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The Wonder of Stevie Wonder: 7 Fun Facts

As the music world pays tribute to Stevie Wonder with an All-Star Grammy Salute tonight, we throw a spotlight on some wonderful facts about the man and his legendary music.

LAURIE ULSTER · FEB 16, 2015

120 SHARES



"Stevie Wonder: Songs In The Key Of Life – An All Star Grammy Salute," which honors the music legend, airs tonight on CBS. (Photo: s_bukley /www.shutterstock.com)

When [Stevie Wonder](#) was 13 years old, and still going by the moniker "Little Stevie Wonder", he had his first #1 hit with the song "Fingertips." He was the youngest artist ever to top the chart, and the first artist in history to top the pop charts and R&B chart simultaneously.

Fifty-two years later, a star-studded group gathered to give him the tribute of a lifetime. "Stevie Wonder: Songs In The Key Of Life – An All Star Grammy Salute" airs tonight, featuring a diverse array of Wonder-influenced artists performing songs from throughout his career and culminating in a performance by Wonder himself. Tributes will come from [Beyonce](#), [Annie Lennox](#), [Ed Sheeran](#), [Tony Bennett](#), [John Legend](#), [Lady Gaga](#), [Pharrell Williams](#), [Andrea Bocelli](#), India.Arie, [Jill Scott](#), [Jennifer Hudson](#), and more as they celebrate the life and music of this extraordinarily talented man. And his daughter Aisha, the inspiration for his beautiful hit "Isn't She Lovely," took the stage to sing that song to her father.

In honor of this momentous man and this momentous occasion, here are 7 wonderful facts about Stevie Wonder.

HE'S AN AWARDS HOG

This isn't just about Grammys, although he's DEFINITELY a Grammy hog. He has 25 of them (plus a Lifetime Achievement Award), the most recent one coming his way in 2007 for his Tony Bennett team-up on "For Once In My Life." Wonder also has an Oscar for Best Song, "I Just Called To Say I Love You" from the movie *The Woman in Red* starring Gene Wilder. The same song won him a Golden Globe. And he even has an Emmy, for his guest appearance as himself on *The Cosby Show*.

Conversely, he also has a Razzie (Golden Raspberry Award) for worst movie song, thanks to the title song on the "Wild Wild West" soundtrack, a collaboration with [Will Smith](#) and Kool Moe Dee.

Now let's kick things up a notch. He's a United Nations Messenger of Peace, has a Distinguished Service Award from the President's Committee on Employment of the Physically Handicapped, the National Order of Arts & Letters from France, the Gershwin Prize for Popular Song, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor a civilian can receive in the U.S. And there are dozens more, too many for us to list. Like we said: awards hog.

HE'S GOT FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

In fact, it doesn't get any higher, at least in this country. President [Barack Obama](#), who awarded Wonder with his Medal of Freedom, has repeatedly stated that Stevie Wonder is his all time favorite artist. And Obama isn't the only President that Wonder has hobnobbed with: he met [George H.W. Bush](#) at an event for the T.J. Martell Foundation, where they were both being honored, and was at [Bill Clinton](#)'s star-studded 'Decade of Difference' party and benefit for The Clinton Foundation. And he had the pleasure of singing his [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)-inspired song, "Happy Birthday" to [Nelson Mandela](#) at Mandela's 80th birthday celebration in Johannesburg.

Interestingly, the first President he connected with was [Richard Nixon](#). In 1969, Nixon awarded him the Distinguished Service Award from the President's Committee on Employment of Handicapped People. Five years later, Wonder expressed his disdain for what was going on in Washington with the anti-Nixon single "You Haven't Done Nuthin'." The song featured backing vocals from The Jackson 5 and went to #1 on the pop charts. Nixon resigned two days after it was released.

HE'S A BIG FAMILY MAN

This past December, Stevie Wonder's ninth child was born. He has had children with five different mothers, and they all bear his original last name, Morris. He's a grandfather, too.

His very first child was his daughter Aisha, born in February of 1975. The world celebrated along with Wonder when he released his beautiful song about her, "Isn't She Lovely," on his landmark "Songs In The Key Of Life" album. It's a beautiful father-daughter song, and you can hear baby Aisha playing and gurgling on the track. Now 40 years old, Aisha's on tour with her dad, singing backing vocals as he tours the country performing the album her song first debuted on.

KEITH RICHARDS ONCE CALLED HIM SOMETHING SO NASTY WE CAN'T EVEN PRINT IT

But it was a long, long time ago.

In the early 70s, The Rolling Stones went out on tour to promote their album "Exile on Main Street," and booked Stevie Wonder as their opening act. He was about to release "Talking Book", which featured the now legendary tracks "Superstition" and "You Are The Sunshine Of My Life," and seized the opportunity to reach an even wider audience. The tour was exactly what you'd expect of the Stones in the 1970s as they played and partied their way across the country. In Chicago, they stayed at [Hugh Hefner](#)'s house, ostensibly for security reasons, and the parties there included Wonder as well. But one day, Wonder's drummer quit the band, and he didn't feel comfortable performing without him. He let the Stones know he wouldn't make that night's gig, and Keith got mad. That's when the anger erupted, and the name calling went to its fullest expression.

