

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Eddie Levert

PERSON

Levert, Eddie, 1942-

Alternative Names: Eddie Levert;

Life Dates: June 16, 1942-

Place of Birth: Bessemer, Alabama, USA

Residence: Henderson, NV

Work: New York, NY

Occupations: R & B Singer

Biographical Note

Singer, and member of the famed O’Jays, Edward “Eddie” Levert, was born June 16, 1942, in Bessemer, Alabama. When Levert was eight years old, he moved with his family to the town of Canton, Ohio, where he attended McKinley High School. At a young age, Levert and childhood friend Walter Williams began performing as a gospel duo. As teenagers, the two were inspired to form a singing group after seeing a performance by Frankie Lyman and the Teenagers. Levert and Williams brought together fellow students Bobby Massey, William Powell, and Billy Isles, to form their first group, The Triumphs.

In 1960, The Triumphs signed with Syd Nathan, owner of King Records, and the group was renamed The Mascots. The next year, The Mascots recorded their first single, “Miracles”, which was deemed a local success, and drew the attention of famed Cleveland disc jockey Eddie O’Jay. Because O’Jay was an essential in the group’s managing and mentoring, The Triumphs decided to change their name to The O’Jays, as a tribute. That same year, the O’Jays began working with producer H.B. Barnum and Little Star Records. Shortly after, The O’Jays signed with Imperial Records, and released their debut single, Lonely Drifter, with the released their first album, Comin’ Through following in 1965. After a rocky start- including the withdrawal of Billy Isle from the group- The O’Jays met Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. Then a part of the production team at Neptune Records, Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff went on to create their own label, Philadelphia International, after Neptune shut down in 1971, taking The O’Jays with them. Under the new label, The O’Jays recorded their first big hit, Back Stabbers (1972). While with Philadelphia International, The O’Jays recorded nearly thirty charting singles, and several number one songs. Back Stabbers reached number

one on the R&B charts, and number three on the Billboard Top 100 chart. In 1973, The O'Jays released Love Train, and the single became a number one hit on both the Hot 100 and R&B charts. In 1975, co-founder William Powell was forced to leave The O'Jays due to illness, dying of cancer two years later. After Powell's death, The O'Jays released their fifth album, Family Reunion, which reached number seven on the Billboard Top 200.

The O'Jays have received the Rhythm & Blues Foundation's Pioneer Award (1998), and were inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame. In 2005, they were also inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 2009, BET awarded the group the Lifetime Achievement Award, and the group is still actively touring.

Eddie Levert is the father of three sons—Eddie Jr., Gerald, and Sean—all of whom are/were currently active in the music industry. In 2006, Gerald, an accomplished R&B singer, died at the age of 40. Two years later, son Sean, also an R&B artist, died at the age of 39. Eddie Jr. is currently the CEO of Levert Entertainment, a record label headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

Eddie Levert was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 28, 2013.

Related Entries

Mckinley High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

J.J. Burns Elementary School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Triumphs [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1958 to 1960]

Singer

Mascots [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1960 to 1963]

Singer

The O'Jays [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1963 to ?]

Singer