

Ohio Players



The Ohio Players were an American funk and R&B band, most popular in the 1970s. They are best known for their songs "Fire" and "Love Rollercoaster". Gold certifications, records selling at least one million copies, were awarded to the singles "Funky Worm", "Skin Tight", "Fire", and "Love Rollercoaster"; plus to their albums Skin Tight, Fire, and Honey. On August 17, 2013, The Ohio Players were inducted into the inaugural class of the Official R&B Music Hall of Fame that took place at Cleveland State University in Cleveland, Ohio.

History

The band formed in Dayton, Ohio in 1959 as the Ohio Untouchables and initially included members Robert Ward (vocals/guitar), Marshall "Rock" Jones (bass), Clarence "Satch" Satchell (saxophone/guitar), Cornelius Johnson (drums), and Ralph "Pee Wee" Middlebrooks (trumpet/trombone). They were best known at the time as a backing group for The Falcons.

Ward had proved to be an unreliable leader, who would sometimes, during gigs, walk off the stage, forcing the group to stop playing. Eventually, the group vowed to keep playing even after he left. Ward and Jones got into a fistfight in 1964, after which the group broke up.

Ward found new backups, and the group's core members returned to Dayton. They replaced Ward with 21-year-old Leroy "Sugarfoot" Bonner (guitar), who would become the group's front man, and added Gregory Webster (drums). To accommodate Bonner's musical style preferences for the group ("R&B with a little flair to it") and to avoid competing with Ward, the group changed their format. By 1965, the group had renamed themselves the Ohio Players, reflecting its members' self-perceptions as musicians and as ladies' men.

The group added two more singers, Bobby Lee Fears and Dutch Robinson, and became the house band for the New York-based Compass Records. In 1967, they added vocalist Helena Ferguson Kilpatrick, who had just returned from George Gershwin's European Tour of *Porgy and Bess*.

The group disbanded again in 1970. After again re-forming with a line-up including Bonner, Satchell, Middlebrooks, Jones, Webster, trumpeter Bruce Napier, vocalist Charles Dale Allen, trombonist Marvin Pierce, and keyboardist Walter "Junie" Morrison, the Players had a minor hit on the Detroit-based Westbound label in with "Pain" (1971), which reached the Top 40 of the Billboard R&B chart. James Johnson joined the group at this time as vocalist and saxophonist. Dale Allen shared co-lead vocals on some of the early Westbound material, although he was not credited on their albums *Pain* and *Pleasure*. It was at Westbound Records where the group met George Clinton, admired their music. The two albums' avant-garde covers featured a spiked-black leather-bikini clad, bald model Pat "Running Bear" Evans, who would later grace additional Ohio Players albums, including *Climax*, *Ecstasy*, and *Gold*.

The band's first big hit single was "Funky Worm", which reached No. 1 on the Billboard R&B chart and made the Top 20 on the Billboard Hot 100 in early 1973. It sold over one million copies and was awarded a gold disc by the R.I.A.A. in May of that year. The band signed with Mercury Records in 1974. By then, their line-up had changed again, with keyboardist Billy Beck instead of Morrison and Jimmy "Diamond" Williams on drums instead of Webster. On later album releases, they added second guitarist/vocalist Clarence "Chet" Willis and conga player Robert "Rumba" Jones. Meanwhile, keyboardist Walter "Junie" Morrison recorded three albums on his own before joining Funkadelic as the force behind their hit *One Nation Under a Groove*.

The band had seven Top 40 hits between 1973 and 1976. These included "Fire" (No. 1 on both the R&B and pop chart for two weeks and one week respectively in February 1975 and another million seller) and "Love Rollercoaster" (No. 1 on both the R&B and pop charts for one week in January 1976; another gold disc recipient). The group also took on saxophonist James Johnson. The group's last big hit was "Who'd She Coo?" a No. 1 R&B hit in August 1976. It was their only success in the United Kingdom, where it peaked at No. 43 on the UK Singles Chart in July 1976.

Deaths

Clarence Satchell (born 15 April 1940) died 30 December 1995 after suffering a brain aneurysm; [citation needed] Ralph Middlebrooks (born 20 August 1939) died in November 1997; and Robert Ward (born 15 October 1938) died at home 25 December 2008. Cornelius Johnson (born 12 July 1937) died 1 February 2009. Leroy "Sugarfoot" Bonner (born 14 March 1943, Hamilton, OH) died 26 January 2013 at age 69. Marshall Jones (born 1 January 1941, Dayton, OH) resides in Jamestown, Ohio, and is the only surviving member from the Mercury line-up.

