



Timepieces

Four Seasons Stories from the past



'Motown Unreleased—37 years of myths and mis-information : Part 2

Returning to our Motown 'expose' we now turn to describing the difficulties with Motown Universal's record keeping and vault masters which demonstrates some of the problems they have finding the digital masters we want so much. It also shows how bad the record keeping was during the Four Seasons period at Motown.

A Motown expert explained some of the issues around the group's session info.



HARRY WEINGER

"My database and the "Don't Forget The Motor City" web-site (<http://www.dftmc.info/>) go up to the end of 1972, except for tracks that were cut in Detroit during 1973-4. Most (but not all) of the Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons stuff was cut in L.A. But there are no session logs for L.A., so no recording dates.

There are some cards called THE ARTIST CARDS. I have scans of these, made from a microfiche, which are in parts barely readable! Next time I am in NY, I plan to scan the cards themselves, at least the ones I think can be dated up to the end of 1972. There are 26 4S titles and 23 FV titles. I can read all the 4S titles, but only about half of the FV titles, from the scans!

Most titles on the cards have a MASTER NUMBER in a series beginning at 60000. (See relevant section of Reg Bartlette's book.) These were written on the cards by hand, and are mostly unreadable in the scans. I believe that if I had enough of these numbers, and with the aid of other information, I could make a guess at a rough dating scheme. I think the master numbers indicate when recording of a title was started, though not when it was finished, and they might well have used the same master number

even when there was a complete re-make. Note these are **MASTER numbers not matrix numbers (as supplied by the pressing plant) or tape numbers (as the Digital Master numbers we Motowners know so well).**

The computerised tape index at UM will contain all the titles they have on tape. Unfortunately, there are a lot of errors in the list, it was compiled by interns without any knowledge of Motown (or even English, it sometimes seems to me!), by typing in what it says on the tape boxes. "



Andy Skurow, we understand, is the master of Motown's vaults. He's the expert on tracking down tapes and arranging for tracks to be re-mastered by the engineers. So, when the time comes, Andy will be able to find everything that physically exists. As Harry Weinger has said re past artist research....you don't really know what is there without playing and reviewing the masters (multi-track and 2 track stereo mix-downs)

To just add to the confusion every list produced of the tracks in the vaults is preceded by a comment that..... **"MANY MAY BE DEMOS, OUTTAKES, OR INCOMPLETE."**

And the problems of managing the vault are not easy as these quotes from Motown Universal CEO Harry Weinger from **'The Second City'** interview reveal..... whilst no mention of The Four Seasons is made, the comments clearly can apply to the Four Seasons masters.

Q. In the past decade, there's been a lot of Motown product, from compilations to box sets to great collector's products. What's the next step?

"There's still so many things that haven't come out in terms of traditional CDs. There are plenty of artists who haven't had their full catalogue available in awhile..... For me, there's a sense of wanting to take care of the basics. In all the years of compilations there's albums and artists that just aren't available. ***It's a combination of taking care of the new generations rediscovering the hits, taking care of the wonderful core fans looking for things that are missing from their collections, things that no one's ever heard before.*** And you also just want to have archived the original albums..... Whether we'll get to it all? I don't know. There's just some acts you can't physically get to. There's just not enough days in the year or enough bodies to work on it all. ***So you look at other labels that might want to reissue stuff.***"

Q. What keeps you, as a producer, from abandoning physical altogether?

"It's not like taking the tape off the shelf, and just digitizing it and throwing it up there. Is it the right tape? Is it mastered properly? Is it the right version? Who are the writers and producers? What album is it from? How you translate that into a

digital world is what we're transitioning into."

Q. Reissues often come under fire for less-than-stellar re-mastering, or poor condition of the original tapes. How do you, as a producer, work to get around that?

"I don't think I'm golden on this one. I do my best, and we have terrific engineers – Kevin (Reeves) and Seth (Foster) and Ellen (Fitton) are terrific. Sometimes the source material can handcuff you. But we've done everything from 1930s or 1940s acetates to digital masters that come from CD masters, with no analogue step.

You're wearing two or three hats. One is I'm now getting this and listening, and I'm reading the notes. What did they do? Use the original master tapes? Tape copies? I want to know. You have a way to inform the fans about the providence of the tapes and, sometimes, what happens to tapes. They aren't just tapes on a shelf. You have to research. And sometimes, with time and molecules and air and physical space, things go away. ***If you're shipping a master to Europe, it may be in a vault – but you can't always find it.***"

We are arguing that based on our findings of some unreleased tracks on cassette tape and articles/notes re the sessions fans attended, it is well worth doing project research and the results will (we believe and hope) reveal superb music. Frankly, we can't understand why the Partnership wouldn't employ any necessary resources to recover such history. It is in our opinion a project waiting to happen.

But then there is the question of whether or not Bob Gaudio and Frankie Valli would co-operate with a project to release the material.? Will they ever see the historical importance and let us have this music? Can you imagine The Beatles or Beach Boys catalogues having such a lost period covering so many tracks. Somehow, it appears, the Partnership doesn't believe that parts of their 'real' music history are important.

Given the success of the re-issue collection 'The Motown Years' on Hipo-Select in 2009 we can only hope that they would see the potential of a CD release.

Harry Weinger genuinely cares about the music and the fans and in interview gives a hint perhaps at the way forward, for at least some of the Motown artists still awaiting release

Next Time we will reveal more re the lists of unreleased and the possibility of a realistic project to review and release the 'lost' Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons Motown Masters.