Keith has mellowed over the years, and obviously recognizes Wonder's immense talent. He once expressed disdain for Prince by saying, "He's trying to be Stevie Wonder" – with the implication that he couldn't possible measure up – and has talked about how great it was that his son Marlon got to hang out with Stevie when he was a kid.

HE'S POLITICAL

Long before Bono made it cool, Stevie Wonder was involved in politics, raising money and starting foundations for charity, and championing the causes he felt strongly about. He lobbied for gun control and against apartheid, and has always performed at benefits and made public service announcements for what he believed in. As part of a Mothers Against Drunk Driving campaign, he even appeared on posters with the slogan "Before I ride with a drunk, I'll drive myself."

One of his biggest political accomplishments was his ultimately successful lobby for a national holiday on honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He had met King at a freedom rally in Chicago, and of course had experienced racism first hand. As a teenager on tour with the Motown Revue, their choice of venues was limited due to segregation, and their bus had been shot at in Alabama. He was shocked when he heard of King's death, and flew to Atlanta for the funeral.



Stevie Wonder with [Coretta Scott King](#) while attending "Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Celebration of Life," honoring her late husband in 1984. (Photo by Ron Galella/WireImage/Getty Images)

It took 15 years to make King's birthday a national holiday, and for three years, Wonder put his career on hold to lead rallies in the cause. President [Jimmy Carter](#) endorsed the bill, but couldn't get support from Congress. It was [Ronald Reagan](#) who finally signed it into law, although it took three more years until it was first observed, and another 11 before all 50 states would make it official.

HE HAS EXPERIENCED THE LOSS OF TWO OTHER SENSES

Stevie Wonder has been blind since shortly after his birth, and early in his life, he learned to rely on his other senses. In 1952, when Wonder was just two years old, his mother brought him to faith healer [Oral Roberts](#) in the hope of curing him. Of course, it didn't work, and Wonder never let it hinder him. His enormous talent was what made him stand out, and not his perceived disability.



Blind since shortly after his birth, "Little Stevie Wonder" was a prodigy who grew up to be a music legend.

In 1973, three days after his album "Innervisions" was commercially released, Wonder was on his way to a benefit performance. His cousin drove while he slept in the car, music from "Innervisions" still playing in his headphones. A lumber truck in front of them jammed on the brakes and the vehicles collided. Wonder was slammed in the forehead by the truck bed and knocked unconscious.

He was in a coma for several days, and when he came out of it, he'd lost his sense of taste and smell. He was finally able to leave the hospital a few weeks later, but he didn't perform again until March of 1974. He had to take medication for a year after that, but he eventually recovered, regaining both of his lost senses. The accident changed him, making him more aware, more spiritual, and more grateful. He chose not to have plastic surgery to remove the mark left by the crash, so he'd have the scar, and remember.

HE'S WRITTEN A LOT SONGS FOR OTHER PEOPLE

There are so many signature Stevie Wonder songs that it's a surprise to discover just how many of them he's written for others. Here are just a few.

"Tell Me Something Good" was the breakthrough hit for Rufus & [Chaka Khan](#) and won them their first Grammy Award. There are some different stories about how the song was written, but put all together, it seems that Wonder came by the studio to give them a song and Chaka, who was pregnant and a little testy, said she didn't like it. He came up with "Tell Me Something Good" while they were in the studio, and they worked on it together until it was perfect. Years later, Wonder would play harmonica on Chaka Khan's 1984 hit "I Feel For You," written by Prince.

It was Ronnie White of The Miracles (as in "Smokey Robinson and...") who first took the 11-year-old Stevie Wonder to audition for Motown. Years later, Wonder and producer Hank Cosby would write an instrumental track, but Wonder couldn't come up with lyrics that did it justice. He brought the track to the Motown Christmas party and played it for [Smokey Robinson](#), who said it sounded like a circus, and took just a few days to come up with the lyrics. Thus, "The Tracks Of My Tears" was born, and went on to become an international multi-million seller.

And many people are surprised when they find out that [Aretha Franklin](#)'s "Until You Come Back To Me" is a Stevie Wonder song (co-written with Morris Broadnax and Clarence Paul). He started writing it when he was 13 years old, and when he finally recorded it in the 1960s, it didn't really go anywhere. In 1977, he called Franklin up late one night to say he had a song for her. "I'll take it," she told him. "Send somebody down to get it!" he said back. That's the story Aretha Franklin told on stage when she and Wonder did the song together at the Soul Train Lady of Soul Awards in 2005.

Stevie Wonder's songs have dominated the charts, racked up awards, and he has been a role model for many an aspiring musician. [Kanye West](#), no stranger to success, has said that he's really just trying to compete with "Innervisions" and "Songs In The Key Of Life." With Wonder's ability to play multiple instruments – often playing almost all the instruments himself on many of his earlier albums – plus his brilliant songwriting and his unmistakable voice, he has inspired millions, and no doubt will continue to do so, generation after generation.

"Stevie Wonder: Songs In The Key Of Life – An All Star Grammy Salute" airs tonight from 9-11pm on CBS.

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