thereafter. The stereo mixes are gratuitous; the Motown production style, indebted to the Wall of Sound, sounds better when the instruments bleed together than when they come at you from different sides of the stereo field. It's the live recording that's worth the price of admission.

Appropriate for its nightclub setting—and for the fact that the Supremes would follow up *Holland-Dozier-Holland* with an album of interpretations of the Broadway songwriting duo Rodgers & Hart—this set is heavy on the Great American Songbook. They have fun with their vocals, putting on a ridiculously affected "diamonds and poils" New York accent for "The Lady Is a Tramp" and backing each other up with exasperated ad-libs on "Secondhand Rose" ("so embarrassing!") It's not *Live at the Apollo*, nor is it *Judy at Carnegie Hall*, but it's still a fun glimpse at the world's biggest, most glamorous girl group engaging human-on-human with a cocktail-drunk audience. And those songbook standards are classic no matter who sings them.