

A snippet of *The Dealers: Then and Now*
By A.J. Dugger III

*The Unforgettable Story of The Memphis
Legends*



THE DEALERS: THEN AND NOW

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From the chapter, "Muscle Shoals Sound."

In the midst of recording these songs, the group found themselves surprised during a gig. During a concert in New Orleans on September 15, 1978, the band was performing Marvin Gaye's hit song, *Got To Give It Up*. They had performed the song three times because the crowd kept screaming for more. As the exhausted band played their fourth set, a security guard approached Stanley. "Marvin Gaye is here and wants to perform with you. Can you play the song again?" Stanley scoffed. "I was thinking he just wanted to hear us play that song again," he recalled. Ricky remembers the night well. "We were tired as hell. I was exhausted," he recalled.

But minutes later, Marvin Gaye walked into the club. The group stood there in absolute shock. They were all quiet...even Elton. "I never will forget that night. I never did expect to see him walk through that door," Stanley remembered. Marvin Gaye leapt on stage, smiling and full of enthusiasm. "Of course no one was tired anymore after we saw Marvin Gaye walk in," joked Ricky. The 39 year-old Gaye was far from his prime and having personal problems at the time, but when The Dealers kicked off the music, it was as if he were 20 years younger and living a carefree life. His energy and quiet falsetto sent the crowd into a frenzy. The Dealers jammed for almost 20 minutes with the singer.

Over thirty years later, Stanley is still shocked by that performance. "I didn't believe he was going to be in there. He was one of the people in music that I always wanted to meet. We have no recording of it or nothing. It's just a great memory." Before leaving the stage, Marvin Gaye kissed Meeky's ear. Grinning from ear to ear, she said she wouldn't wash that ear for weeks. (And she didn't.)

The band felt good about the impromptu performance, especially when Marvin gave them a special invitation. "Marvin Gaye told us if we were ever in Los Angeles to look him up," said Stanley. Tragically, Marvin was murdered by his father several years later. "We never did make it to L.A. before he died," Stanley recalled.

Early the next year, the group opened for one of Marvin's former Motown labelmates. This time, they got to meet Eddie Kendricks, the falsetto-voiced former lead singer of The Temptations. To this day, many tenors in soul music give Eddie Kendricks credit for writing the textbook on how to sing a falsetto, and Darrell was no exception. Darrell got the chance to talk at length with his idol when The Dealers opened up for him at a Memphis club called The Paradise. Right off, Eddie was impressed with Darrell's voice. "You sound good," the legendary Motown crooner told him. "Keep going. Don't get discouraged. A lot of things can take you away from where you're trying to go. Develop the best of what you've got. When you sing a song, feel it, and look people in their eyes when you sing to them." Although he was tall and thin with a thick goatee, Eddie had a powerful presence to him.

Stanley couldn't resist asking Eddie why he left The Temptations. Smirking, Eddie looked at the bandleader and said, "Man, it's a long story. You don't wanna hear about The Temptations." Ironically, Eddie rejoined the Temptations a few years later for an ill-fated reunion album and tour.

Stanley wasn't hesitant to ask about The Temptations, but he didn't say anything about the declining state of Eddie's voice. Years of chain smoking had weakened the singer's trademark falsetto voice, and ultimately led to his death of lung cancer in 1992. "When we played that gig, Eddie had a screech in his voice," Stanley said. "Darrell's voice sounded much smoother." Pieface says that Darrell sounded better than Eddie Kendricks even at his best. "Eddie was more of a crooner...he sung to the melody," he said. "Darrell could hit some high power notes. He's more like Prince, Eddie Holman or Philip Bailey. I know Darrell tries to sound like Smokey Robinson and Eddie Kendricks, but I've never heard them hit the high notes that Darrell hits. You've never in your life heard Eddie or Smokey get up there with Darrell. Darrell underrates his own voice sometimes."

By now the band was playing with legends almost on a regular basis. Ricky Townes recalled a time when The Dealers opened for Ray Charles. After their set, they hung around to watch Ray's performance. As his band tuned up, it became apparent that Ray had no patience with his sound crew, particularly the man operating the P.A. System. "Fuck! You have *got* to get this sound right! Who is the sound man anyway?" he fussed, scowling behind his dark shades. Backstage, Elton and Ricky couldn't contain their laughter. In the space of time between 1972 and 1979, The Dealers had gone from rehearsing in Stanley's bedroom to opening for artists like Ray Charles and witnessing his

temper tantrum from backstage. Life was good, but only about to get better.