

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Smokey Robinson

PERSON

Robinson, Smokey, 1940-

**Alternative Names:** Smokey Robinson;

**Life Dates:** February 19, 1940-

**Place of Birth:** Detroit, Michigan, USA

**Work:** Walnut, CA

**Occupations:** Singer; Songwriter

## Biographical Note

Singer and songwriter Smokey Robinson was born on February 19, 1940 in Detroit, Michigan to Flossie Mae Smith and William Robinson. He attended Northern High School, where he graduated in 1957.

At Northern High School, Robinson formed the doo-wop group the Five Chimes, later known as the Miracles. The Miracles were one of the first groups to sign with Berry Gordy's record label Tamla Records, later incorporated into Motown Records. Here, in 1960, Robinson and the Miracles recorded "Shop Around," which became Motown's first million-selling hit record and first number one hit on the R&B singles chart. As a songwriter, Robinson subsequently wrote hits for the group including "You've Really Got a Hold on Me," "Ooo Baby Baby," "The Tracks of My Tears," "Going to a Go-Go," "More Love," "Tears of a Clown," co-written with Stevie Wonder, and "I Second That Emotion." By the mid-1960's, Robinson became vice president of Motown Records, serving as in-house producer, talent scout and songwriter. In this role, Robinson wrote and produced hits for other Motown greats including The Temptations, Mary Wells, Brenda Holloway, and Marvin Gaye, with the songs "The Way You Do the Things You Do," "My Girl," "Get Ready," "You Beat Me to the Punch," "Don't Mess with Bill," "Ain't That Peculiar," and "My Guy." A year after retiring in 1972, Robinson began his solo career, recording hits including "Just to See Her," "Quiet Storm," "Cruisin'," and "Being with You," among others. He remained vice president of Motown Records until 1990; and, following his tenure at Motown, he continued his touring career and released several solo albums: Food for the Spirit (2004), Timeless Love (2006), Time Flies When You're Having Fun (2009), Now And Then (2010), Smokey & Friends (2014), and Christmas Everyday (2017).

Robinson has received numerous awards, including receiving a star on The Hollywood

Walk of Fame in 1983, induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1987, a Grammy Award for Best Male R&B Vocal Performance in 1988 for “Just to See Her,” induction into the Songwriters’ Hall of Fame in 1989, the Grammy Legend Award in 1990, the Heritage Award at the 1991 Soul Train Music Awards, a National Medal of Arts in 2002, and a BET Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015. In 2009, the Miracles were honored as a group with their own star on The Hollywood Walk of Fame; and, in 2012, they were inducted as a group into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Robinson also holds honorary doctorate degrees from Howard University and the Berklee College of Music.

Robinson has three children, Berry, Tamla, and Trey, and is married to Frances Gladney.

Smokey Robinson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on October 10, 2009.

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