

STEVIE WONDER:

Written by *Jesse Washington*



SINGER-SONGWRITER and MUSIC PRODUCER born in 1950

Since 1961, when the blind 11-year-old musical prodigy auditioned for Motown Records, Stevie Wonder has created music that is unmatched in love, compassion, justice and unity — and his musical talent still fills dance floors to this day.

Born Stevland Judkins in Michigan, USA and called “Stevie Wonder” by the creator of Motown, his first No. 1 hit came in 1963 with the album *Fingertips*, which referred to Wonder’s unique bongo rhythms. In 2016, he released “Faith” with contemporary artist Ariana Grande. In between came dozens and dozens of timeless songs, melodies and moments.

Where to start? Maybe with Wonder’s head swaying as he played and sang, his sunglassed eyes fixed on a world of music only he could see. But we all could feel his music when we listened. Or with his 1966 cover of Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ In The Wind,” which became an anthem of the civil rights movement. It’s the song that helped make white Americans accept Martin Luther King Jr. Wonder created many hit songs such as “Signed, Sealed, Delivered I’m Yours,” “Superstition,” “Living For The City” and “Sir Duke.”

No other musician has pulled so many heartstrings with a harmonica while simultaneously jamming so ferociously on the piano. No other artist has inspired a legendary annual series of dance parties where only Stevie Wonder music is played. All along, he has maintained social activism. Wonder tried his best to use his voice to change the world, writing about the problems facing those on the bottom, particularly the racism that African-Americans faced. *But we are sick and tired of hearing your song / Telling how you are gonna change right from wrong*, he sang in 1974. *Cause if you really want to hear our views / You haven’t done nothing!*

Always, there was love. With Wonder, love was nurturing and empowering, a source of strength. *For once in my life I have someone who needs me / Someone I’ve needed so long / For once, unafraid, I can go where life leads me / And somehow I know I’ll be strong*, he sang in 1968. Half a century later, in an era when many musicians focus on earthly belongings or money, Wonder’s inner visions continue to encourage us to find the higher ground.

SERENA WILLIAMS:

–Written by *Trudy Joseph*



TENNIS PLAYER, born 1981

Let's have a conversation about the best — strike that — the greatest. This isn't an Aaron Rodgers vs. Tom Brady conversation, or Michael Jordan vs. Magic. One name rises to the top — a name who dominates in ways that no other athletes can measure up to. Serena Williams.

She can boast 23 Grand Slam titles (the world record), six U.S. Opens, seven Wimbledon titles, seven Australian Opens, three French Opens, four Olympic gold medals, 23 doubles titles, and a career Golden Slam. Williams has won enough awards for several lifetimes.

Born Sept. 26, 1981, in Michigan, and raised in Compton, California, Williams is the youngest of five daughters. Her father learned from tennis

books and videos how to coach his daughters Serena and her older sister Venus. In daily two-hour practices, the Williams sisters worked themselves to the bone on a concrete court, avoiding potholes and often practicing without nets. Growing up in Compton meant developing a sense of fight for survival — the same fight that would become part of their game both on and off the tennis court.

Williams defeated the sport of tennis, a sport that was usually played by white athletes and considered 'demure' (calm, fancy), by being herself — with her curves, a signature Afro-style ponytail, and an energetic style of play. What makes Williams' career, which spans 20 years, so remarkable is not a spotless record, but the spirit to rise above the criticism. People have told her that she will not succeed because of her age, her game, and her body type. But she still set the standard for victory in sports.

Whether she's serving tennis balls at 128 mph, designing affordable fashion, or teaming up with Beyoncé in music videos, Williams' lengthy resume solidifies her place among sport's all-time greats.

HARRIET TUBMAN:

–Written by *Callan Mathis*



ABOLITIONIST, born 1820, died 1913

Harriet Tubman, the influential “conductor” of the Underground Railroad, will be the first African-American woman to appear on U.S. money when her likeness was set to appear on the \$20 bill beginning in 2020. She led hundreds of enslaved people out of the South to freedom and each journey and every person mattered. “I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can’t,” she said. “I never ran a ‘train’ off the track and I never lost a ‘passenger’.”

Born into slavery, she endured physical violence nearly every day in her early years. For example, Tubman encountered an enslaved person (slave) who left the fields without permission. When she refused to catch and return the runaway, their master hurled a two-pound weight at her, striking her in the head. The injury meant she had dizziness and headaches frequently for the rest of her life, and some historians believe she suffered from narcolepsy or 'sleeping sickness'.

Tubman escaped from slavery in 1849, using the Underground Railroad to make the 90-mile trip from Maryland to Philadelphia. But her individual safety wasn't enough for her. Hearing that her niece and her children were going to be sold, she went back to the South and led them on the path to Philadelphia. Soon she came back for her siblings. Then for her parents. After passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, which said that enslaved people who escaped to the North could be recaptured and returned to slavery, Tubman changed her route to end in Canada, a country where slavery was outlawed. Even though there was a bounty (reward) for her capture, she made at least 19 trips and risked her life each time.

During the Civil War, she became a nurse and spy for the Union government. She tended to the sick and wounded, caring for soldiers both Black and white. After the war, she cared for her parents and the needy, and turned her house into a home for the sick, elderly, and poor. Tubman died of pneumonia in 1913 and was buried with military honors.