Discography

Studio albums

Year	Album	Peak chart positions			Certifications (sales threshold)	Record label
		US [12]	US R&B [12]	CAN [13]		
1969	<i>Observations in Time</i>	—	—	—		Capitol
1972	<i>Pain</i>	177	21	—	• US: Gold [14]	Westbound
	<i>Pleasure</i>	63	4	—		
1973	<i>Ecstasy</i>	70	19	—		
1974	<i>Skin Tight</i>	11	1	15	• US: Platinum [14]	Mercury
	<i>Fire</i>	1	1	17	• US: Platinum [14]	
1975	<i>Honey</i>	2	1	36	• US: Platinum [14]	
1976	<i>Contradiction</i>	12	1	26	• US: Gold [14]	
1977	<i>Angel</i>	41	9	58		
	<i>Mr. Mean</i>	68	11	65		
1978	<i>Jass-Ay-Lay-Dee</i>	69	15	—		
1979	<i>Everybody Up</i>	80	19	—		Arista
1981	<i>Tenderness</i>	165	49	—		Boardwalk
	<i>Ouch!</i>	201	—	—		
1984	<i>Graduation</i>	—	—	—		Century Vista
1988	<i>Back</i>	—	55	—		Track Record

“—” denotes a recording that did not chart or was not released in that territory.

Live albums

- *Ol' School* (1996, Essential Music)
- *Jam* (1996, Mercury)
- *Live 1977* (2013 Goldenlane records)

Compilation albums

Year	Album	Peak chart positions			Certifications (sales threshold)	Record label
		US [12]	US R&B [12]	CAN [13]		
1972	<i>First Impressions</i>	—	—	—		Trip
1974	<i>The Ohio Players</i>	—	32	—		Capitol
	<i>Climax</i>	102	24	—		
1975	<i>Greatest Hits</i>	92	22	—		Westbound
	<i>Rattlesnake</i>	61	8	—		
1976	<i>Gold</i>	31	10	28	• US: Gold [14]	Mercury
1977	<i>The Best of the Early Years, Vol. 1</i>	—	58	—		Westbound
1995	<i>Funk on Fire: The Mercury Anthology</i>	—	—	—		Mercury
1998	<i>Orgasm: The Very Best of the Westbound Years</i>	—	—	—		Westbound
2000	<i>20th Century Masters: Millennium Collection - The Best of the Ohio Players</i>	—	—	—		Mercury
2008	<i>Gold</i> [2008] [18] [19]	—	—	—		Island/Mercury

— denotes a recording that did not chart or was not released in that territory.

Singles

Year	Single	Peak chart positions		
		US [20]	US R&B [20]	CAN [13]
1967	"Neighbors"	—	—	—
1968	"Trespassin"	—	50	—
	"It's a Crying Shame"	—	—	—
1969	"Bad Bargain"	—	—	—
	"Find Someone to Love"	—	—	—
1971	"Pain (Part 1)"	64	35	91
1972	"Pleasure"	—	45	—
	"Varee Is Love"	—	—	—
1973	"Funky Worm"	15	1	50
	"Ecstasy"	31	12	—
	"Sleep Talk"	—	—	—

1974	"Jive Turkey (Part 1)"	47	6	71
	"Skin Tight"	13	2	19
	"Fire" [A]	1	1	5
1975	"I Want to Be Free"	44	6	51
	"Sweet Sticky Thing"	33	1	60
	"Love Rollercoaster"	1	1	2
1976	"Fopp"	30	9	43
	"Rattlesnake"	90	69	—
	"Who'd She Coo?" [B]	18	1	63
	"Far East Mississippi"	—	26	—
1977	"Feel the Beat (Everybody Disco)"	61	31	—
	"Body Vibes"	—	19	—
	"O-H-I-O"	45	9	88
	"Merry Go Round"	—	77	—
	"Good Luck Charm (Part 1)"	101	51	—
1978	"Magic Trick"	—	93	—
	"Funk-O-Nots"	105	27	—
	"Time Slips Away"	—	53	—
1979	"Everybody Up"	—	33	—

1981	"Try a Little Tenderness"	—	40	—
	"Skinny"	—	46	—
	"The Star of the Party"	—	—	—
1984	"Sight for Sore Eyes"	—	83	—
	"Sweat"	—	50	—
1988	"Let's Play (From Now On)"	—	33	—

— denotes a recording that did not chart or was not released in that territory.

Ohio Players	
Marshall "Rock" Jones · Clarence "Satch" Satchell · Ralph "Pee Wee" Middlebrooks · Leroy "Sugarfoot" Bonner · Andrew Noland · Gary Webster · Bobby Lee Fears · Dutch Robinson · Walter "June" Morrison · Bruce Napier · Marvin "Merv" Pierce · Billy Beck · Jimmy "Diamond" Williams · Robert Ward	
Studio albums	Observations in Time · Pain · Pleasure · Ecstasy · Skin Tight · Fire · Honey · Contradiction · Anger · Mr. Mean · Jass-Ay-Lay-Dee · Everybody Up
Live albums	On School
Compilation albums	Climax · Gold
Singles	"Bad Bargain" · "Funky Wom" · "Fire" · "Sweet Sticky Thing" · "Love Rollercoaster" · "Who'd She Coo?"